

Carte Semiotiche 2023

Scene della nostalgia



la casa
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Carte Semiotiche
Annali 9

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Rivista Internazionale di Semiotica e Teoria dell'Immagine
Annali 9 - Giugno 2023

Scene della nostalgia

A cura di
Mario Panico

SCRITTI DI
BOERO, BUSI RIZZI, DE LUCA,
LOBACCARO, MORENO, PEZZINI, PILUSO, POLIDORO,
PONZO, PORTELLO, POZZATO

la casa
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Lucia Corrain

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a cura di
Mario Panico

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Scene della nostalgia

The Saint's Room: Museums and the Management of Nostalgia

Jenny Ponzio

1. Introduction

In recent decades, a growing number of exhibition spaces have been set up in countries with a substantial Catholic cultural background to maintain and communicate the memory of saints and blessed¹. These museums, generally owned and managed by religious institutions, orders or associations, vary greatly in terms of arrangement and size, from very small, simple museums dedicated to local figures to important poles celebrating famous personalities such as Padre Pio² and Don Bosco. These places can be considered a particular kind of the wide set of devices used by institutions and communities to build their own memory and identity³ by semiotizing their past through processes of selection, organization, elaboration and narrativization: in the case under consideration, collective memory is built around a founding and exemplary character, and his or her textualization takes place in a museal space.

While indexicality constitutes a pivotal feature for most kinds of museums, in the museums dedicated to saints this feature takes on a quite specific meaning and provides a foundation for constructing memory. In most cases, not only the objects displayed inside but also the museal space itself has an indexical relationship with the life or deeds of the saintly figure. Indeed, some of these museums are located in buildings hosting a religious order or charitable institution (such as a school, nursing home, etc.) founded by the saints⁴ themselves and thus bearing testimony to their remarkable endeavors. In many other cases, these museums are set up in areas where the saint lived: the indexical relationship in these places is particularly strong in that the sites become meaningful precisely because they bear the tangible traces of the saintly figure's life.

From an epistemological perspective, museums of saints are not only based on the value of *memory* understood as the systematization of the past in a narrative that fosters identification and socio-cultural cohesion⁵; at the same time, these museums also entail *historical* valorization, a feature they share with most museums devoted to characters and events of the past: the way in which the figure of the saint is narrated adheres to an ideal of historical fidelity and accuracy, thus also reinforcing the credibility and authoritativeness of the display. This preoccupation with historical accuracy is consistent with the epistemological values underlying museums as a format or genre (in other words, the choice

to establish a museum entails endorsing the epistemological and cultural values attributed to this format) and can be considered a facet of the wider phenomenon of Catholic culture and institutions embracing historical-critical methods in multiple areas, including matters of sainthood.⁶ In the discourse characterizing these museums, therefore, *memory* and *history* are closely connected to each other but also combined with a third kind of valorization more specifically associated with the field of religion: the character celebrated in the museum is not only a historical figure and pillar for the construction of community memory, but also the object of a devotional cult. The values of memory and history are thus combined with *sacredness*. In this sense, the places considered here have features in common not only with the museums, and more generally monuments and institutions, devoted to codifying history and memory, but also with sacred places such as churches and places commemorating the dead.

This study focuses precisely on museums created from the living spaces of saints. The musealization of these spaces entails a peculiar combination of the values of memory, history and sacredness, figurativized in peculiar enunciative strategies and narrative and pathemic structures. In particular, I will show how these museums semiotize the pathemic configuration of *nostalgia*, a feature they share with other kinds of museums but which they discursivize in a specific way.

According to Floch (1996), the syntagmatic organization of museums entails an aspectualization of the visit that is based on a rhythm alternating between moments of leisure and relaxation and moments of intensity and tension. In museums made from the living places of saints, there is one moment that typically constitutes a “punctum” (cf. Barthes 1980) in visitors’ experiences, engaging them deeply and especially at the emotional level: viewing *the saint’s room*. In the following argument, I will try to point out the main semiotic dynamics surrounding the musealization of these personal rooms and explaining their strong appeal. The analysis will take into consideration a sample of three case studies located in Turin, a city famous for its “social saints”, namely saints dedicated to charity work helping the poverty-stricken and emarginated segments of industrial society. The memory of some of these saintly figures is maintained in specific museums, and here I will focus on those devoted to saint Giovanni Bosco, blessed Francesco Faà di Bruno, and saint Giuseppe Murialdo.

2. *The Saint’s Room*

2.1. *The Context*

All the museums considered here are located in the places where the saintly figures both lived and founded their charity institutions: “Museo Casa Don Bosco” is set up in the house where the saint lived and founded the first Salesian oratory⁷, nowadays a large hub, adjacent to the Salesian sanctuary of the Consolata, hosting conference rooms as well as a guest house, bookshop, etc.; “Museo Faà di Bruno” is part of a complex containing several institutions, including a school, retirement home, and church⁸; and “Museo Murialdo” is hosted in a complex called “Artigianelli 150” that still offers a professional school, residence hall, etc.⁹.

Locating the museal spaces devoted to the saint’s life inside a larger, multi-functional complex generates a particular meaning effect in that it relates the lives of saintly figures to the tangible evidence of their works and their surviving heritage.

