

Day 1 — Thursday 5 November 2026

Colloquium: Truth, Rhetoric and Fiction

Truth, rhetoric and fiction: literary forms of truth from the Elizabethan Stage, the late eighteenth century, through to the present day

Elizabeth Ford (with contributions by Tim Hammond, Elizabeth Ford, Richard Jones and Joanne Reardon)

This panel will consider various forms and manifestations of 'truth' in literature and creative writing. From the Elizabethan stage in the late sixteenth century, Shakespeare's playhouse and its actors, to the late eighteenth century novel and a contemporary historical work of fiction set in the same decades. Key themes explored include stage rebellion, acting, approaches to knowledge, and how to write about the past in the present day. The panel consists of the following papers from OU colleagues: Dr Tim Hammond, 'The Elizabethan rebels: truth and the rhetoric of popular disruption'; Dr Elizabeth Ford, 'Dogberry's truth: actor and role in Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing*'; Dr Richard Jones, 'Literary Knowledge in the Eighteenth Century'; Dr Joanne Reardon, 'Historical Fiction – Truth or Lies?'

Colloquium: Democracy, Disinformation and Religion

Democracy, disinformation and religion: the mobilisation of truth by religious actors, institutions and counter-cultural communities

Paul-Francois Tremlett (with contributions by Vickie Hudson, Joseph Powel and Precious Chatterje-Doody)

The study of religion has long grappled with questions of truth. However, in recent years those questions have additionally been implicated in concerns surrounding fake news and the crises of the post-truth era, mediated by an array of new, mass communication platforms and technologies. In this inter-disciplinary roundtable of lightning talks, panellists will share research drawn from across contemporary Eastern Orthodoxy, Slavic Paganism, the Catholic Church in the Philippines and Rastafari online spirituality. Building on this broad base, they will explore the mobilisation of truth by religious actors, institutions and counter-cultural communities to address questions of stigmatised knowledges, conspiracy theories and the relationship of truth to power.

Mediating Vulnerabilities

Making Harm Legible: AI and the Truth-Telling of Victims

Tamara Polajnar

When victims of coercive control attempt to tell their truth to institutions, they face a fundamental problem: coercive harm is not contained in a single message. It is subtle, context-

dependent, and distributed across time and texts. A slur in isolation is deniable. A pattern of isolation, love-bombing and threat-making, accumulated over months of communication, tells a different story. Yet institutions designed to protect are rarely equipped to read that story. Courts, police and social services typically encounter victim accounts as narratives under scrutiny, subject to questions of credibility, consistency and authenticity. The burden of proof falls on those least able to carry it. We present language AI tools that detect coercive behavioural patterns in real-world text. Rather than flagging individual keywords, we model coercive communication as psycholinguistic patterns that accumulate across documents and conversations. The tools provide human-readable explanations linked to highlighted evidence in original document context, producing analysis that can be understood by non-specialist audiences including legal professionals and safeguarding practitioners. Drawing on cases from coercive control, intimate partner abuse and institutional bias, we argue that such tools function not simply as detection systems but as truth-telling infrastructure: technology that makes legible what institutions have historically been structured to miss. We consider the epistemological stakes of this framing: what does it mean for an AI to corroborate a victim's account? How do we ensure that explainability does not flatten the complexity of lived experience into institutional legibility at the cost of its truth? We conclude by proposing a framework for developing language AI in ways that centre the audience, the account and the accountability of the system itself.

Health Misinformation in the Digital Age among Vulnerable Communities in Odisha

Lohita Raulo

As social media platforms increasingly penetrate remote and semi-urban settlements, they have emerged as significant channels through which unverified health information are shared. This study explores how health related misinformation circulates within the vulnerable communities in Odisha, examining the intersection of traditional belief systems, modern medical knowledge and misinformation in the digital age. This study aimed at understanding how community trust, indigenous health practices, and social media misinformation collectively shape health perceptions and decisions among the vulnerable populations. Employing a qualitative research design conducted across purposively selected vulnerable communities in Odisha. Participants were drawn from varied age groups and gender categories within the community, for a nuanced exploration of differences in health belief systems and media engagement. Thematic analysis was applied to identify recurring patterns and community narratives surrounding health information consumed through social media platforms. The study also analysed how ASHA workers were perceived within these communities, and whether institutional messaging is being undermined by competing misinformation narratives on social media platforms. Moreover, how women navigate health decision-making in environments where patriarchal community structures intersect. Findings reveal that while patriarchal norms continue to marginalise women as independent health decision makers. The study also finds that ASHA workers, themselves women, command a level of community trust that positions them as potent counter misinformation agents within these otherwise male dominated decision-making structures. Moreover, community trust remains heavily anchored in traditional belief system, oral

knowledge traditions, and health practices, which often negotiates with the biomedical information accessed through various channels. The study concludes that effective health communication strategies for such communities in Odisha must eradicate the misinformation or counter it with community-led, culturally embedded and sensitive to their histories.

Avoiding the Algorithm: Self-Censorship and Euphemistic Violence on Social Media

Kyrie Miranda-Farnell

In recent years, online social media users and content producers have increasingly replaced terms associated with violence, death, sexuality, and crime with alternative words. In many instances, users rely on euphemisms, such as unalived for killed or committed suicide, grape for rape, and found without life for dead or was murdered to discuss emotionally challenging topics. While these substitutions, known as algospeak, are often used to avoid algorithmic content removal, demonetization, or reduced visibility, their use also raises important questions about authenticity, audience interpretation, and the representation of reality in digital discourse. Effectively, online users are describing events with language that is truthful, but which reshapes the discursive construction of reality.

Drawing on in-person surveys and interviews, and examples collected from online platforms, this paper explores how users adapt their linguistic practices to communicate sensitive information that remains comprehensible to human consumers of their material while avoiding content removal by automated moderation systems. Relatedly, I also focus on potential social ramifications of this process: while these euphemisms preserve meaning for consumers, functioning as creative strategies of resistance that allow users to discuss restricted topics, algospeak may also sanitize or distract audiences from the violence, trauma, or social realities that they attempt to describe.

By examining these linguistic adaptations through corpus linguistics, discourse analysis, and sociolinguistics, this paper argues that algorithmically mediated communication has created a new form of audience design in which content creators must use euphemisms to report truthful events in ways that are comprehensible to content consumers and acceptable to machine interpreters. The resulting language practices reveal ongoing tensions between truthfulness, authenticity, and platform governance in contemporary digital communication.

Poetic Truths

Whose Truth Travels? Translation, Memory, and the Politics of Authenticity in Contemporary Algerian Narratives

Elhadj Benmoussa

Questions of truth, authenticity, and authority become particularly complex when narratives cross linguistic and cultural boundaries. While truth is often understood as factual accuracy, literary and translation scholars have increasingly highlighted its relational, interpretive, and politically situated dimensions (Ricoeur, 2004; Baker, 2006). This paper examines how experiences of memory, identity, and historical trauma are reshaped through translation in

contemporary Algerian narratives. Focusing on selected literary and autobiographical texts translated between Arabic, French, and English, the paper explores how translation functions not merely as a transfer of meaning but as a site where competing truth claims are negotiated. Particular attention is given to narratives dealing with colonial memory, post-independence identity, and the Algerian Civil War, where questions of authenticity are often inseparable from language choice and audience expectations. Drawing on narrative theory (Bruner, 1991), translation studies (Baker, 2006; Tymoczko, 2007), and postcolonial scholarship (Fanon, 1967; Bhabha, 1994), the paper argues that translation participates in the production rather than the simple transmission of truth. The movement of narratives across languages frequently transforms the ways in which experiences are framed, remembered, and legitimised. In this process, translators, publishers, and target audiences become active participants in determining what is recognised as authentic or credible. The paper proposes the concept of translated authenticity to describe the dynamic relationship between authorship, audience, and linguistic mediation. It argues that truth in translated narratives should be understood not as a fixed property of the original text but as a negotiated outcome shaped by cultural, political, and linguistic forces. By examining contemporary Algerian narratives, the paper contributes to broader debates concerning authorship, authenticity, and the circulation of truth across languages and cultures.

Locating Eddy: Reading against the grain of family stories and the colonial archive

Dulani Kulasinghe

In 1915, my great grand uncle Edward Henry Pedris was executed for treason by the British colonial administration of Ceylon (now Sri Lanka). Afterwards, his bloodied chair was paraded before other prisoners, who fought for and later led independent Ceylon. Eddy's story has been told by my family ever since; it is also part of the national story. But the circumstances around his execution are unclear: was he an undisciplined traitor, a bigot, an anti-colonial agitator, as he was accused of being? Or was he a quasi-religious martyr, as he became in the retelling? What was the truth of the man himself? This paper uses public and private archival material around Eddy's life and death as a lens through which to explore these questions at the intersections between memory, myth, class, caste, religion and racialisation into which the British colonial project attempted to intervene. It also seeks to address an overarching question: how can the generative power of storytelling in the ongoing construction of narratives of nation liberate memory from the cultural hegemony of colonial / state power, and what role can poetry play in illuminating these relationships? Given the incomplete and contested source material available to me – the colonial archive & family stories – the creative-critical methodology of this paper draws on archive studies, especially Breakell and Russell (2024) and Nerlekar and Orsini (2022). Poetry's capacity to hold the contradictions inherent in these sources without flattening them is central to my use of it, as articulated by Saidiya Hartman's notion of critical fabulation (2008). This paper will incorporate poetic responses to the archives as a means of approaching the person hidden in them.

Ethnographic poetry and the (non-)representation of atmospheric truths in social science research findings

Daniel Calvert

This presentation considers the role of ethnographic poetry (Creese and Blackledge, 2026) as a more-than-representational means of exploring truths in social science research findings. I draw on a recent linguistic ethnography carried out at a political advocacy group in Glasgow that brought together people seeking asylum. My research findings foreground “affective atmospheres” (Deumert, 2023) as the context of the group’s communication, which generated joy in response to the hostility they faced in the UK. Through elements such as song, dance, poetry and food, the group arguably engaged in “atmospheric practices” (Bille and Simonsen, 2021) that shaped their encounters inside and outside of the group.

The presentation will explore how these findings upended my approach to representing the truths generated by my research, directing me towards ethnographic poetry. Linguistic ethnography has traditionally turned to discourse analysis to uncover truths, yet its focus on indexical meaning making arguably limits its scope to engage with affective dimensions of communication that involve sensory proximity (Blackledge and Creese, 2023). By contrast, ethnographic poetry can better acknowledge truths as experiential, embodied affects located within texts themselves. Drawing on non-representational theory (Vannini, 2026), I will argue that ethnographic poetry can offer atmospheric truths that are to some extent beyond representation: existing in a state of becoming and incomplete understanding.

