

The Monumental Challenges of Pastmaking

Tyler Youngman

Syracuse University School of Information Studies, USA

tdyoungm@syr.edu

ABSTRACT

Pastmaking is a process in which agents exercise power to make or use documents depicting a past that can be given or taken as historical truth. Such documents often possess narrative elements perceived for use in heritage formation, collective remembering, and identity maintenance practices. Pastmaking encompasses the performative creation of historical knowledge, prompting considerable pause about: (1) who gets spoken for in (re-)tellings of prior events, (2) how agents arrive at consensus to determine what is historically known, and (3) how knowledge is lost or gained when historical narratives get (re-)written, a salient issue in light of conceptual developments on epistemicide and epistemic injustice in library and information science (LIS). The research question of this dissertation asks: How are epistemicide and pastmaking related through storytelling? In response, this dissertation undertakes comparative case studies of two commemorative monuments using critical discourse and narrative analysis, abductive content analysis, and document phenomenological insights. They include: (A) Columbus Circle in Syracuse, NY, and (B) The Place of Remembrance at Syracuse University. Following a literature review of storytelling, epistemicide, and pastmaking, Narrative Documentality is introduced as the framework for studying the interplay between narratives and documents. This critical qualitative investigation reveals how commemorative monuments, subject to performative agencies of giving and taking, afford or deny experiences of historical narrative through their use in constructing the past. Findings offer three distinct contributions to LIS: (1) a relational model of pastmaking, (2) the assessment of relevance as a performative process, and (3) demonstrating instances of document-dependent truth.

ALISE RESEARCH TAXONOMY TOPICS

Sociology of information; Social justice; Information ethics; Research methods.

AUTHOR KEYWORDS

Cultural heritage informatics; Cultural memory; Monuments; Bibliography; Performativity.

Copyright 2025 by the authors. Published under a [Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/).

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21900/j.alise.2025.2069>