The animated character of the surrounding environment contrasts with the fixity of the museal space, a fixity stemming from the fact that these museums narrate lives inevitably belonging to the past. In this context, the museum commemorating the saintly founder constitutes a different, enclosed space, especially in the case of the two smaller museums devoted to Faà di Bruno and Murialdo. The type of fiduciary contract that the museal discourse proposes to the visitor is similar in all the cases considered here: as mentioned above, the museum is a separate place but placed inside a complex clearly characterized by a social and religious significance. The language adopted by the museum respects the cultural codes of historical fidelity and collective memory underlying the communities founded by the saintly figures. It also conveys a certain religious or sacred value, underlined for instance by the attention these museums devote to the canonization of their saints, in particular through the iconography typical of this genre (namely paintings characterized by stereotyped features emphasizing the figure's holiness and sacredness)¹⁰. While the relationship between the museum and its surrounding space can be read in terms of the Greimasian opposition englobing-englobed (cf. Greimas 1984), the internal organization of the space tends to follow a different pattern. In the case of the Murialdo museum, the visit follows a linear itinerary that retraces, in the space, the progressive phases of the saint's life from his infancy to his education and work inside the Church. His room is placed in an intermediate position: it is preceded by the narration of his youth and display of a painting created for his beatification, and is followed by a section devoted more specifically to describing the charity institutions he founded and their socio-historical context. At the end, a set of objects (including, for instance, a sarcophagus and painting) are devoted to illustrating the elements surrounding his death and canonization. The museums of Don Bosco and Faà di Bruno are less linear in their spatial and diachronic organization. In the first, the visit spans different floors with the more strictly biographical section located on the second floor. Here, visitors find a gallery devoted to other saintly figures (especially but not exclusively connected to Don Bosco, the social saints and the Salesian order), a space devoted to the canonization of Don Bosco (displaying, for instance, a painting, ark and set of sacred paraments made for the occasion), the chapel, and the saint's room, in this case actually two spaces: a first room is presented as the saint's bedroom, while a second space, adjacent to the first, is presented as the room in which the saint died. Due to the architectural structure of the building, these spaces are not organized along a single linear axis, but nevertheless constitute distinct narrative units. Similarly, the Faà di Bruno museum begins with an introductory section featuring panels summarizing the life of the blessed and a display showcasing some personal objects. Next is a section containing scientific and technical instruments used by the blessed, a brilliant mathematician with numerous scientific and cultural interests. Visitors can then access the saint's lodgings, with a small parlor, living room, bedroom and small room for prayer, followed by a further room with additional personal objects. The rooms are arranged in a circular pattern.

2.2 *Accessing the Saint's Room(s)*

In all of the cases, the saint's personal room or rooms constitute a further inner level, the access to which is marked in relation to the general context of the museum. Accessing the private, intimate life space of the saint presents a contrast between

the rest of the space of the museum, with its public, historical and memorial character, and the intimacy of a private home. The indexical relationship with the saintly figure is reinforced in this inner space, full of references to his or her bodily and daily life evoked by humble everyday objects such as eyeglasses, tools for writing or personal care, and furniture and accessories such as armchairs and beds that the saint used over a lengthy period of time. For visitors, entering this space entails a sense of more accentuated closeness with the saint, the experiencing of entering into an intimate sphere normally reserved for very close friends and relatives. This post-mortem reversal of the rules of proxemics and of the distinction between public and private has the effect of eliciting intense pathemic engagement.

On one hand, the particularly strong appeal of the saint's personal room can be explained in light of the well-known idea of authenticity evoked in general by indexical signs (as a result of which finding oneself in the personal space of an important historical and religious character, kept exactly as it was when he or she occupied it, is striking for visitors)¹¹. At the same time, this appeal also stems from a specific feature of the religious culture under consideration. Indeed, the importance attributed to a religious person's own cell is linked to a religious imaginary that creates a parallelism between the interior, spiritual space of the soul and the exterior space of the room in which spiritual experience takes place (cf. Ponzo 2023; Leone 2013): the material space of the cell or room is believed to bear traces of the spiritual quality of the exceptional individuals who inhabited it, thus rendering it somehow "sanctified". This concept is figuratively represented in the idea of osmogenesis, for instance: in the Catholic tradition, osmogenesis is a kind of charisma consisting in the involuntary capacity of saints to spread celestial perfumes around them. In some cases, according to this tradition, the objects that they touched, or the places where they found themselves or lived, carry the perceivable traces of these perfumes: this idea of osmogenesis therefore provides a figurativized representation of an implicit parallelism between the spiritual quality of the saint and his or her capacity to leave remnants of sacredness on surrounding objects and environments¹².

A further element to be considered to fully understand the connotations of the saint's room is a certain idea of prayer based on concentration and inner withdrawal. Many mystics claim that it is fundamental for them to have a room of their own to detach from the external world and reach spiritual concentration, in particular in the first stages of their ascetic path. Catherine of Siena, for instance, repeatedly underlined the importance – especially for religious people – of cultivating their spirit in their own cell. She constructed a parallel, quite often cited in her writings, between this detached physical space and what she called "the inner cell", an expression showing that the spatial configuration of the religious person's experience influences the spiritual practice to such an extent that the external space of the cell shapes the way the "inner cell" of the soul is imagined and described¹³. This imagery connected to the cell suggests that the powerful impact of visiting a saint's room can also be explained in light of this relationship – both indexical and iconic – that seems to allude to a correspondence between the intimate life space of the exterior cell and the quality of the saintly figure's soul, as these religious figures are believed to have taken the most important steps of their spiritual paths in these rooms. In all the museums examined here, the room's importance as a space for concentration