This presentation seeks not to pin down atmospheres analytically but to open them up aesthetically. I will share sociolinguistic ethnographic poetry from my research that creatively responds to fieldnotes, interactional and documentary data, supporting the audience to experience research findings as a form of atmospheric truth telling. I conclude that social science research findings can arguably be more truthful when they embody the affective, atmospheric forms of communication that exist within the social life of participants themselves.

Public Truths

The Intersection of Truth-Construction and Language Materialisation – Meaning-Making in Contexts of Print Literacy and Machine Learning and the Future of Public Truth

Britta Schneider

Language is key to constructions of truth, and it is pertinent to study how languages and meanings are institutionalised and materialised if we want to understand how truth is made – and how the making of truth may differ in relation to changing material and technological practices. How do meaning-making and the collective stabilisation of sign meanings differ if we compare the technologies of print literacy and those of machine learning? What effects do materialisations and technologies of language have on public discourse and on democratic culture? In this talk, I first introduce linguistic anthropological approaches to how meanings of signs are constituted and institutionalised, based on theories of indexicality and semiotic ideology (Gal & Irvine 2019, Keane 2018, Silverstein 2014). I then compare the material

constitution of language in the culture of printing with its technological construction in machine learning, and the differing effects on who can write and speak publicly. Examples from contemporary public and digital discourse are then used to illustrate that machine learning technologies contribute, on the one hand, to the destabilisation of truth by co-constructing or evoking signs in public discourse that are not based on collective practices of meaning-making (e.g. AI slop and algospeak). On the other hand, these technologies are not governed by public communities, and the potential for creating and distributing discourse is held by a small number of non-public actors. Questions arising from these observations relate to the future of democratic discourse in light of changing language materialisation: How can we ensure that truth-making remains a public endeavour? And to what extent is indexical stability and the collective sharing of signs necessary for democratic publics?

Hillsborough: a telling 'truth', untelling the lie

Frank Monaghan

On April 15, 1989, a disaster occurred at Hillsborough Football Stadium in Sheffield, resulting in the deaths of 97 Liverpool FC fans. Two days later, the front page of the *S*n* newspaper appeared with the headline 'THE TRUTH', blaming drunken supporters for the disaster, claiming that some of them had 'picked the pockets of victims,' 'urinated on brave cops' and even 'beat up PC giving kiss of life'. This narrative, widely echoed elsewhere in the media, by politicians and South Yorkshire Police (SYP), was strongly contested by eye-witnesses and an official inquiry was set up, led by Lord Justice Taylor, and its first report, published just four months later, in August 1989, concluded that "the main reason for the disaster was the failure of police control" and dismissed SYP claims that fans' drunkenness or attempts to gain entry by force or with forged tickets contributed to the disaster'. And yet, that initial narrative of criminal fan behaviour persisted for a further 23 years, until the Hillsborough Independent Panel reported on its inquiry into events in 2012, concluding that responsibility for the disaster lay primarily with the police and that the fans were not at fault. The *S*n* appeared next day with the headline 'The Real Truth', stating 'Cops smeared fans to deflect blame' and apologised 'profoundly'. This presentation, draws on various philosophical theories of 'truth' (such as 'correspondence theory', 'coherence theory' and 'performative theory') to examine how and why the discredited 'truth' persisted for so long in public consciousness, asking whose interests it served, and exploring how it was ultimately successfully challenged by the weight of evidence, and other texts, such as survivor accounts, campaigns (Hillsborough Families Support Group, Hillsborough Justice Campaign), dramatised accounts (both 'factional and fictional) and other semiotic evidence such as banners, memorials, memorialisation and monuments).

Truth matters. For a socio-epistemic approach to public discourse

Johannes Angermüller

What difference does it make for a discourse to turn out true or false? This question has become of pressing relevance in contemporary political struggles. The climate controversy is a case in point where well-established scientific knowledge has been the object of critical scrutiny. In this situation, it seems curious that mainstream discourse researchers think that the truth quality of

discourses is outside their scope. In this talk, I want to make the case for a radically discursive approach that acknowledges the hierarchy between true and untrue discourses while asking how both truths and untruths are constructed discursively. My empirical example is based on the controversies over human-driven changes of the atmosphere, from the depletion of the ozone layer in the 1970s and 1980s to the acid rain panic in Germany of the 1980s and climate science since the 2010s. These debates testify to the complex and sometimes surprising dynamics of discourse as a result of which the truth of certain claims is established or not. Inspired by Science and Technologies Studies, I will defend both the epistemic and social value of discourses and articulates linguistic, social and material dimensions. Against this theoretical background, the controversies over global gas emissions remind us that discourses do not become true simply because certain people say or think they are true. Instead, discourse researchers would do well to acknowledge that some discourses are truer than others when they articulate material and non-material elements in ways that stand the test of time.

Truthful Characters

An Able Pen: Reading the Selves of Harriet Jacobs's *LINDA: Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, Written by Herself (1861)

Anlie Williams

For much of the twentieth century, scholars assumed Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* was fictional, written by Lydia Maria Child. Yet, in the 1980s, scholar Jean Fagan Yellin's extensive archival work revealed otherwise: she established the text was an authentic slave narrative. Although literary scholarship frequently references this vexed history, how does it affect *Incidents*' interpretation? If the text's authenticity is so contested, what does this suggest about how Jacobs operates within the text itself? How does the narrative's archival history come into tension with textual interpretation and Jacobs's authorship? This paper investigates such questions by considering how *Incidents*' authorial tensions are informed by its archival history. The text can be read through the literary persona of Linda Brent and as an autobiography of Harriet Jacobs. Recent scholarship often treats Jacobs either as a writer employing the sentimental novel and sympathy to appeal to abolitionists, or as a Black feminist theorist imagining freedom through speculative generic conventions. This talk asks whether these approaches are as disparate as they might seem, and proposes that reading both Linda and Jacobs as authors of *Incidents* reconceptualizes how the text operates. The first section of this paper analyzes the text's original title, in which these authorial tensions between the literary and the autobiographic manifest. The second section examines what I call the four selves of *Incidents* (the slave girl, the woman, the mother, and the pen) to explore the relationship between authorship and interpretation. I focus on the ambiguities and slippages that *Incidents* presents, on the destabilization that the narrative demonstrates when constructing the self. Ultimately, I track the narrator's use of these terms in detail throughout the text, considering how they challenge reading *Incidents* as either a wholly theoretical or purely autobiographical narrative.

Retelling the Truth

Heather Fishwick

This paper explores, from my perspective as a creative writing PhD student working with classical receptions, how my attempt to 'truthfully' recreate a figure from myth has impacted my research and writing. With reference to my work-in-progress, a novel about the Trojan Princess Cassandra, I will reflect on how my own response to Cassandra is influenced by previous interpretations, the context and time in which I am writing, and the creative format in which I am approaching her.

In Ancient Greece and Rome, conflicting myths existed alongside each other and were presented by different writers (or sometimes the same playwright, in separate plays) in different ways, creating variations which a novelist writing a retelling must choose between. As a result, there is no one, truthful way to tell Cassandra's story and any retelling is likely to be heavily influenced by its writer's individual choices and approaches.

I will also consider how far my mythic retelling can attempt to authentically depict the Bronze Age, and the role historical accuracy plays when writing about what Emily Pillinger calls the 'mythic past' (2022). To do so, I will reflect on how discussion around ancient epic and tragedy in classical receptions can impact creative writing practices, and consider authenticity and accuracy in historical fiction in relation to my work.

Cassandra has her own complex relationship with the truth: gifted the power of prophecy by the god Apollo, she is cursed so that no one will believe her. She is a figure who speaks the truth, but isn't trusted. While in works of tragedy such as Aeschylus's 5th Century BCE play *the Agamemnon*, this is linked to her curse, in this paper, I explore how I have used Cassandra's age, gender and status to affect her authority as a truth-teller.

Fiction as an Instrument of Social Deconstruction and Critical Analysis in Daniela Dröscher's Work

Dora Rusciano

Drawing on two works by German author Daniela Droscher, this paper aims to investigate the sociological character of autofiction. In *Zeige deine Klasse. Die Geschichte meiner sozialen Herkunft* (2018), through the form of autobiographical essay the author revisits the increasingly neglected concept of class and reflects on the history of postwar German society through a first-person account centred on both her family history and her own experience. In the autofictional novel *Lüge über meine Mutter* (2022), she returns to some of the themes addressed in the autobiographical essay and reconfigures them within a fictional framework: namely that of an imagined dialogue between the fictional „I“, who recounts problematic family dynamics from the perspective of the child self, and the adult “I” – the writer – who has acquired both temporal and critical distance from those events. The aim of this contribution is to demonstrate how, in accordance with Bertolt Brecht's conception of art as an instrument capable of deconstructing and critically analysing social mechanism, the author understands fiction as a means of understanding reality and, through her novel, seeks to reflect on the role of lie – referred to in

the title, translatable as *Lies on my Mother* – in the process through which truth is both understood and constructed. Alongside the metanarrative dimension, particular attention will also be given to the metalinguistic one, which the author thematises also in *Sprechen* (2026), her most recent autobiographical essay. By drawing on this latter text, the paper ultimately seeks to come full circle by examining the ways in which truth may be pursued through first-person writing, while also assessing the specificity of the genres in question and their respective expressive and epistemological potentialities.

Infected by Kukutis: The Genesis of a Poetic Character

Radvilė Bartkutė

This paper explores how a character functions as a device for truth-telling in a literary text. In classical literature, the characters who most often serve as the truth-tellers are elderly sages, jesters, or children, as in Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tale "The Emperor's New Clothes". When ideological systems prohibit speaking freely about a cruel reality, it may be exposed by those who are perceived as fools or people of unsound minds. One such is literary character Kukutis created by a prominent poet Marcelijus Martinaitis (1936–2013). Kukutis made his first appearance in the author's early poetry collections and was later developed into a central character of his best-known work, *The Ballads of Kukutis* (1977). Blending character traits of a folkloric trickster and a naive village fool, Kukutis can act as a "truth-teller" and is able to bend the constraints of the Communist regime. Enwritten into the poems, Kukutis quickly became popular during the Lithuanian Independence Movement, when the poems were widely turned into songs and became one of the most recognisable figures in Lithuanian literature. Eventually, the so-called infection of Kukutis has returned to the author himself: Martinaitis continued developing his poetic hero and kept multiplying its prototypes throughout the rest of his literary career. Delving into a genetic analysis of *The Ballads of Kukutis*, this paper establishes an extensive corpus of the unexplored work's drafts. Initially, the paper will reveal the complex process of how this type of literary character is born, shaped and perpetually revised; second, the genetic analysis will expose how the author constructs Kukutis as a mediator of untold truths in the literary text and indirectly criticizes the absurdity of brutal Soviet reality.

