

Call for chapters

Co-editors George Severs and Amy Tooth Murphy are inviting expressions of interest to contribute chapters to the forthcoming Routledge *Oral History Theory Handbook*. The Handbook will consist of between 35 and 40 chapters in English which aim to reflect on and advance the field of theory within oral history. Despite its usefulness and importance, theory remains under-examined and under-appreciated within oral history. In dialogue with each other, the chapters of the Handbook will situate and make a case for theory as a crucial and productive component of oral history work, both within and beyond the academy. Across all stages of the oral history process, from conception to analysis and dissemination, theory is vital. To that end, the editors invite a wide range of contributions which centre theoretical frameworks, approaches, developments and provocations.

Theory is a live and dynamic process. As such, contributors to this volume are not expected to make definitive or 'final' pronouncements. Rather we encourage submissions which propose new and emerging concepts, actively engage with ongoing theoretical developments, and impact future practice. In doing so, the editors seek to stage work by an international range of authors, including but not limited to early career and established scholars, oral history practitioners, public historians, archivists and activists. This volume will be global in scope and the editors encourage submissions from a wide range of geographic contexts. We particularly encourage submissions from authors working in the geopolitical south and/or whose work foregrounds theories and questions of decolonisation and/or indigeneity.

We are seeking chapters of 8000 words. Authors are encouraged to submit abstracts of 250-300 words to the editors via ohtheoryhandbook@gmail.com along with a short biography by January 31st 2026. Authors are reminded that theory should form the core of the proposed chapters. We appreciate that case studies may feature but these should be used to evidence or inform the theoretical interventions at the hearts of chapters. The editors will respond with their decisions on submitted abstracts by the end of February 2026 and first draft chapters will be expected by the end of December 2026.

Below is an outline of suggested topics in this early stage of conception. However, we invite interested contributors to go beyond these prompts and expect that the completed book will be actively shaped by its contributors. The editors see this book as a collaborative endeavour and are open to suggestions. Please get in touch if you would like to discuss a potential idea.

Suggested topics:

Time

Time is everywhere in oral history, and the oral historian must often attempt to be in two places at once - the time of the interview and the time being recalled. There is also the imagined future to which we speak. In this sense, oral history is time travel. But, of course, we can only access the past through the prism of the present. Thus, time is also a prism we look through. This section theorises time and its impact on oral history work.

- Temporality and chronology in narrative construction
- The interview as porous temporal and physical space
- Beyond chronology
- The effects of time on re-use, and the role of the archive within that process
- Oral history - being in two places at once?
- Futures

Memory

A section dedicated to theorising memory is essential in any oral history theory collection. Here we give space to memory, as the intangible and provocative quicksilver we work with every day. This section continues the traditions of memory scholarship in the field, exploring individual, collective and cultural memory and their interconnected messiness, all of which continue to challenge and inspire in oral history research.

- Using and resisting cultural memory
- New approaches to studying and conceptualising memory (individual, collective, social, memoryscapes, etc).
- Between the individual and the collective: family oral history
- Fallible and failing memory

- Oral history in a post-truth era

Incorporating scientific knowledge

Oral history has always been a gregariously interdisciplinary field. In this section we embrace scientific advances from neurology to digital humanities to explore what they can do to enhance and inform our work. It is often the case that where scientific scholarship is used in oral history it is to purely practical ends, e.g. the 'how to' of information technologies. Crucially, this section takes a theoretical approach to scientific knowledge application to oral history.

- Utilising neurology research in oral history
- Digital world and its impact on a newly curated narrative
- The role of the digital humanities
- Theorising AI
- Online interviewing - theories of remote communication
- Science, social science and oral history (psychoanalysis, psychology, etc)

Analytical approaches

Of all the aspects of oral history work, the analysis of interviews has perhaps garnered the least critical and theoretical attention. Analysis of oral history material can often be ad hoc and ungrounded. This section tackles this gap, drawing on a range of interdisciplinary practices and approaches that speak to how we make sense of and bring robust analytical frameworks to our data.

- Theorising big data sets
- Literary analysis and oral history
- Narrative and discourse analysis
- Theories of interviewing within sociology, anthropology etc.
- Life writing, memoir and oral history

- Theorising translation

Emotion

Emotion is always in the room with us, and its effects can be profound. Every oral historian can recall a time when emotion exerted its powerful influence on an interview. Yet emotion has been under-theorised in oral history work. In this section we stage a long overdue discussion foregrounding emotion in our work, developing theoretical frameworks to understand and leverage its influence.

- Emotion and re-use
- Theorising negative affect
- Laughter and humour
- Bringing history of emotions theory to oral history
- Trauma

Intersubjectivity

Intersubjectivity has proven to be a productive theoretical concept to explore issues of power, agency, dis/connection and rapport, all key to the oral history encounter. This section continues and expands debates by pushing outward into the ‘edges’ of intersubjectivity as well as revisiting more familiar avenues through current discourses around identity politics.

- Insider/Outsider: Beyond binarized approaches, complicating the relationship
- Connecting with the interviewer in re-use
- The archive/archivist within the intersubjective dynamic
- I know who I am but who are you? The life course and career stage of the interviewer
- Power (complicating ‘elites’)

- Discomfort and obstruction
- Silence
- Working with transcripts

Narrative / narrating

Narrative is the thread we work with in oral history research. From interview to analysis to interpretation and presentation we seek to find, catch hold of, follow, weave and stitch the threads of story that bring meaning to events and experiences. This section seeks to advance discussions on narrative, pushing us to look at diverse manifestations and modes of narration.

- Epiphanic moments
- The perennial narrator: the impact of multiple interview experiences on interviewee narratives
- Narrating through the senses
- Theorising non-verbal oral histories
- Gender and narrative
- Oral history in translation

Space and Place

This section foregrounds the physicality of place and space, bringing theorised understandings of the places where oral history happens, and where it is employed. Such discussions have often been practical in nature, perhaps focusing on the 'how'. But here, as throughout this collection, we insist on the importance and value of theoretical approaches to underpin our work and further robust scholarship and practice.

- Pedagogical theories: Using oral history in schools / university classroom
- Utilising theory in community oral history

- Museum settings
- Non-human actors and places
- Theorising the archives
- Scales: local, national, global