and prayer is evoked by the presence of prayer objects, particularly kneeling-stools, and indeed such objects are featured in all of these three cases. The visitor's experience of the saint's room is regulated according to different display strategies based on different degrees of accessibility. It is possible to identify three main degrees. The one granting the greatest intensity of experience is exemplified by the Murialdo and Faà di Bruno museums, where visitors can enter the room and there are no barriers between them and the majority of objects displayed. While some barriers protect individual objects (e.g. manuscripts in Murialdo's room, a carpet in Faà di Bruno's room), many objects more closely evoking the bodily presence of the saint are not protected, and therefore can be viewed at a very close range, potentially even touched, by visitors. A second level, granting significant visibility but a less direct experience, characterizes the rooms that are actually accessible but in which the visitor's movements are confined to a corridor delimited by barriers, without being able to move throughout the room¹⁴. A third level, further limiting the experience of the room, consists in visitors being allowed to view the room from outside while standing at the threshold framed by protective glass. This third level characterizes the room of saint Giovanni Bosco, which appears fully furnished. The adjacent room, the one in which he died, is instead accessible but contains fewer objects. The distinction between the two rooms, and in particular of the function of the second one, is clearly explained by the panels placed just outside: the first is described as "The chamber of Don Bosco" in which he lived and worked for 27 years; the second is described as his "Death chamber", i.e. the room he used for a very short period during the last stage of his illness. The mortuary component of this second room is accentuated by the fact that the few objects displayed there include black priestly clothes that belonged to the saint arranged in a floor-to-ceiling glass showcase and composed horizontally, as if the person wearing them had vanished, leaving this clothing arranged as it had been on his body. The panel explains «In the place where the death bed was situated, presently placed in the adjoining room, in its original position, a precious relic has been installed. It is a display case with the original garments of the Saint...».

2.3 Looking With the Saints' Eyes

These different degrees of accessibility are a fundamental part of the enunciative strategy adopted by the museums¹⁵. When the saint's room can only be observed from outside, through protective glass, the museum is applying an objectifying mode: in this case, the visitor is called on to play the role of witness and is relegated to a space that is heterotopic with regard to the topical space of the bedroom. In contrast, the museum can also construct the visitors' point of view so as to position them in correspondence with the saint's gaze: in these cases, the visitors see what the saint saw in his daily life. The best example of this kind of enunciative strategy is provided by the Faà di Bruno museum: in his bedroom and the adjacent small prayer room, the visitors can not only access his personal space without barriers but can also position their face and eyes on the several peepholes that allowed the blessed to hear and see what was happening in the church just below his room while remaining himself unseen. When visitors access the saint's room, therefore, they also take on his point of view

as if they *embodied* for a time the saint himself while seeing and moving inside his personal space. In this case, the museum's enunciational stance adopts an enunciative strategy comparable to cinematographic subjective framing. From this perspective, therefore, it is possible to distinguish between two enunciational choices used by the museums of saints: one consists in positioning the visitor as a witness according to an objectivizing strategy, the other in constructing an empathic and "embodied" subject based on a subjectivizing strategy. Of course, these two strategies do not fully exclude each other, and can be combined in different ways and to various degrees in each museum. The fact that visitors are sometimes incorporated into the enunciation as if they embodied the saint and sometimes in the role of witnesses is a key factor to explain the pathemic effect achieved by these museums. In particular, these strategies influence the effect of experiencing something sacred which once animated the musealized space and the traces of which can still be perceived thanks to the museal enunciation: the quest for these traces, the desire to experience this absent presence, is the narrative program underlying the visitors' itinerary, and this basic narrative structure is undoubtedly connected to the pathemic configuration of *nostalgia*, as I will argue in the next section.

3. Museums, Nostalgia, and Saints

3.1 Life and Death

The museal spaces devoted to the places inhabited by saints articulate, in a dynamic and complex way, the opposition between these figures' lives and their deaths. The object most effectively symbolizing this dynamic is arguably the bed: the bed is one of the most frequently used objects in daily life, but it is also connected to the idea of death, the deathbed. This connection with death is also another reason for these museums' powerful pathemic impact, in particular when visiting the saintly figures' personal rooms: these rooms represent not only the fulcrum of the saintly figure's spiritual life, a vivid testament to their bodily and everyday life, but also the place in which the capital event of their death took place. As Violi observes:

There seems to be a close and to some extent mysterious relationship between death and the specific place where it occurs, something that seems to endow that space forever with a surplus of meaning, a special evocative and symbolic power. People return to that place, it becomes a destination for pilgrimage and devotion, they mark it to distinguish it from all others, as frequently seen along our roads where fatal accidents have occurred and where people continue to lay flowers or small votive objects (Violi 2014: 88).

As a consequence, these museums employ a series of strategies to emphasize this relationship with death. The most multi-faceted strategy is undoubtedly the one used by the Don Bosco museum, which splits – or rather doubles – the space of the room in order to create a separation between the room of the saint's life and that of his death, endowed with opposite connotations, established explicitly by the explanatory material, and organized on the basis of different strategies of accessibility. Another strategy employed by the three museums investigated here is the display of mortuary photographs. In the case of Don Bosco and Faà di Bruno, these pictures are hung not in the room itself, but in its immediate proximity. In

both cases, the corpse is photographed in a seated position rather than lying in bed. Murialdo is instead pictured in his bed, and the image is positioned on the wall close to the bed itself: the indexical relationship with the place is strongly emphasized, since the furniture and accessories visitors see around them are exactly the same ones that they see in the mortuary photograph. In the same way, the picture of Faà di Bruno is positioned in the living room and the environment depicted in it is clearly the same as the one surrounding the visitors (e.g. it shows the same crucifix, bookshelves, curtains, etc.): obviously, this evidence of the fact that visitors find themselves in the very place where the saint died is a powerful trigger for their pathemic reaction to the musealized space.