Trauma and Truths

Capturing complex truths through collaborative writing

Clare Best and Patricia Debney

Clare Best and Patricia Debney are both survivors of intrafamilial Child Sexual Abuse. We are also both writers, and both academics in the fields of creative writing and cultural histories. Throughout our lives and careers, we have addressed multi-layered notions of 'truth': from being abused children ('how do I tell the truth about what happened to me?'); to young adults ('who will believe my truth?'); to writers and tutors working in the creative arts in HE ('how do I

write about and facilitate discussions around difficult personal and social truths in text and performance?’).

In February 2025, we began a joint lyric essay as a response to the opera *Festen* (composer Mark-Anthony Turnage, librettist Lee Hall), the narrative of which turns around the disclosure of child sexual abuse perpetrated by the father of the family. In our collaborative writings for this essay we looked at the intricacies of truth-telling and the consequent denials which often follow such disclosures in our own lives and in the opera. Through prose, poetry, statistics and polemic we wrote about our own histories with our own truths, how we came to know them as authentic, and how often families, society and culture meet these truths with denial or dismissal.

The essay, ‘Twenty-five soundings about child sexual abuse and the arts: considering the opera *Festen*’, published in the BMJ Medical Humanities online journal in April 2026, became a call to value survivors’ lived experiences as unassailable truths.

Our presentation will retain this multi-modal approach, exploring ways we might consider framing and realising these complex truths in writing and the arts. We will also consider how interactive and collaborative work – such as ours for the lyric essay – can facilitate and support the telling of difficult truths.

Performing authenticity in a child sexual exploitation and abuse forum

Amy Booth

Participation in dark web child sexual exploitation and abuse (CSEA) fora places competing demands on forum members and their linguistic identity performances. These fora are low trust environments (Grant & Macleod, 2020) where users expect to be observed, infiltrated, or even shut down by law enforcement. Users are therefore crucially concerned with disguising information that points to their ‘true,’ offline identity. Paradoxically, the low trust environment also necessitates the performance of ‘authentic’ identities – those which create a consistent online persona which is perceived to ‘match up with’ the user’s offline identity (Tagg, 2015). Authentic identities are more likely to be seen as trustworthy and reliable by others, and therefore serve as a gateway to acceptance and authority within the forum community. In this paper, I explore users’ discursive identity performances in the immediate aftermath of forum outages. These are highly significant moments in the lifecycle of a dark web CSEA forum, as users must reestablish an authentic online persona, and their social position in the forum, in a context of heightened suspicion and awareness of the precarious and surveilled nature of such fora. Despite this, users show surprisingly little concern for reclaiming their position through performances of authority. Instead, most users claim authenticity through highly affective performances, demonstrating their strong emotional connection to the community and its importance in their lives.

Victimhood as Process: A Critical Discourse and Systemic Functional Study of Trauma, Identity and Agency

Evangelia Mourtzanou

This paper examines the discourse of two testimonies by Greek actors through the lens of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), with a particular focus on victim narratives. By employing Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG), this research aims to explore how language and experience are presented in the emergence of trauma, identity and shame (Laughlin, 2025; Knoff, Vasterling & Verfaellie, 2023). This research draws on narrative processing in post-traumatic experiences, exploring how verbal, relational, mental and material processes are used to present meaning in the context of abuse. In the transitivity system, “processes” refer to the verbs that represent actions, states, or emotions, while “participants” are the entities involved in these processes. By closely examining the types of processes and the roles that participants play, we can gain insight into how social actors engage in various activities and how these engagements contribute to their representation. Verbal processes foreground the transition from silence to public speech, situating testimony as an act of hermeneutic justice that challenges social silencing (Alyce & Taggart, 2023). Relational processes of identification and classification recontextualize past experience within contemporary frameworks of harm and recognition, resonating with discourse on the social construction of victimhood (Chouliaraki, 2024). Mental processes reflect delayed cognition, memory inhibition and embodied recall, consistent with findings on trauma narrative characteristics and shame-sensitive practice (Laughlin, 2025; Knoff et al., 2023). Material processes encode embodied action and turning points that embody survival and constraint. Across both narratives, victimhood emerges not as static identity but as linguistically and experientially negotiated, shaped by familial response, institutional context and ongoing negotiation of disclosure, shame and solidarity. The analysis highlights how language choices encode both concealment and revelation, illustrating how victimhood and agency are dynamically reconstructed through discourse.

Historical Storytelling

WhatsApp Histories: Digital Propaganda and the Crisis of Historical Truth

Arunima Chakraborty

This paper examines the growing role of WhatsApp and other social media platforms in reshaping public understandings of history through the circulation of unverified and ideologically charged narratives. In the contemporary digital age, historical knowledge is increasingly consumed through forwarded messages, short-form content, memes, and viral posts rather than through academic historiography, archival research, or engagement with professional historians. As a result, social media has emerged as a powerful site for the production and dissemination of historical misinformation. The paper argues that WhatsApp forwards function as instruments of digital propaganda by presenting selective, simplified, and emotionally persuasive versions of historical events that often align with political, religious, or nationalist ideologies. The repetitive circulation of such narratives within closed digital communities creates an illusion of authenticity and epistemic certainty, encouraging users to accept historical claims without verification. In this process, virality frequently replaces evidence as a marker of credibility. Drawing on theories of narrative authority, mediated truth, and collective memory, the study explores how digital communication destabilises the boundary

between fact and fiction in historical storytelling. The paper further investigates how younger generations, increasingly dependent on social media for information, encounter distorted representations of the past that contribute to political polarisation, ideological conditioning, and the erosion of historical literacy. By analysing selected examples of viral historical misinformation, this study demonstrates how WhatsApp transforms everyday communication into a mechanism for constructing alternative historical realities. Ultimately, the paper highlights the urgent need for critical digital literacy and renewed engagement with historical scholarship in an era where algorithmic circulation and emotional narratives increasingly shape public perceptions of truth and history.

Telling the truth of the past: Emotional authenticity and historical storytelling in *Call the Midwife*

Katie Hazel

This paper explores how the drama series *Call the Midwife* constructs and communicates “truth” through historical storytelling. Originally starting in 1950s and moving year by year, the series draws initially on the memoirs of Jennifer Worth and is subsequently developed through extensive historical research led by Heidi Thomas and her production team. While the events represented are grounded in documented social and medical histories, the series occupies a hybrid space between factual representation and narrative construction. Drawing on McGann's distinction between technical accuracy and human authenticity in medical television drama, this paper argues that the authority of *Call the Midwife* derives not solely from factual accuracy but from its production of emotional authority. Through analysis of narrative devices such as voiceover, character-centred storytelling, the framing of medical social issues, and poignant cultural events such as the Apollo 11 moon landing and the release of *The Sound of Music* film. The paper examines how “truth” is constructed as an affective and relational experience for audiences. Particular attention is given to the role of authorship in shaping the truth, tracing the transition from Worth's autobiographical perspective to Thomas' adaptation and expansion of the narrative world. Furthermore, the paper considers how institutional and cultural contexts, including the conventions of BBC prime-time broadcasting, shape the boundaries of what can be represented as “truth”. It suggests that the series reflects contemporary values as much as historical realities, positioning historical television drama as a site where truth is negotiated between authorship, narrative form, and audience expectation. In doing so, it highlights the role of television drama as a form of informal historical education, shaping audience understandings of the past, and influencing how historical knowledge is constructed, interpreted, and trusted, particularly in contexts where media texts function as primary points of engagement with the past.

Constructing Truth, Selling Heroism: Commercial Narratives of Captain Scott's Antarctic Expedition (1910-13)

Lauren Alex O'Hagan

This paper examines how commercial advertising surrounding Captain Scott and the British Antarctic Expedition (1910–13) actively constructed, manipulated and obscured ‘truth’ both

during his lifetime and posthumously. Using multimodal critical discourse analysis, it explores how textual, visual and material strategies produced authoritative yet misleading narratives of scientific endeavour. Advertisements selectively quoted Scott's diaries, omitting expressions of vulnerability to foreground stoic heroism, while images staged or altered Antarctic realities, through dramatised landscapes or incongruous elements such as polar bears, to heighten affective appeal. Claims of authenticity were further reinforced through references to photographs or communications purportedly sent by Scott, even when temporally impossible. During Scott's lifetime, these strategies enhanced product authority; after his death, they sentimentalised heroism and reinforced collective memory. The paper argues that such representations performed a version of scientific 'truth' rooted in endurance, spectacle and domestic consumer culture, demonstrating how visual and material media shape both collective memory and the ongoing cultural afterlife of polar exploration.

Truths Across Languages

Telling the truth across languages: University students' use and metalinguistic understanding of evidentials in L1 Arabic and L2 English argumentative writing

Abdelhamid Ahmed and Lameya Rezk

This presentation examines how university students use evidentials to construct credibility, attribute knowledge, and negotiate truth claims across languages in the Qatari Corpus of Argumentative Writing (QCAW), using 390 essays written by Qatari undergraduates in L1 Arabic and L2 English under controlled, resource-limited conditions. Focusing on evidentials as discourse markers for signalling authority, epistemic positioning, and source attribution, the study combines corpus-based analysis with students' metalinguistic reflections on their own rhetorical choices. The findings show clear cross-linguistic differences. Arabic essays display a higher normalised frequency of evidentials and more frequent reliance on culturally authoritative sources, including religious and shared sociocultural references, reflecting rhetorical preferences for distributed or implicitly recognised authority. English essays show a more developing use of explicit evidentials, suggesting partial alignment with Anglo-English academic expectations of traceable attribution, but also persistent difficulty in making sources overt, specific, and verifiable. Students' metalinguistic comments further reveal contrasting assumptions about what counts as sufficient evidence and credible support in each language, with Arabic often drawing on shared cultural knowledge and English requiring more explicit source marking. The presentation argues that evidentials are not merely linguistic markers of information source but key resources for performing truthfulness, legitimacy, and authority in bilingual academic writing. It therefore contributes to current debates on evidentiality across languages and on how truth claims are discursively constructed and negotiated in educational contexts.

The Cognitive Grammar of Asymmetric Warfare: Force Dynamics and Spatial Proximization in Elite News Discourse

Azzeddine Tamlakoutan

While much of the discourse surrounding post-2023 geopolitical conflict focuses on kinetic warfare, less attention has been paid to the cognitive legitimization of state surveillance. This presentation explores how elite media constructs the "Architecture of Threat" by cognitively transforming religious architecture into panoptic security nodes. Using a corpus-assisted analysis of The Wall Street Journal (2023–2025), this study utilizes Talmy's Force Dynamics to examine how the spatial boundaries of the "mosque" are linguistically penetrated. By analyzing deictic positioning and transitivity, the presentation will demonstrate how the text aligns the reader's vantage point with the state security apparatus, stripping the site of its religious affordances and reframing it as a container of ideological contagion. Ultimately, we discuss how these cognitive-linguistic operations naturalize the pre-emptive surveillance of marginalized communities.