3.2 *Museums and Nostalgia*

According to Giovanni De Luna (2011: 101), «the idea of a museum often hides a loss, [it] exorcises an absence». Especially in recent decades, as economic and social structures and infrastructures change, the remains of these structures are promptly musealized: «The peasant world has disappeared, here are dozens of museums [...]; the large industrial plants of Fordist cities disfigure the urban fabric with their rubble, [and] immediately a way is found to render them genteel by turning them into museums» (De Luna 2011: 101-102). De Luna interprets this phenomenon in terms of the mercification of culture, but what is more interesting from the perspective adopted here is that his observation clearly points to a concept that we can translate as follows: museums are often created due to a *nostalgic drive*¹⁶. According to Greimas (1986), nostalgia is the pathemic configuration in which subjects are detached from their objects of value, as this latter is far away and unreachable in space or, as in the cases examined here, in time. In other words, several kinds of museums can be described as strategic cultural devices for managing the nostalgia associated with people, objects or events belonging to a mythologized past. In our case, the age of industrialization and the “social saints” large-scale charity work is over, but there is a community which continues to maintain an affective memory of this past age. This nostalgic bond is kept alive through the museification of key places. Such museums seek to “presentify” the past, to give visitors the illusion of entering into a world where time is frozen and they can still experience the past: this doubled isotopy (Greimas 1986: 348 refers to «a particular débrayage that projects the subject towards an elsewhere [...] thus doubling his pathemic itinerary with an imaginary isotopy»), this spatial-temporal splitting of the subject, is a pivotal characteristic of nostalgia defined as the ability to be both present and absent (cf. Jankélévitch 1974).

3.3 *Museums, Nostalgia and Grief*

Our case studies have a further specific trait with respect to the examples proposed by De Luna (2011): the museums considered here commemorate not only an epoch or social phenomenon (such as peasant culture or industrial development), but are also connected to an individual figure, that is, they commemorate a dead person. In this case, therefore, *nostalgia* takes on a specific meaning connected to the processing of grief. Grief and nostalgia present quite similar pathemic configurations if we consider that, in the first case, the unreachable object of value is actually *a person* who was lost due to death. As De Masi (2002: 125) observes, «mourn-

ing for the loss of a loved one and mourning for being separated from love objects, associated with the thought of death, do not appear to be easily separable». The Freudian approach likewise seems to suggest these two concepts overlap, if grief can be defined as «the reaction to the loss of a beloved person or of an abstraction which took her place, such as the homeland or an ideal» (cf. Bruguera 2018). From this perspective, it may be less surprising to find that museums of the saints have some traits in common with sites of trauma and museums commemorating the victims of genocides and dictatorships, such as those analyzed by Patrizia Violi (2014). The main similarities are listed in Table 1.

Indexicality based on spatial contiguity	This is a constitutive element for both kinds of museums, the basic reason for their existence (Violi 2014: 87, 89) to such an extent that the space itself is more important than the objects collected there.
Reactualization and presentification of the past	In the museal space, visitors are given the impression of being immersed in the past-made-present.
Preeminence of the pathemic component over the epistemological one	Both kinds of museums are places generally visited not to “acquire knowledge” but rather to “feel” and experience (Violi 2014: 89, 116, 119-120). From this perspective, the visit resembles a pilgrimage (Violi 2014: 120).
Sacral value	Both kinds of museums «are neither real museums, nor cemeteries or places for honoring the dead, nor monuments; they are instead all these things at the same time, and perhaps even something more» (Violi 2014: 106; 121; 136).
Valorization of the “authenticity” of the place	This valorization is expressed, for instance, by emphasizing the explicative apparatus regarding spatial continuity with the past events celebrated in the museums and the conservation of the original structure and appearance of the spaces (Violi 2014: 112).
Displaying personal objects	These objects belonging to the intimate sphere evoke the individuality of the person who owned and used them. As Violi (2014: 132-133) observes: «...the objects carry, inscribed within them, the powerful memory of the individuality that possessed, used, and touched them. An inescapable metonymic relationship binds the thing to the person, or rather to his or her memory, and the object becomes the conduit for re-actualizing what is no longer there, for making an absence present. [...] These are always personal objects relating to a private sphere of existence, often even intimate [...] and, as such, destined to be relegated to the realm of private invisibility. Their exhibition in the museum reverses the public/private relationship that characterized them in their original function, relocating them within a public sphere par excellence, the museum, and removing them from the regime of non-visibility associated with their use.»

Displaying portraits of the dead	As with the display of intimate personal objects, this practice can be perceived as marked with regard to mainstream culture in which access to such testimonial objects (the exhibition of dead bodies and related pictures) is delimited by precise cultural borders.
Narrative structure	These museums are organized so as to narrate the story of the people who lived, suffered or died in those places, so that these sites can be defined as «spatial narrations of the memory» (Violi 2014: 115).
Free entrance	Being able to enter the museums for free casts the visit as a gift from an institutional Sender while also adding pedagogical and moral connotations to the experience (Violi 2014: 120).

Table 1. Similarities between sites and museums of trauma and museums of saints

The meaning effect characterizing these museums is achieved by systematically valorizing the personal objects: not only does the museal enunciation save these objects from being lost to memory or damaged but, by placing them in a specific context and building around them a complex paratextual apparatus (composed for instance of the explicative panels and discourse offered by the guide, who can be considered an informant actant), they semiotize these objects as indexes metonymically connected to the figures being commemorated. However, the pivotal common point among these kinds of museums or sites – seeing as they are very different in other aspects – is probably their relationship with death. In the case of saints, of course, the death in question is individual and not wholesale, but in both cases it becomes the key event for defining the identity of a group, and remembering this event in a museal space can be interpreted as processing the associated grief. The most important difference between museums devoted to traumatic events and those devoted to saints, however, lies in their subjacent actantial structure: in the first case, the dead are presented as victims and their death as a senseless and violent event, one that represents a break with time and meaning and risks paralyzing the host culture, which defines itself in negative terms, i.e. in contrast with the violence and ideology leading to the victims’ death. In the second case, the dead are active protagonists and their death is incorporated into a teleological culture which posits it as the starting point for positive progress on the part of the community. In this sense, the museums of saints actively contribute to creating a founding mythology, i.e. a mythologization of the origin of the community itself. As such, they can be seen as similar to the museums and other celebrative devices devoted to celebrating the origins of institutions such as nation-states.

4. Conclusion

A “nostalgic” component is implicit in the cult of saints at a fundamental level. Indeed, saints are only recognized as such by the Church after their death: the cults venerating them are basically “retrospective” and, even though such devotion entails the creation of a spiritual relationship, there is a strong attachment in Catho-

lic culture to all the various indexical signs that give the faithful the impression of maintaining a bodily connection with the venerated figures. As this case study shows, this kind of connection can be seen not only in relation to relics, carefully hidden and yet displayed by reliquaries (cf. Leone 2014), but also for saints' rooms or cells, likewise made experienceable in museal spaces according to varying criteria. The pathemic configuration at work in the museums of saints, the Senders of which are the ecclesiastic institutions and/or communities that assert an affective and ideological bond with these figures, is similar to the pathemic configuration characterizing the "processing of grief". It diverges in some ways from standard definitions of mourning as a way to cope with a definitive loss, however, given factors such as the teleological nature of Catholic culture as well as the idea that it is possible to create and cultivate a spiritual relationship with certain dead people, such as the saints, believed to act as active Helpers even after their death. The musealization of saints' houses and rooms can surely be interpreted as an ever-more important facet of the process of constructing and transmitting the memory of them. These museums aim to provide a testament that is both historical and religious, and have to grapple with the potential clash – typical of Catholic culture – between the need to offer signs of the saints' bodily lives and the need to prioritize spirituality over materiality (cf. Leone 2014). These museums actively contribute to creating or reinforcing a pathemic bond with the saints by presentifying and materializing their absence. From this perspective, they can be considered a specific case of museums based on a nostalgic drive, and indeed they are based on a set of semiotic strategies which regulate (both igniting and containing) the community's sense of loss and desire for the saintly figure. As the analysis has shown, these strategies include different levels of accessibility to the most intimate life space of the saintly figures, the exhibition of their mortuary pictures and personal objects, striking a balance between historical information and commemoration and sanctification through celebrative iconography, emphasizing the authenticity of the objects on display, and the spatial organization of the personal spaces. The kind of nostalgia cultivated by these museums is a collective one related to the origins and beliefs of a community and the creation of an encounter that is not experienced directly but rather evoked and imagined through the museal device itself. This pathemic configuration should not be interpreted exclusively as an instance of the mercification of culture, however. This latter drive seeks to provide the public with a highly emotionally engaging experience while at the same time fueling the "market of nostalgia", a market consisting in the chance to buy access to «a possible world that multiplies the extension of biological time» (cf. Leone 2015: 10). In other words, the aim here is not only to immerse visitors in a particular atmosphere consisting in the reconstruction of a past life and of the saint's lingering presence in his or her home. What is at stake is not only emotion and sensation, but also a project of imagining the future beginning from the past itself. Indeed, as mentioned above, these museums are located inside complexes where "life goes on". The memory built and preserved in these museal spaces, surrounded by everyday activity, thus plays another important function. As Affuso insightfully notes, this function is to nourish nostalgia as a distanced place from which to imagine a possible future; in other words, to guide concrete action setting off from a certain representation of the past so as to strive for a certain future based on the same positive values:

Nostalgia is therefore about a desire; not exactly the desire for something to return, but rather to return to something, from the very beginning, to find oneself again at the point where a certain experience was commencing. It is the desire to re-start time, the setting-out, the premises and promises but also the alternatives. [...] nostalgia is linked to the future, partly because it serves to allay fear about the inexorability of time, partly because it helps us to imagine how a given past might have a different future. (Affuso 2012: 119)

The kind of nostalgia elicited by these museums, therefore, is not merely a dream of an idealized past in which we might temporarily lose ourselves. It is a more constructive kind of nostalgia in that it provides the basis for imagining a possible future. This impulse is consistent with Catholic culture, in which saints are imagined not only as ghosts haunting churches and museums but as exemplary figures meant to provide the stimulus for further progress on the part of the community of believers. Umberto Eco (2007: 13) dreamt of a museum providing «a journey that leads me (as when I go to Amsterdam to view a single painting by Saenredam, already knowing its history and the environment in which it was created) to really make my way ‘inside’ a specific artwork». The museums of saints are not particularly innovative in their display strategies, for instance in the way they use architectural and technological elements: in this sense, they really cannot be considered representative of the kind of “new museums” studied, for instance, by Pezzini (2011). However, they can be considered museums “of the third millennium” (Eco 2007: 14) in that their entire organization is designed to highlight a single work, assuming that life and work can coincide – in our case, the very life of an exceptional and exemplary figure who embodies a set of historical, memorial and sacred values.