Al parecer: Evidential Marking in Mexican Journalism and Expert Reports on the Ayotzinapa Case

Paloma Simone Seger

In contexts of factual uncertainty and institutional crises, truth is often obscured in public discourse. This study addresses how speakers signal the source of their knowledge through the category of evidentiality and how this relates to truth-marking and legal or journalistic accountability. Specifically, it analyzes the Spanish marker *al parecer* (apparently / seemingly) at the intersection of sentence structure, meaning, and communicative context within a corpus on Mexican kidnapping cases. The analysis focuses on the media coverage and expert reports on the forced disappearance of the 43 students from Ayotzinapa in 2014; a complex and polyphonic discourse where competing narratives fight for legitimacy.

Drawing on cognitive linguistic frameworks (Construction Grammar and Frame Semantics) which view language as a structured inventory of form-meaning pairings (i.e. constructions) this study demonstrates how specific constructions encode whether information is firsthand or secondhand, as well as the stance the speaker adopts toward the truth of their statement.

Through an analysis of investigative journalism, press articles, and expert reports (e.g., GIEI, UN), this work identifies two constructions in which *al parecer* is functionally embedded:

The reportative construction: [[V_DICENDI] + [(CONJ) + que + al parecer + COMPL]]

Used when processing secondhand information or rumors. By anchoring statements to external sources, writers evade epistemic responsibility, shield themselves from liability, and signal objective reporting.

The inferential construction: [[V_PERC/EPIST] + [OBJ/COMPL] + [(CONJ) + al parecer + P]]

Activated during cognitive evaluation or direct observation. Here, *al parecer* signals a logical hypothesis based on incomplete evidence, allowing speakers to construct a plausible narrative while transparently marking the limits of verifiable truth.

This study also addresses how text genres shape the marking of truth. Beyond its linguistic contributions, the study offers insights for interdisciplinary research on crisis communication,

investigative reporting, and legal discourse by revealing how grammatical choices serve to manipulate authority, building trust, and revealing truth.

Why Russian truth cannot be pretty: “krasivy” vs “prekrasny” [Lightning talk]

Irina Zhilina

Dostoevsky (1873, ‘On lying’) and Zaliznyak & Shmelev (2004) note a Russian cultural tendency to lie ‘beautifully’ (*krasivo vrat*). Russian has two aesthetic adjectives glossable as ‘beautiful’: *krasivy* (surface) and *prekrasny* (sublime).

The study draws on three subcorpora of the Russian National Corpus: the main subcorpus (389.5 m words), Central Media (819.8 m), and Social Media (166.0 m). Five adjective–noun combinations were retrieved by lemma at a distance of one token: *krasivy* and *prekrasny* with *pravda* (‘truth’) and with *lozh* (‘lie’), together with *strashnaya pravda* (‘terrible truth’) as a control. The 2×2 design isolates the adjective from the noun: were the constraint a property of *pravda*, it would hold for both adjectives. Retrieval returned 615 raw hits, manually filtered to exclude the parenthetical *pravda* (‘..., *pravda*?’), predicative and adverbial readings of the adjective; repeated posts in the social-media subcorpus and proper names were retained.

Filtering yields 37 attributive instances of *krasivaya lozh* against 3 of *krasivaya pravda*; *prekrasnaya lozh* returns 15 against 5 of *prekrasnaya pravda*. The control *strashnaya pravda* returns 381: *pravda* takes attributive modifiers freely. *Krasivaya pravda* is unattested in the main subcorpus (0 of 40 raw hits) and surfaces only in 21st-century journalism and social media. *Prekrasnaya pravda*, conversely, occurs only in literary texts.

Collocation	Main 389.5 m	Central Media 819.8 m	Social Media 166.0 m	Total (filtered)
<i>strashnaya pravda</i>	139 → 129	171 → 168	92 → 84	381
<i>krasivaya lozh</i>	15 → 15	9 → 9	13 → 13	37
<i>prekrasnaya lozh</i>	12 → 11	2 → 2	2 → 2	15
<i>prekrasnaya pravda</i>	22 → 5	7 → 0	12 → 0	5
<i>krasivaya pravda</i>	40 → 0	23 → 2	36 → 1	3

Raw hits → attributive instances after manual filtering. Russian National Corpus, retrieved 16 July 2026.

Russian lexically shields truth from surface aestheticisation: truth may be terrible or sublime, but not merely pretty — and where it is sublime, it is so only in literature. This turns Zaliznyak & Shmelev’s qualitative claim into a measurable and reproducible asymmetry, and anticipates debates about the aestheticisation of falsehood in digital media.

Day 2 — Friday 6 November 2026

Representing Truths

Oral History, Artifacts and Collaborative Testimony: Whose Authority Narrates Queer/Trans Experience?

JD Davids

Oral history and archival research are positioned as a method for recovering "authentic," otherwise excluded voices. Yet they create their own problems of authenticity: the interview is a collaboration shaped by the interviewer, the platform, the audience, the presumption that testimony can be extracted and preserved, and archives face barriers to collecting and sharing the ephemeral or unrecorded. This paper examines projects centering queer and trans experiences (cruising, the first Dyke March, and ACT UP activism), to ask whose authority gets to narrate queer history, and what authenticity is claimed or lost in the process? The paper begins with an oral history project on transmasculine/non-binary cruising, with interviews on public sex encounters across class, gender, and cultural lines. The interviews produce complex, contradictory accounts of pleasure, fear, negotiation, and survival. They are not "authentic" in the sense of unmediated truth; rather, they are authentic as collaborative knowledge-making under specific conditions of power and trust. The second section examines the 1993 Dyke March digital archive project (OutHistory), which centers oral histories and artifacts on coalition-building and factionalization across Left and emergent feminist and queer formations. Here, the "authenticity" of historical memory shows conflicting accounts, silences, revisions, and conventional knowledge disproportionately shaped by online information. The archive becomes a space of negotiation and rebuttal, not retrieval. The third traces ACT UP's own relationship to authority and narrative—particularly the PISD (People with Immune System Disorders) Caucus, whose story has been largely excluded from dominant ACT UP histories. Recovering this history through lived experience, archival research, and theoretical framework can reveal how certain accounts become authorized and others erased. The paper argues for understanding oral history and archival research not as transparent methods for accessing authentic experience, but as a site where authenticity itself is negotiated, contested, and shaped by power relations.

The Hidden Truths of Deaths in Psychiatric Detention

Carly Speed

Within society, there is a distinct lack of knowledge when it comes to 'truth' surrounding the deaths of detained patients within psychiatric detention in England and Wales. Much of what an individual without personal experience of this issue would know relates to very limited media coverage. However, since the inception of the 'asylum' system, those embroiled within it have actively challenged their dismissal, subjugation and silencing and have fought continuously to

have their truths heard. However, dominant voices allow these contestations to then be re-silenced.

As so much in the contemporary picture concerning deaths in psychiatric detention can be understood by examining historical truths, the research concentrated equally on both the historical and the contemporary. This paper first draws upon my archival research examining the 1800s onwards. This consisted of critically examining hundreds of historical documents, namely case notes, reports, complaint letters from patients and families and newspaper reports. These were cases that were largely unpublished and thus the silenced voices and truths of their authors were being heard for the very first time. Alongside this, the paper will share the contemporary experiences, gathered through interviews and questionnaires, of those with personal and professional experience in this area, namely bereaved families, legal practitioners and coroners.

It is important to note that my research does not aim to present 'the' truth surrounding the issue of deaths in psychiatric detention. Instead, it recognises the importance of hearing and sharing the multiple truths of patients, their families and those who advocate for these groups who have that their voices and truths readily and frequently dismissed over a period of centuries. It is only then that we can truly begin to understand all truths surrounding the deaths of some of the most vulnerable members of our society.

Disability Stylistics: From Stereotypes to Positive Potential

Rod Hermeston

This paper uses analysis from the critical discipline of disability stylistics to investigate the depiction of 'the crippled man' in William Trevor's short story of that name and consider the possibility of a positive stylistics of disability.

Disability scholars have long noted the existence of negatively stereotyped representations of disabled people, (Mallett & Runswick-Cole, 2014, pp.57-8). Pre-existing stereotypes limit the possibility that writers will adopt diversified or realistic (truthful) representations (cf. Grue, 2015, p. 109). While disability scholars have pointed to the role of language in forming negative attitudes, I have noted previously that their focus has been primarily on labels or discourse at a level removed from linguistic structure at the sentence level (Hermeston, 2017, p. 36).

Thus far disability stylistics has utilised fine-grained linguistic analysis to reveal the way that truth-limiting ideologies and stereotypes about disability accumulate through patterns of linguistic structures (Hermeston 2017, 2022), giving a firm linguistic grounding in critical analysis of disability in literary and other texts.

This paper will use transitivity analysis, social actor analysis, issues of narrative mode and analysis of speech and thoughts to understand the construction of 'the crippled man', who is deliberately depicted stereotypically as a burden, a victim, perhaps ultimately of murder, and lacking in control.

The paper demonstrates that language is a central component in the construction of this characterisation, and notes that such depictions help to reinforce discourses that may be taken as truths, and shape wider expectations of disabled people in society.

The paper, influenced by positive discourse analysis (Stibbe, 2018, 165- 178), then considers the potential for a positive stylistics of disability which identifies and encourages stylistic practices that construct more realistic, diverse, and truthful representations.

Influencing the Truth

Commoditized controversy in post-truth digital wellness economies

Maxine Ali

Social media platforms have become fertile ground for the spread of health misinformation and conspiracy theories. Driven by engagement-based algorithms that govern the parameters of what is recognised as successful or valuable content online, the commercial logic underpinning these platforms, known as the 'attention economy' (Hearn, 2010), has fostered a digital ecosystem in which visibility and virality are prioritised over factual accuracy. This presentation explores ways in which emotional provocation and polarisation are instrumentalised by social media users to maximise the attention and engagement attracted by their content. It focuses on the mediated performances of ten female Instagram wellness influencer-healers, a form of social media micro-celebrity whose online presence is structured around 'alternative' approaches to health and healing situated outside of, and often in opposition to evidence-based medicine. Part of a wider sociolinguistic investigation into how 'authenticity' is discursively manufactured within digital wellness cultures, the discussion approaches misinformation as a linguistic practice, that is, situationally contingent interactional strategies through which epistemic standards are destabilised and renegotiated (Jones, 2025). The analysis shows how influencer-healers assert and legitimate the truthfulness of health-related claims through calibrated display of controversy. This frames truth-telling as a spectacle of ideological dissent engaged in by influencer-healers despite its social and reputational risk. By positioning themselves as willing to go against the grain and challenge mainstream consensus, influencer-healers perform a moral investment in honest and authentic expression that projects a trustworthy presentation of the self. Findings demonstrate how affective intensities are strategically engendered and leveraged in ways that enhance the perceived believability of false and misleading claims, thus foregrounding the social and emotional dimensions of truth-telling activities online.