To conclude, the analysis proposed here shows that museums of saints are organized according to enunciative strategies which elicit the pathemic effect of nostalgia; however, these semiotic dynamics only work thanks to an impulse we could define as *affection*. Indeed, the pathemic effect of these museums is only achieved because visitors are already familiar with the saint (as in the case of famous saints such as Don Bosco) or at least because, at the beginning of the visit, the museum itself introduces visitors to the figure (as in the case of saints and blessed venerated especially in local, more circumscribed communities, such as Murialdo and Faà di Bruno). Visitors thus proceed along an itinerary leading them to learn or remember anecdotes about the saints’ lives and deeds, generating not only knowledge but also feelings of admiration and sympathy as well as affection. This aspect is even more central if we consider that many visitors are Catholic believers who share the values embodied by the saints. As a consequence, all of these museums presuppose or construct an observer with a strong intentional relationship to the saint; an observer, that is, who *cares about* the saint. Without this strong initial motivation, viewers would not see “the bed of the saint”, for instance, but rather “just a bed”. They would find objects – such as Faà di Bruno’s scientific and technical tools – that are potentially interesting and curious in themselves, but not endowed with a particular meaning by virtue of having belonged to the saintly figure. The indexical quality and related nostalgic pathemic configuration of these objects therefore depend on the enunciative strategy of the museum and this strategy, in turn, is only effective as long as it first creates an affective bond between the visitor and the saint.

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² For an analysis of Padre Pio's museum and church, cf. Pezzini (2011: 148-167).

³ Regarding the notions of "memory" and "history", cf. Assmann (2008).

⁴ In this and other instances, I use the term "saint" in a generic way to include not only canonized saints, but also other saintly figures for whom canonization causes have been launched.

⁵ In this case as well I refer to the distinction between "memory" and "history" articulated in Assmann (2008), but also to the idea of "imagined community" proposed by Anderson (1983).

⁶ For instance, canonization cause procedures require that, especially for saints who lived in the past, an historical-critical study be carried out as part of evaluating the individual's suitedness to be proclaimed a saint. Historiographic concerns also inform the hagiographic genre in its modern form; moreover, critical-historical study of the sources has led the Church to eliminate traditional cults in cases where there is not sufficient historical evidence of the allegedly saintly life and deeds (cf. Marino 2018: 192-196).

⁷ A description of the history of the museum and the life of the saint, as well as a virtual tour, are available on the museum's website: <https://museocasadonbosco.org/>.

⁸ <http://www.museofaadiBruno.it/>.

⁹ <http://artigianelli150.it/ala-palestro/museo-murialdo/>.

¹⁰ These features include the nimbus and abundant light surrounding the saintly figure, a benevolent facial expression, and references to their good deeds and endeavors as well as the miracles granted to the faithful through their intercession, etc. Even though, to my knowledge, a semiotic study specifically devoted to the iconography made for canonization phases has yet to be carried out, see Dondero (2007) regarding the stereotyped features of sacred iconography in general.

¹¹ Regarding this effect of authenticity connected to indexes, cf. Violi (2014: 89-103).

¹² For a discussion of osmogenesis, cf. Ponzo (2020).

¹³ Regarding this topic, cf. Ponzo (2023).

¹⁴ This is the case, for instance, of saint John Paul II's living room in Varsaw, I thank Armando Fumagalli for sharing with me a picture of that room.

¹⁵ I wish to heartfully thank Francesco Galofaro, who visited the museums under consideration with me, for the fruitful dialogue which led to the formulation of the arguments presented in this section.

¹⁶ For a further discussion of the relationship between tourism and nostalgia, cf. Frow (1991).

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Nostalgiche ironie in *Midnight in Paris* di Woody Allen

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Keywords: storia delle passioni; nostalgia mediale; vintage; retromania; Woody Allen

Anche le passioni subiscono o sono protagoniste a vario titolo delle mode: è il caso della nostalgia, chiamata anche retromania o passione vintage, che da molti anni è al centro del sentire comune, alimentata dai media in varie forme. Dopo un rapido excursus nella storia culturale, l'articolo si sofferma un celebre film di Woody Allen, *Midnight in Paris*, costruito appunto come un divertente caso di "nostalgia mediale". A partire da un gioco di rimandi testuali che lo caratterizzano come un meta-discorso sulla nostalgia, il film ne propone una versione "produttiva": di un rivolgersi al passato, cioè, non come disincanto e ripiego intimista, ma come necessario trampolino, sia pur ironico, per una più euforica riconversione esistenziale.