Instagram, Inauthenticity and the Platformed Autobiography of Caroline Calloway

Nicola Wilson-Torch

In 2015, Caroline Calloway signed a \$500,000 book deal based on the popularity of her Instagram account, where she had amassed more than 300,000 followers through long-form captions that narrated an aestheticised and aspirational version of her everyday life. By 2017, the book deal had fallen through amid growing scrutiny surrounding the authenticity of her

online persona and the legitimacy of both her digital content and subsequent book proposal. These revelations gave rise to a succession of public controversies that further undermined the credibility and coherence of her online identity. Nevertheless, by 2023, Calloway had self-published three books collectively marketed as the 'Instagram Trilogy', effectively monetising the controversies surrounding her alleged inauthenticity into commercial narratives in their own right. This paper takes Calloway as a case study through which to examine the commercialisation of authenticity within contemporary publishing and digital media culture. Approaching Instagram as a narrative medium in which serialised forms of life-writing are produced, circulated and monetised in real time (Kozharinova and Manovich 2024), it argues that Calloway's extended Instagram captions function as a form of online autobiographical narrative that can later be repackaged for print publication. In turn, this transition subjects her carefully curated online persona to heightened expectations of permanence, authority and accountability not typically demanded of ephemeral social media content. The paper further explores how subsequent accusations of inauthenticity became central to both her public image and later commercial appeal. Through analysis of Calloway's social media content, interviews and self-published works, the paper examines how authenticity and truth are simultaneously performed, commodified and destabilised across digital and print contexts, positioning Calloway as emblematic of the instability of authorship, credibility and self-presentation within contemporary media ecologies.

Mediating Environmental Truths: UK Outdoor Influencers and Informal Sustainability Discourse on Instagram

Melissa Avdeeff, Megan Rector, Viola Wiegand

Since COVID lockdowns, there has been a marked increase in people venturing into the British wilderness. Social media discourse and mainstream press often point to a correlation between outdoor influencers and increased tourism to 'Instagrammable' beauty spots, thereby increasing issues with local traffic, environmental degradation, and mountain rescue callouts. In response, this paper explores how UK outdoor influencers on Instagram are mediating the British natural environment, and how environmental 'truths' and sustainable practices are framed and legitimised through influencer culture. The focus is not on outdoor influencers who position themselves as 'greenfluencers', but rather, those whose profiles are primarily about their outdoor experiences, where sponsored ads may be present, but are not the central focus. This research brings together and builds on previous work exploring: (1) influencers and expectations of authenticity; (2) platform affordances and the media ecologies of Instagram; and (3) discourses of environmental sustainability. We question the duty of care of influencers who are not positioned as educators, but nevertheless participate in the informal education of less experienced outdoor audiences through parasociality and the perceived credibility of influencers over more institutional sources. Previous research (DeBrew et al. 2024) has demonstrated the aesthetic conventions involved in mediating the outdoors, perpetuating tropes of conquest, the promontory witness, and aesthetics of 'untouched' wilderness. These representations often reproduce colonial narratives of dominance and individualism, alongside broader ideological assumptions concerning how people relate to the natural environment.

Methodologically, this study focuses on a corpus of Instagram posts (text and image) from the 10 most-followed British outdoor influencers from the previous 12 months, alongside comments engaging with those posts. We combine corpus-assisted discourse analysis and critical technocultural discourse analysis to examine the discourses themselves, and how platform affordances and technocultural expectations shape particular conventions of mediating nature, constructing authenticity, and circulating environmental truth-claims.

Fictional Truths

The Truth of Ghost Stories [Lightning talk]

Emily Bullock

The Truth of Ghost Stories talk will explore how 'truth' is constructed and destabilised within the ghost story tradition, focusing mainly on the works of 19th and early 20th century short story writers. Despite the ghost stories supernatural subject matter, they rely on creative writing techniques that allay doubt: realistic settings, scholarly protagonists, embedded narratives, and the use of documentary evidence to create a framework of plausibility that invites, rather than demands, belief. At the same time, ghost stories are anchored in emotional truths: fear, curiosity, greed, love and loss. These 'truths' shape narratives, positioning the supernatural as a catalyst for moral consequence but hiding within the format of a 'story' they can also address unspeakable things of the era such as domestic abuse, child abuse, and queer love.

Author Authenticity, Censorship, and Conspiracies of Silence

May Ouma

Yellowface by R.F.Kuang is a literary fiction novel that centres June Hayward; an unsuccessful white author, who steals the unpublished manuscript of her frenemy, Athena Liu, after her untimely death. June spends weeks reading and editing Athena's manuscript before selling it to Eden Press. Later publishing the novel 'The Last Front' under the racially ambiguous pseudonym, Juniper Song. After publication, June faces allegations of cultural appropriation and plagiarism. The novel is concerned with themes of author authenticity and censorship. Kuang is inviting the reader to engage with the question: who has authority to depict and/or benefit from other people's stories? Interestingly, these questions are aimed at both June and Athena. In June's case, through the seemingly more straightforward question of plagiarism and cultural leeching, whereas Athena's authenticity is queried through more nuanced discussions of positionality through wealth and social class. Within the publishing industry and wider literary spaces, the practice of silence is employed in order to maintain the status quo through rules and social norms, including the acts of noticing and ignoring. To this end, it may be difficult for individuals to break the silence or even to publicly notice the disparities within the industry in relation to race, sexual orientation, gender, and class, et cetera, despite being aware of them. Although, with the industry being overwhelmingly white, heteronormative, and wealthy, it would be impossible to deny. The choice to ignore and remain silent therefore can be attributed to the need to maintain social standing and capital. Through employing Eviatar Zerubavel's notion of "conspiracies of silence", which he describes as a phenomenon "whereby a group of people

tacitly agree to outwardly ignore something of which they are all personally aware”, this research examines the pitfalls and nuances of authorship in the pursuit of authenticity in literary spaces.

The Truth as Fiction

Nicolas Mugavero

This paper investigates the proposition that truth does not simply appear in fiction, but is organized by it. Using Lacan's claim in Seminar VII that “truth has the structure of fiction”, I argue that literary form does not represent truth so much as it provides the conditions under which something like Truth becomes legible at all. Specifically, the works of Alain Robbe-Grillet and Italo Calvino offer sustained meditations on this condition. In *Jealousy*, for example, truth is never revealed as content but produced through the repetition of descriptive sequences, whose slight variations function less as clarifications than as displacements. What emerges from these sequences is not the confirmation of an event, but the persistence of a structure. While in Calvino, (most notably in *If on a winter's night a traveler*) through fragmentation, recursion, and narrative interruption, we find a world in which truth cannot be located in any single account, but only in the relations between them. Truth emerges, if at all, in the gaps, overlaps, and failures of narrative continuity, where meaning is both generated and deferred. In order to clarify how such emergence operates, I turn to Wittgenstein's notion of language games. From this perspective, truth is not a hidden content waiting to be revealed, but something enacted within specific forms of discourse, which are dependent on rules, contexts, and practices of use. Calvino's shifting narrative frames can thus be understood as a series of competing and unstable truth-games, each momentarily establishing its own criteria before dissolving into another. In short, rather than treating “post-truth” as a recent crisis, this paper suggests that truth has always functioned in this way, i.e., structured, mediated, and sustained through forms that are, at their core, fictional.

Cynicism: a tool to sincerity?

Louise Kari Méreau

If sincerity is the last remaining luxury in late capitalism, then the novels of Frédéric Beigbeder and Virginie Despentes are its duty-free shops: dazzling, overlit, and fundamentally suspect. Drawing on my comparative study of cynicism in contemporary French literature, this paper examines how both authors weaponise cynicism as a paradoxical mode of truth-telling. Somewhere between Diogenes' barrel and a VIP room at the Queen nightclub, authenticity becomes performance, confession becomes branding, and the narrator's “honesty” arrives already wrapped in quotation marks. Focusing on works such as *99 Francs*, *Windows on the World*, *Baise-moi* and *King Kong Théorie*, my paper argues that cynicism operates not as the opposite of authenticity, but as its exhausted contemporary form. Both writers blur the boundaries between author and narrator, fiction and autofiction, confession and marketing strategy. Their texts cultivate what Kari-Méreau identifies as a specifically modern cynicism: no longer merely nihilistic, but politically charged, oscillating between self-interest and social critique. I also look at how audiences are implicated in this economy of authenticity. Beigbeder's

advertising executives and Despentes' anti-heroines address readers who are already fluent in irony, suspicious of sincerity, and yet still hungry for "the real." In this sense, both authors expose a central contradiction of contemporary discourse: authenticity has become culturally mandatory precisely when belief itself has become unfashionable. Overall, the question I am putting forward is "is contemporary cynicism a tool for sincerity or not?"

Platforming Truths

Hypernarrativity and/as narrative capital: Performed authenticity and 'aura farming' in postdigital platform ecologies

Nikos Papadopoulos

This paper explores the narrative practices of three teenagers on Instagram and TikTok, arguing that what constitutes "authenticity" is increasingly contested, layered, and algorithmically mediated. It focuses on identity negotiation within a postdigital framework, recognizing the entanglement of analog and digital realities (Tagg & Lyons, 2022). Drawing on small stories research (Georgakopoulou-Nunes, 2023), the study approaches teenage engagement with narratives as a complex assemblage of human agency and algorithmic affordances. Central to this is hypernarrativity (Wagener, 2019), which refers to a fast-paced, fragmented, and perpetually unfinished state of hypertextual storytelling. Methodologically, the study draws on doctoral research data to employ a postdigital collaborative ethnography (Guerrero et al., 2023), emphasizing the teenagers' reflexive role through self-ethnographic data collection and speak-aloud scrolling sessions. Literacy practice biomaps are used to trace meaning-making trajectories on a "horizontal" level, enabling detailed "vertical" micro-analyses of specific narrative events. The analysis highlights illustrative cases, such as the vernacular practice of 'aura farming'—a slang term for intentionally acting "cool" through content (re)sharing to boost social status. This is analyzed through the lens of narrative capital (Lueg, 2023), highlighting a narrative's capacity to be recontextualized and recognized as worthy of reproduction. The data reveal how sensory overstimulation, ludic dimensions, and intentionally incoherent semiotic designs generate high narrative capital due to their alignment with what is currently deemed humorous and/or relatable, i.e., the "nomos" of the field (Lueg, 2023). In this context, authenticity is negotiated as an emotional, performative act for self- and other-positioning and subcultural belonging, at the nexus of teenager-platform co-agency and shifting postdigital ecologies.

The Architecture of Authenticity in Post-Truth Social Media Ecologies: A Discursive Analysis of Truth-Claims by Moroccan Content Creators Elmaliki, Essou, Raghieb, and Swinga

Abdelhamid Adarrab

On social media, credibility does not rest exclusively on the factual accuracy of a proposition. It is also constructed through the way a speaker qualifies sources, recognises or conceals uncertainty, mobilises experience, displays documents, adopts a moral position, and addresses an audience. The broader project from which this paper emerges examines four Moroccan content creators - Ilyas Elmaliki, Taha Essou, Amine Raghieb, and Mustapha Swinga - who were

initially associated with four provisional regimes of truth. The present paper reports the first completed intracase analysis, devoted to Mustapha Swinga. The corpus comprises two public YouTube videos, one addressing the potential costs and benefits of Morocco's involvement in the 2030 FIFA World Cup and the other addressing gambling, regulation, advertising, and public protection. Ten truth-claim episodes were delimited and coded through qualitative digital discourse analysis informed by evidentiality, pragmatics, and social semiotics. The protocol systematically separates the verbal claim, the evidence actually displayed, externally verifiable context, and the analytical limit. The findings identify two dominant and overlapping configurations. In the first video, Swinga constructs calibrated pedagogical authority through source stratification, uncertainty management, and an explicit commitment to revision. In the second, he develops protective civic truth-telling through mechanism tracing, regulatory criticism, moral warning, and an invitation to collective problem-solving. Darija operates as an epistemic infrastructure of translation: it makes institutional and technical distinctions accessible without functioning, by itself, as a guarantee of authenticity. The case therefore leads to a revision of the initial label of pedagogical fact-checking. Swinga's discourse is more accurately described as pedagogical civic authority constructed through source stratification, practical inference, and protective disclosure.

Truth in the age of social media algorithms

Olivia Kelly

This presentation explores truth-telling in the context of social media use by distance learners. Social media has become an important part of the distance learning experience, supporting peer support, information sharing and a sense of belonging. Distance learning institutions increasingly use social media to engage students, communicate information and foster learning communities. However, as my research has shown (Kelly, 2024), these benefits exist alongside growing concerns about misinformation, declining trust in expertise and the influence of algorithms.

Research on truth and misinformation suggests that social media presents significant challenges in accessing accurate information. Vosoughi et al. (2018) found that false information spreads faster online, indicating that truth is often disadvantaged within social media platforms designed to prioritise engagement. Additionally, while individuals can often distinguish reliable from unreliable information, repeated exposure to misinformation can increase its perceived credibility. Bachmann and Valenzuela (2023) argue that familiarity and confirmation bias weaken critical judgement over time, making inaccurate claims appear more believable. A further challenge concerns the role of algorithms in shaping knowledge. Engagement-driven systems can create echo chambers reinforcing existing viewpoints and reducing exposure to alternative perspectives (Gupta & Bansal, 2024).

These insights have important implications for distance learning. Drawing on my teaching and research experience, social media spaces provide valuable support for distance learners. Informal networks help learners interpret module requirements, exchange resources and build confidence. However, they can also facilitate the spread of misunderstandings about

assessments or policies. Repeated circulation of inaccurate information may lead students to trust peer-generated content over official institutional guidance. For distance learning institutions, there is a growing need to teach digital literacy initiatives that help students critically evaluate information sources, recognise the influence of algorithms and engage reflectively with online communities. As social media becomes increasingly central to the student experience, helping learners navigate truth claims is a core institutional responsibility.

Email as platform for truth in an emerging pandemic: the construction of Anthony Fauci's authority

Rachele De Felice

In the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic, individuals and institutions across the world were struggling with understanding the new virus, and the actions required to combat it. In the absence of pre-existing information about the disease, the 'truth' about the situation was being established almost in real time, constantly revised as new data came to light. One of the figures at the heart of this was Dr Anthony Fauci (Director of the US National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases), who quickly became recognised as a voice of authority and objective advice globally. In this presentation, I address the following question: how did Fauci use language to establish (his) truth and authority in this time of crisis when communicating with colleagues, government officials, the media, and the general public? We have a rare opportunity to analyse his written communication through the publicly available Fauci email dataset (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/interactive/2021/tony-fauci-emails/>), consisting of around 2700 messages from Fauci's email account spanning the period from January to June 2020. Using corpus linguistics tools, I examine Fauci's use of terms associated with a strong epistemic stance (e.g. true/truth, false/fake, consensus, claim, certain(ly), sure, believe/belief, etc.) in relation to emerging facts and events. I will discuss how he tempers their epistemic force with hedges (less, maybe, however, etc.) in his efforts to appear authoritative and credible while not misleading the public. In doing so, I contribute to our understanding of how speakers mobilise linguistic resources to display stance and authority, and provide a case study of how this can develop and shift in near-real time.

Discursive Truths

Shock or Appease: How Contradictory Truth Claims Shaped Evolution Popularisation in Arabic

Mohammad Aboomar

In the period from 1882 to 1884, a major encounter with Darwinism in the Arab world unfolded in the press and the book market. Darwin emerged as a divisive figure by the end of this period, with reactions depending on how evolution was popularised. Regardless of the scientific nature of evolution, the early efforts of its popularisation in Arabic took opposing ideological directions to cater for the consequences of an evolutionary worldview on prevalent traditions in the receiving culture. On the one hand, a group of intellectuals popularised evolution as a madhab resembling religious schools of thought and hunted for precursors to Darwin in premodern Arabic literature. On the other hand, another group depicted evolution as a materialist idea that

collides with religious beliefs and leads to atheism. Although both camps had a common objective, their different approaches led to widely differing truth claims about evolution in particular and modern science more broadly. Focusing on the issue of human descent, this paper sheds light on how relevant scientific claims were translated and presented in Arabic by the editors of the periodical *al-Muqtaā'af* and in the works of ShiblÄ« Shumayyil to portray contrasting positions while often relying on the same sources. They, in their capacity as gatekeepers, have thus ideologised these claims either to appease their readers into the adoption of modern science or to shock them into it. Revisiting this period reveals how the scientific aspects of evolution were clouded by ideological concerns that remain significant in relevant discourses until today. The paper, therefore, serves as an example of how scientific findings are used as tools to manipulate non-literary discourses.

Truth Telling in Hypernormalised Times

Edmund King

In October 2026, Adam Curtis's BBC documentary *Hypernormalisation* will have its ten-year anniversary. What seems most striking in retrospect about Curtis's documentary is how contemporary it still feels. Curtis's organising foci -- the ideological fallout from the 1979 Iranian Revolution, the sense that we are due a "system failure" along the lines of the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the rise of Donald Trump -- seem (if anything) to have intensified in relevance in 2026. In this paper, however, I want to focus on another area in which the documentary remains relevant, to do with the concept of hypernormalisation itself. Formulated by the Russian anthropologist Alexei Yurchak (and arguably somewhat misunderstood by Curtis), hypernormalisation is a theory of discourse creation. Under the intensely intersurveillant conditions operating in late Soviet Russia, Yurchak argues that discourse creators looked to one another's texts for models of ideological compliance, creating highly derivative "new" texts that were "correct" in terms of their formal characteristics, but which had little regard for either originality or literal meaning. The "truth" or otherwise of a text lay in its compliance with an ambient set of discursive norms derived from how previous texts had stated things. In this paper, I want to apply the concept of hypernormalisation to two forms of contemporary truth telling: the "Post-New Left Political Vocabulary" that arose online in the early 2010s, and students' use of generative-AI to write formally "compliant" essays. In each case, hypernormalisation provides a model for how digital forms of discourse creation lead to an emphasis on formal correctness as a "show" of truth.

The lexemes "fascist" and "Nazi" in the Telegram discourse of military bloggers

Nikolay Ternov and Dmitry Mikhailov

This paper examines how the lexemes "fascist" and "Nazi" function in the Russian-language discourse of military bloggers on Telegram during the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian war. Rather than treating these terms simply as political labels, the study asks how historical vocabulary is reactivated within digital media to construct moral authority, define the enemy, and support particular claims about the meaning and legitimacy of contemporary events.

The analysis is based on ten influential Russian military-blogger Telegram channels whose combined audience exceeded 4.5 million subscribers as of March 2025. The corpus comprises 112,054 posts published between 24 February 2022 and 31 March 2025 and collected through Telegram's official API. Following preprocessing and lemmatization adapted to Russian-language material, posts containing the target lexemes were examined through concordance analysis and topic modelling using BERTopic. This combination of quantitative and interpretive methods makes it possible to identify recurrent contexts of usage as well as broader discursive patterns.

The analysis identifies ten major thematic clusters in which “fascist” and “Nazi” perform functions ranging from enemy dehumanization and the legitimization of violence to the sacralization of suffering, the heroization of military action, and the symbolic defence of historical memory. Across these contexts, the terms increasingly lose their narrowly historical reference and operate as flexible markers of moral otherness. Through references to the Second World War, contemporary events are incorporated into a longer narrative of existential struggle in which present adversaries are represented as continuations or reincarnations of an historically familiar enemy.

The paper connects these processes directly to the conference theme of truth and truth-telling. Military-blogger Telegram channels position themselves as alternatives to institutional media, cultivating an image of immediacy, authenticity, and insider knowledge. Their discourse therefore does more than describe events: it produces a particular regime of “unofficial truth” in which testimonial language, affect, historical analogy, and moral polarization work together to establish who can speak credibly, whose suffering counts as evidence, and which interpretations of the war appear self-evidently true. The study thus approaches truth-telling not primarily as a question of factual verification, but as a discursive practice through which authority, memory, and moral certainty are constructed in a digital wartime environment.

Social Media Truths

Constructing recognizable masculinities through identity play in parody videos by female content creators on Douyin

Xiangyu Zhang

As one recent expression of Chinese digital feminism (e.g., Chen & Gong, 2024; Song & Wang, 2025; Zhang & Mu, 2024), a number of female content creators have been posting videos on the social media platform, Douyin, where they engage in playful parodic performances of masculine characterological figures. Without fully disguising their feminine gender, these female content creators perform recognizable masculine behaviors in various situational contexts (e.g., on a first date), indexing problematic Chinese masculinities that have been observed and/or experienced by women in their everyday lives. Drawing on Bakhtinian notion of varidirectional double-voicing (Bakhtin, 1981), this study takes a multimodal discourse analysis approach (Norris, 2019) to examine how these female content creators deploy various linguistic and semiotic resources to construct obviously fake, yet simultaneously convincing, masculinities through this gender-based identity play (Kafai et al., 2010). In addition, by focusing on two illustrative videos from

two accounts (@Jay and @Buzz) sampled for a larger project, I also consider how the “truthfulness” of these gender performances is co-constructed by viewers' comments in response to the parody videos analyzed. The findings show that the content creators orchestrate different modes (e.g., gesture, posture, gaze) to construct “fake” masculine characters (e.g., mansplainers and street harassers), while simultaneously effectively embodying problematic Chinese masculinities situated in various contexts (e.g., mansplaining to women during a date, harassing female passersby) – which many viewers identify with and find “truthful.” I argue that through double-voicing, this identity play of problematic masculinities constitutes a new form of truth-telling within China's stringent online censorship practices, which restrict more overt forms of feminist activism. The gender-based identity play in these parody videos allows the female content creators to make visible Chinese women's collective experiences while critiquing hegemonic masculinities.