Nostalgie seriali: Il fantastico scenario della Fantastica signora Maisel

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Keywords: nostalgia; vintage; serialità televisiva; umorismo ebraico; semiotica della cultura

In questo contributo sarà analizzata la serie *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel* (*La fantastica signora Maisel*), scritta e diretta da Amy Sherman-Palladino, e ambientata a cavallo fra gli anni Cinquanta e gli anni Sessanta del secolo scorso. Dopo una rapida presentazione dei protagonisti e delle principali linee narrative (par. 1), si passerà a considerare un'ambiguità di base, quella fra ambientazione nel passato e stili espressivi contemporanei, che ascrive questo prodotto al cosiddetto *vintage mood* (par. 2). Il par. 3 sarà dedicato all'analisi di alcuni aspetti strutturali della serie, fra cui il valore profondo/auto-realizzazione della donna/, ancora così attuale; nonché la costruzione degli attori, delle atmosfere, delle passioni, degli stili visivi e dei dialoghi. Il par. 4 verte sul ruolo della comicità, e in particolare sul doppio registro della comicità d'epoca (le performance di Miriam come *stand-up comedian*) e comicità da *sit com* creata dai personaggi della serie nelle loro relazioni reciproche "reali". L'argomento è approfondito nel par. 5 in cui si considera l'appartenenza di tutti i protagonisti alla comunità ebraica. L'intera serie ruota attorno a una forma di "lateralismo culturale" rispetto alla maggioranza WASP nella New York dell'epoca, in particolare l'umorismo ebraico funziona come un "frullatore" di valori e una continua messa in discussione delle interpretazioni. Infine, nel conclusivo par. 6, si suggerisce che l'effetto-nostalgia prodotto dalla serie sia legato soprattutto all'immersione dello spettatore in un mondo-scenario dalla coerenza perfetta. La moda, la scenografia, e tutti gli aspetti concreti di questo mondo non sono affatto accessori ma diventano "attori", protagonisti a pieno titolo accanto ai protagonisti umani. Si sospende felicemente la credenza circa un'esistenza effettiva, nel passato, di questo fantastico scenario e se ne fruisce come in un'esperienza di realtà estesa.

Da Top Gun a Top Gun: Maverick: Intertestualità e ipertestualità al servizio della nostalgia Piero Polidoro (Università LUMSA di Roma – p.polidoro@lumsa.it)

Keywords: semiotica; cinema; audiovisivo; intertestualità; nostalgia; narrazione

Top Gun (USA 1986, regia di Tony Scott) è stato uno dei film più iconici degli anni Ottanta del secolo scorso e ancora oggi ha numerosi fan. Nel 2022, dopo ben trentasei anni e molti rinvii, è arrivato finalmente nelle sale cinematografiche il suo *sequel*, *Top Gun: Maverick* (USA 2022, regia di Joseph Kosinski). In questo articolo verrà analizzato il modo in cui il nuovo film è riuscito a proporre una storia originale e – al tempo stesso – a recuperare il patrimonio nostalgico rappresentato dal film del 1986. Per farlo, verranno innanzitutto messe in evidenza le differenze narrative fra i due film. Successivamente, usando i concetti messi a punto da Gérard Genette, verranno identificati i meccanismi intertestuali e ipertestuali che collegano *Top Gun: Maverick* a *Top Gun*, distinguendoli in tre categorie: 1) citazioni e allusioni, 2) riferimenti ipertestuali senza trasformazioni narrative, 3) riferimenti ipertestuali con trasformazioni narrative. Con diversi gradi e a diversi livelli, questi tre tipi di meccanismi permettono al film del 2022 di recuperare in funzione nostalgica quello del 1986, riuscendo però anche a sviluppare una trama e strutture narrative autonome.

Come d'incanto: Il nostalgico ritorno del futuro negli immaginari premediati

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Keywords: premediazione; futuro; feticismo; nostalgia; incanto

Gli immaginari sul futuro che popolano il panorama mediale contemporaneo spesso disegnano scenari distopici e disorientanti, suscitando nello spettatore un certo senso di nostalgia per un tempo passato o per ciò che rimane del presente prima dell'apocalisse incombente. La strategia nostalgica si gioca proprio nella relazione, spesso di sovrapposizione, tra questi piani temporali e mediali, che mettono in comunicazione la dimensione dell'immaginario futuro con quella dello spettatore nel momento della visione. Media e tecnologie sono protagonisti di molti universi narrativi distopici, dove spesso sono tematizzati e raffigurati come elementi negativi: strumenti diventati fine e scopo, colpevoli di avere sterilizzato il mondo reale e appiattito l'immaginario; protesi che hanno progressivamente anestetizzato corpo e mente dell'essere umano, narcotizzandone la presa estetica e significativa sulla realtà, la capacità di dare e creare senso (cfr. Montani 2014).

Tuttavia, il merito di questi immaginari premediati (cfr. Grusin 2010; Demaria e Piluso 2020) è quello di offrire allo spettatore una via di fuga, verso una nuova spirale riflessiva. La nostalgia del passato viene proiettata sugli stessi oggetti mediali e tecnologici che ne hanno sciolto l'incanto. Media e tecnologie sembrano recuperare la propria aura – si fanno oggetti museali, di valore nostalgico a cui potersi "finalmente" ricongiungere. Lo spettatore gode di questi beni in maniera feticistica: non si tratta di superare l'alienazione, del rivedere se stessi nell'immagine che questi oggetti riflettono, ma piuttosto di perdersi nello spettacolo di un'immagine che si riverbera lungo la superficie dello schermo, di rimanere incantati di fronte alla perfezione operativa e alla chiusura riflessiva di una realtà troppo oggettivata per venire assoggettata.