Truth as Emotional Resource: Affective Truth-Claims and Community Negotiation in Korean Guilty Pleasure YouTube Discourse

Kyu Hyun Park

What happens when a community collectively recalibrates what counts as truth? This paper explores comment discourse on Korean ‘diet failure’ (for weight loss) YouTube channels, where creators consistently fall short of conventional dieting standards yet attract fiercely loyal audiences who actively defend their credibility and continued participation. Drawing on a corpus of YouTube comments from three anonymised channels and Sperber et al.'s (2010) framework of epistemic vigilance, this study uses pragmatic analysis to suggest that truth operates on three distinct yet interrelated layers: objective truth (viewers explicitly acknowledge the creators are not conventionally dieting), community-negotiated truth (the community collectively redefines what counts as dieting on the creator's own terms), and affective truth (the emotional experience of consumption is worth protecting regardless of factual accuracy). The analysis identifies three discursive phenomena corresponding to these layers. Cross-channel reference comments reveal that viewers maintain objective awareness of epistemic standards while choosing to suspend them. Meta-discursive comments that silence criticism reveal how communities actively construct their own standards of credibility by discouraging conventional epistemic evaluation. ‘Guilty protection’ comments discouraging the creator from succeeding reveal the suspension of content vigilance in favour of affective experience: failure is defended not because it is accurate but because it is emotionally necessary. The three layers examined here reveal that truth functions not as epistemic accuracy but as an emotional resource through which participation and group cohesion are sustained. This paper suggests that the strategic suspension of epistemic standards in online communities is not a failure of rationality but a deliberate collective practice, demonstrating that authenticity and credibility in digital spaces are not given but actively and collaboratively produced through discourse.

Pseudo-authority and Health (mis)information on TikTok. A corpus-assisted multimodal discourse analysis

Nicola Pelizzari

Health (mis)information increasingly circulates through synthetic agents on digital platforms, where fabrication, fictionality, and vagueness destabilise conventional markers of expertise. TikTok, often portrayed as a site of "democratised" creativity, is structured by algorithmic logics that amplify particular forms of visibility and shape textual practices. Within this environment, AI-generated videos function as multimodal texts that simulate authority through converging linguistic, visual, aural, and identity cues. Such material spans a continuum, from explicitly declared synthetic videos to content that is probably AI-generated yet often highly lifelike in its delivery, owing to the increasingly sophisticated mimetic capacities of contemporary generative systems. This contribution applies corpus-assisted multimodal discourse analysis (CAMDA) to a stratified corpus of 120 TikTok health (mis)information videos (2024–2025), comprising equal subcorpora of declared-AI, probable-AI, and human-produced videos. For each video, transcripts, captions, overlays, and metadata are examined to trace patterned uses of evidential markers, vague quantifiers, empathy formulas, synthetic voices, credential imagery, and platform-specific identity signals. The study addresses two research questions: how AI-generated TikTok videos simulate medical authority through patterned combinations of linguistic, visual, aural and identity cues; and how fabrication, fictionality and vagueness operate as multimodal textual practices within TikTok's algorithmically shaped circulation of health (mis)information. Drawing on the notion of pseudos, the analysis shows how AI-related videos more often deploy generic evidentiality (e.g. "studies show", "experts agree"), high-certainty stance, and directive closure, scaffolded by diagnostic-style overlays and structured sequencing, whereas human-produced videos more often anchor claims in experiential or institutional frames and retain greater space for hedging. Pseudo-authority is thus not a simple property of AI generation but of how epistemic stance, evidentiality, and identity cues are orchestrated across modes, with implications for public health communication.

Translating Truths

Augmented, Not Automated: Authorship, Authenticity and Truthfulness in AI-Mediated Translation

Katharina Walter

As AI systems increasingly mediate translation, questions of authorship, authenticity and truthfulness become central to how texts circulate across cultures. This paper examines AI-mediated translation through the lens of authenticity, arguing that translation is not merely semantic transfer but an interpretive, creative and socially embedded act. Automation causes problems especially in "creative-text translation" (Hadley et al. 2022: 6) as AI-mediated transfers of literary or promotional texts reconfigure authorship, redistributing agency between human translators and algorithmic systems. While "human-centered" AI frameworks emphasize control and autonomy (Jiménez-Crespo 2025), current generative and neural systems privilege statistically probable outputs, homogenizing style and weakening authorial voice (Walter 2025: 218–221). Using literary excerpts and promotional slogans as examples, this paper demonstrates how automated translations may partly or fully preserve semantic content while failing to convey affective authenticity, rhetorical force or cultural resonance. This foregrounds a

broader epistemic question: What counts as “truth” in translation when linguistic choices are delegated to computational systems? Building on critiques of automated language as displacing human communicative agency (Simanowski 2025), this paper situates AI-mediated translation within wider debates on authenticity and truth in AI contexts. Against this backdrop, the future of our textual environment calls for augmented translation, in which AI supports rather than supplants human interpretive labor and translators remain ethically informed and creative co-authors of meaning.”

Hebrew Truth and Christian Polity from Anti-Jewish Spain: Emplotment, Mediation, and the Contingency of Truth-Claims in an Early Modern Case Study

Jesús De Prado Plumed

Under what conditions does the medium of an utterance become the primary bearer of its authority? This paper engages directly with questions truthfulness, bias, and authority in translation, through a case study that is historically remote but proves theoretically generative. In 1544, the University of Alcalá de Henares, the leading university of its time in the new imperial Spain, commissioned two diplomatic letters of complaint to Pope Paul III and the university's protector of the university at the Roman Curia, written not in Latin, the language of papal diplomacy, but in Hebrew. Their author was Alfonso de Zamora, the university's Jewish convert professor of Hebrew and a veteran of the Complutensian Polyglot Bible. A draft survives and one copy reached Italy, preserved in the Florentine State Archive among the papers of the future Pope Marcellus II. The paper develops three theoretical claims. First, that language choice is itself an act authorising truth: writing an institutional complaint in Hebrew — in the Spanish polity that simultaneously stigmatised Jewish heritage and valorised Hebrew as sacred philological learning — was a calculated deployment of credibility by means of linguistic capital. Second, drawing on Mona Baker's account of causal emplotment in translation, that Zamora emplots his institution's grievance: he inserts the conflict into a narrative structure with identifiable protagonists, causes, and responsibilities. Third, the gap between intended and actual recipient (Parisio versus Cervini) illustrates how emplotted truth-claims in mediated, multicultural communication are reshaped by transmission chains in ways that exceed the author's control. Together, these moves illuminate a structural feature of truth-telling that extends well beyond this sixteenth-century case study: credibility is not an intrinsic property of statements but an effect produced at the intersection of a discursive choice, the author's self-positioning and the contingencies of reception.

When Chitra Becomes Painting: Translation, Authenticity, and Sacred Visual Discourse

Brinda Nair

The translation of indigenous aesthetic categories into modern art-historical vocabulary often produces epistemic shifts that reshape how visual traditions are interpreted, classified, and authenticated. This paper examines the Sanskrit term *chitra* and investigates how its translation into the English term “painting” transforms the semantic, ritual, and affective dimensions embedded within South Asian visual traditions, particularly Kerala mural painting. While “painting” largely denotes a visual object or artistic medium within Western aesthetic discourse,

chitra historically encompasses broader associations of embodiment, modelling, imagination, sacred presence, narration, and affective experience. Drawing from Kerala mural traditions and textual references within Indian aesthetic thought, this paper argues that the translation of chitra into “painting” is not merely linguistic but epistemological. Such translation reconstitutes sacred image-making within colonial and modern frameworks of art history that privilege objecthood, classification, and visual representation over performative, devotional, and relational dimensions. The paper explores how authenticity becomes negotiated through these translated categories and asks what is lost when indigenous visual concepts are absorbed into universalized aesthetic vocabularies. Engaging with theories of translation, discourse, and visual culture, the study further examines how colonial and institutional modes of interpretation shape contemporary understandings of sacred images within museums, archives, and academic writing. By foregrounding chitra as a fluid and culturally embedded concept rather than a direct equivalent of “painting,” the paper questions dominant assumptions surrounding representation, authorship, and authenticity in cross-cultural art discourse. The paper ultimately proposes that recovering the semantic and affective plurality of chitra may open alternative ways of engaging with South Asian visual traditions beyond reductive translational frameworks.

Performing Truths

Faking it, Honestly: Inherent and Staged Authenticity in Contemporary French Autobiographical Theater

Madeline Muravchik

Contemporary autobiographical theater occupies a paradoxical space as Carol Martin observes, “a text can be fictional yet true; a text can be nonfictional yet untrue.” In three recent French plays — Christophe Honoré’s *Le Ciel de Nantes* (2021), Ahmed Madani’s *Incandescences* (2021), and Faustine Noguès’s *Surprise parti* (2020) — authenticity operates on three distinct levels: liveness, acknowledged artifice, and in examining mediatized representations of the self. All three playwrights chose theater because their work requires the authenticity inherent in the co-presence of performer and spectator. For Honoré, theater’s visible artifice creates space for the living and the dead to coexist. For Madani, the live encounter is essential to the work’s purpose. For Noguès, theater’s liveness exposes the emptiness of political rhetoric. Yet each playwright also constructs authenticity through strategy. Honoré saturates *Le Ciel de Nantes* with geographic and familial specificity, using repetition and corroboration to generate a feeling of truthfulness. Contrastingly, he also uses conflicting memories and admitted deception to confer reliability. Madani, whose performers share their own stories, creates ‘double intimacy,’ disclosures that become more vulnerable mid-monologue. Here too, unsolicited admissions of unbecoming behavior render speakers trustworthy because their revelations carry no personal advantage. Noguès employs Reykjavik’s 2008 mayoral election to incite French audiences to improve their own political situation. The works also probe mediatized representations of self. Madani contrasts the social media identities the actors maintain with the vulnerability of live performance. Noguès juxtaposes footage of real-life mayor Jón Gnarr with the actor portraying him, exploring whether mediatized representations can be truer than live ones. Movie-maker

Honoré uses theater to resist film's tendency to replace rather than preserve memory. Together they suggest that theater breeds a unique authenticity: rooted in liveness, transparent about its filters, and able to incorporate media in ways media cannot reciprocate.

The female voice-over and truth-telling in audiovisual discourse

Sabrina Francesconi

This presentation explores the tension between the female voice-over (Cavarero 2022; Chion 1982) and truth-telling within audiovisual discourse. By adopting a multimodal narrative framework (Jewitt 2026; Tseng et al 2026), forms and functions of the vocal mode will be examined as making meaning in films and TV series, at the intersection of visual and audio tracks (Doane 1980; Hoth 2010). Specifically, the female voice will be first inspected in terms of materiality, voice quality, embodiment, spatial-temporal position, as well as agentic power in the story world (Lawrence 1991; Silverman 1988). The vocal mode will be then discussed in its negotiation of authenticity and reliability in the audiovisual narrative and in relation to audience engagement (Kozloff 1988; van Leeuwen 1999). In order to develop the argumentative line, some examples will be discussed, including the voice of a) a mute woman (*The Piano* by Jane Campion), b) of a drug-addicted woman (*Euphoria* by Sam Levinson) c) of a dead woman (*Desperate Housewives* by David Grossman et al), d) an artificially intelligent operating system (*Her* by Spike Jonze), e) a writer (*Stranger than Fiction* by Mark Forster). The leading question is the following: how does the female voice-over negotiate authenticity and truth-telling in audiovisual discourse?

Marston, Montaigne, and telling the truth

Charles Cathcart

From his earliest writings, John Marston – the controversial playwright and poet – exhibited a deep commitment to the notion of free speech and the telling of truth. His final plays show a heightened concern with these values. Those works – *The Dutch Courtesan*, *The Fawn*, and *Sophonisba* – drew from John Florio's recently-published English version of Montaigne's *Essays* and especially from 'Upon Some Verses of Vergil'. Influenced by Montaigne's own passionate commitment to honest speaking, Marston's long-standing engagement with truth-telling and free speech enjoyed a new and more concentrated charge. This has a focus in the open acknowledgement of female sexual desire; and one telling instance occurs when Florio's 'Vertue is a pleasant and buxom quality' becomes Crispinella's 'Virtue is a free, pleasant, buxom quality'. Marston's calculated appropriation and skilful adaptation of 'Florio's Montaigne' yielded dramatic work of great vigour and energy, with the treatment of truth at its heart.

Unreliably Narrated Truths

Who remembers?: Cognitive Operations and Perspectival Mechanisms of Unreliability

Rebecca Connor-Evans and Alison Gibbons

In this paper, we argue that unreliability is an interpretative projection that emerges as recipients process perspectival construals of storyworld events. In doing so, we approach

narrative truth not as a fixed correspondence between account and event, but as a dynamic judgement shaped by perspective-taking, memory, epistemic authority and audience interpretation. We synthesize text-worlds, the memory-based process of world-retrieval, and conceptual integration to newly explain the cognitive operations through which reliability judgments emerge. We propose an original framework of four perspectival mechanisms of unreliability, each underwritten by the dynamic cognitive operations in our synthesis: dual-interpretive unreliability, produced through conflicts between a narrating consciousness and inferred mimetic events; bimediated unreliability, produced through conflict between diegetic-telling and mimetic-showing; multiperspectival unreliability, produced through multiple construals by different consciousnesses; and intraperspectival unreliability, produced when a single consciousness destabilizes its own account. Our analysis of the memory-reflexive TV show *The Affair* (Showtime 2014-2019) explicates the perspectival mechanisms of unreliability at work and their underlying cognitive operations, while also showing how memory operates as perspectival style, structural conceit and as integral to recipient's interpretive processing. Depending on how perspectives are blended, reassessed or held in tension, conceptual integration produces different levels of epistemic authority and instability, which can be related to 'closed' and 'open' forms of multiperspectivity. The paper therefore contributes to wider debates about truth, authorship, audiences and authenticity by showing that narrative truth is not simply located in the authority of a speaker, narrator or represented consciousness, but emerges through the recipient's ongoing negotiation of competing truth-claims. Ultimately, the paper offers a transferable model of perspectival unreliability which can be applied across media and genres. Unreliability is therefore the dynamic outcome of perspective-taking, world-retrieval, conceptual integration, and the reassessment of the epistemic status of memory-bound text-worlds.

Ambiguous Truths: Autofiction and the Poetics of Unreliability

Antonella De Blasio

The contribution focuses on the figure of the unreliable narrator as a strategy of identity construction in autofictional narrative practices. Autofiction, in fact, takes shape as a hybrid form that places the codes of autobiography and those of fiction in tension, destabilizing traditional criteria of referentiality, authenticity, and coherence in self-narration. Within this framework, the unreliability of the narrating voice does not concern solely the truthfulness of the narrated events, but also affects the ways in which experience is selected, organized, and rendered narratively intelligible, thereby shaping the representation of the subject and its claim to authenticity.

The contribution specifically analyses the novel *The Last Interview* (2018) by Eshkol Nevo through the categories of consonance and dissonance developed by Dorrit Cohn and later reformulated within cognitive narratology. These categories make it possible to describe the variable stances adopted by the narrating voice toward the narrated self, highlighting oscillations between empathic alignment, retrospective justification, and critical distance. Unreliability thus emerges as a regulatory device that governs the relationship between

confession and narrative construction, revealing the processual and unstable nature of the narrated self.

In Nevo's novel, the metanarrative frame of the interview functions as an ambivalent device: on the one hand, it simulates a situation of communicative transparency and direct access to experience; on the other, it exposes the performative, rhetorical, and fictional dimensions of self-narration. In this way, the narrative simultaneously activates interpretive schemata associated with both fictional and referential reading, producing in the reader a state of interpretive disorientation.

Truth Is a Story Someone Told Better: Unreliable Narrators in *Gone Girl* and *Verity*

Carmen Gomez-Galisteo

Bestseller *Gone Girl* by Gillian Flynn caused an uproar in the media when it was first published in 2012. A few years later, *Verity* (2018) by Colleen Hoover also generated a great deal of talk. The unreliable narrator of both works in these popular psychological thrillers mesmerized readers is the starting point for this conference paper, which explores their respective use of unreliable narrators, reader expectations, and affective manipulation to question truth, authorship and authenticity. Both build on contradictory versions of events that challenge the authority that is usually associated to first-person narrators. In *Gone Girl*, the opposing versions of Nick and Amy regarding their marriage keep the reader guessing and trying to find the elusive truth. That Amy's diary, supposedly a site of personal confession, is revealed to be a fabrication, adds another layer to readers' questioning of the truth. In *Verity*, the discovery of writer Verity Crawford's unpublished manuscript, with its revelations about psychopathic traits and violence, unsettles the public image of Verity as a devoted mother and wife. However, that this memoir is an exercise of creative writing, again questions our assumptions about autobiographical writings. This paper explores how both novels, by using unreliable narrators, not only deliver powerful plot twists but question the very idea of authenticity. By taking pieces of writing assumed to be true (a diary and a memoir, respectively), they explore how we may confuse intimacy with the truth. This paper shows how, rather than asking whether narratives are true, *Gone Girl* and *Verity* explore why certain stories feel true and how affective authenticity shapes contemporary reading practices, thereby echoing contemporary anxieties regarding authenticity, truth, and the blurring of boundaries between fiction, confession, and manipulation in post-truth culture.

Contesting and Correcting Truth Online

Defining Truth and Harm in Digital Platforms: A Sociosemiotic Analysis of Hate Speech Policies on Social Media

Ulisses Tadeu Vaz De Oliveira, Natalia Sexto

This study investigates how major social media platforms discursively construct “truth,” legitimacy, and authority in their definitions of hate speech. Theoretically, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Systemic-Functional Linguistics (SFL) are coupled to examine policy

documents and community guidelines from Facebook, Twitter/X, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube in order to explore how these platforms frame harmful discourse, protected identities/audiences, and acceptable forms of expression. In this sense, this research contributes to contemporary debates surrounding misinformation and post-truth digital cultures. The platforms governance is also addressed in the examination of how their hate speech policies do more than regulate online behavior: they function as ideological and epistemic statements about what counts as legitimate discourse in networked societies. Through ideational and interpersonal analyses, the study identifies recurring discursive strategies of legitimation, mitigation, normalization, and institutional positioning embedded in platform policies. To that aim, resources of modalization, evaluative language, participant roles, and transitivity structures are combined to negotiate tensions between freedom of expression and harm prevention. Results demonstrate that aspects of inclusivity and authority emerge through the convergence among platforms in the representation of hate speech as a socially harmful and discriminatory practice directed toward “protected groups.” At the same time, subtle lexicogrammatical differences expose divergent ideological orientations regarding accountability and platform responsibility. Results also contribute to discussions about truth-claims in digital environments, especially in contexts marked by algorithmic amplification. The truth-authority claimed by these platforms in the twenty-first century is heavily based on their technical regulation power over societies which consubstantiate mechanisms for shaping moral, social, and epistemic boundaries online.

Telling the Truth to the Unwilling: Audience Reactions to Automated Corrections in the Wild

Harith Alani

When does telling someone they are wrong actually work? This abstract draws on two linked field studies that deployed an automated “bot” on Platform X (formerly Twitter) to correct users who had publicly shared claims already debunked by professional fact-checkers. Unlike controlled laboratory experiments that dominate this field, our interventions are delivered in the open, enabling us to observe how people genuinely react when their false claims are publicly challenged by a bot corrector. The first study examined how the wording and emotional framing of a correction influence its reception. Across nearly 3,900 users, the overwhelming majority ignored the correction entirely. Among those who replied, four in five rejected it outright, with many expressing distrust of fact-checkers as a biased authority rather than disagreement with the specific facts. An empathetic correction tone was the most likely one to prompt a reply, while a bot-identity asserting tone was the least. The second study, with nearly 700 users, tested whether short explanations, rather than mere false labelling, changes this dynamic. Replacing blunt “this is false” verdicts with short summaries explaining why a claim was deemed untrue increased engagement by roughly half, raised acceptance of corrections, and reduced the hostility, insult and toxicity of replies. Together, these findings show that although how a fact-check is presented does influence how recipients react, distrust in fact-checking organisations remains a big obstacle, and the use of bots as a truth-delivery mechanism is understandably problematic. The results also reveal that one of the central challenges in correcting people online is simply getting them to pay any attention or care at all.

Constructing Truth: Exploring Hypertext Framing in Counterfeit News of Fact-checking Websites

Sadia Choudhri

In contemporary media ecology, truth has been contested through algorithmic data-driven strategies. Fact-checking websites have emerged as a potential avenue for guiding public understanding. These platforms establish credibility through strategic communication. Banking on this notion, the current study explores how fact-checking websites use discourse and hyperlinking to maintain trustworthiness by integrating both van Dijk's Sociocognitive perspective on Critical Discourse Analysis (1993) and George Landow's Hypertext Theory (2006). Centred on the selected English-language fact-checking reports, the research adopts a qualitative approach to analyse linguistic and hyperlinking patterns. The findings reveal that hyperlinks as referential or institutional do not merely function as tools for steering information but are, rather, rhetorical devices that embed propositions with modality features "probably," or "may," within networks of epistemic authority. The navigation of official documents and the reference to expert sources shape the reader's interpretive role as arbiters of truth. The study highlights practices related to the epistemology of digital media used to validate knowledge and establish trust online.