Non si tratta del mito di Prometeo e dell'origine della civiltà umana, ma piuttosto di quello di Narciso (cfr. McLuhan 1967), nella sua interpretazione più apocalittica – e come ogni mito, si tratta di ideologia. Attraverso l'analisi di alcuni immaginari mediali sul futuro, in particolare il film d'animazione *Wall-e* e la serie *Love, Death + Robot*, l'obiettivo di questo contributo sarà di indagare le logiche narrative, mediali e soprattutto visive/figurative che ne sostengono la mitologia. Il tema della nostalgia sarà oggetto e strumento di indagine privilegiato: vettore prezioso per comprendere la relazione tra i testi in esame e il loro senso, tra immagini e immaginario.

La nostalgie au futur: Autour de La vie des objets de Mohamed El Khatib

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Keywords: sémioesthétique; nostalgie; affiches; objets; Charles Sanders Peirce

Dans cette contribution, nous souhaitons examiner la complexité du dispositif mémoriel mis en place par le metteur en scène Mohamed El Khatib dans *La vie des objets* (2021), en collaboration avec la photographe Yohanne Lamoulère, qui a été exposée au Maif Social Club (Paris).

L'intérêt de cette création vis-à-vis des relations entre nostalgie, mémoire et objets est double.

D'un côté, le "visible" se rend en quelque sorte "tangibile" par la spécificité des objets "représentés" ou, mieux, imprimés sur les affiches composant l'exposition. Ce sont des objets ordinaires qui sont associés à des récits de vie issus de moments et milieux fragiles – personnes en situation de marginalité sociale, migrations, etc. De ce point de vue, la sémiose mémorielle est directement inscrite sur le support *matériel et formel* (les affiches), et active des processus d'investissement somatique et des dynamiques de traduction intersémiotique entre les objets et les textes.

De l'autre côté, le caractère reproductible et sériel des affiches, ainsi que l'objet-affiche en tant que tel, semblent engendrer une dynamique seconde d'appel à la mémoire chez les visiteurs. Ils pouvaient emporter avec eux les affiches-objets de leur choix. Ainsi, ils deviennent eux-mêmes des œuvres d'une mémoire autre, seconde, réflexive par rapport aux témoignages et aux objets imprimés, en se posant à la fois comme vestiges d'un temps double (le vécu affiché et celui du visiteur), et antidote à une nostalgie à venir (le conflit entre trace et oubli, la promesse de mémoire déléguée aux visiteurs).

En d'autres termes, les affiches et les objets de cette création semblent réaliser une véritable extériorisation du vécu nostalgique, individuel et collectif. Dans ce sens, la mise en relation de la "nostalgie" avec l'"Eingedenken" d'Ernst Bloch tel qu'il est repris par Walter Benjamin – ainsi que les traductions de ce terme, "souvenance" ou "immémoration" –, nous permettra de dégager le potentiel de futur inscrit dans les traces du passé.

Effetto di passato: Strategie cognitive ed estetiche della nostalgia nel fumetto contemporaneo

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Keywords: fumetti; nostalgia; narratologia; semiotica visiva; archeologia dei media

Lo scopo di questo articolo consiste nell'analizzare i meccanismi nostalgici presenti nel fumetto contemporaneo, identificando le caratteristiche tematiche, stilistiche e strutturali che concorrono a generare un effetto nostalgico di concerto con l'interattività e le lacune che caratterizzano la narrazione a fumetti. Concentrandosi sugli aspetti propri del medium del fumetto, il contributo evidenzia nondimeno procedimenti ed effetti di senso comuni ad altri media. Nello specifico, l'articolo individua nell'esperienza nostalgica una serie di tensioni, che vengono rappresentate tematicamente attraverso motivi legati a momenti, luoghi, oggetti ed esperienze sensoriali in grado di creare un effetto nostalgico (che in alcuni casi viene definito "effetto di passato"). Si analizzano, inoltre, le strategie stilistiche sottese all'estetica nostalgica, considerando in particolare il ruolo della grafiazione e del colore, e la loro connessione con la materialità del medium. Viene discusso il modello analettico come struttura prototipica delle narrazioni nostalgiche, investigandone le peculiarità nel fumetto ed esaminando le implicazioni nostalgiche di strategie transtestuali come la paratestualità, le riscritture e la capacità archivistica del mezzo. Infine, l'articolo approfondisce l'effetto di eco e rinforzo delle narrazioni nostalgiche derivanti dai meccanismi cognitivi ed emotivi legati al fumetto, come la tessitura di rimandi semantici e figurativi tra vignette e la presenza di lacune narrative che necessitano di essere riempite da parte del lettore.

Odisseo e la nostalgia del divenire

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Keywords: nostalgia; Odissea; semiotica interpretativa; De Chirico; semiotica della cultura

Gli studi contemporanei sulla nostalgia inquadrano il concetto principalmente da un punto di vista temporale, cioè kantianamente come una passione rivolta verso un passato perduto e irraggiungibile. Tuttavia, alcuni studi psicologici mostrano che gli individui inquadrano il sentimento in maniera composita e non sempre riconducibile a questo quadro (cfr. Hepper et al. 2012). Questo è probabilmente dovuto al fatto che la storia della nostalgia nella nostra cultura si nutre di immagini e rappresentazioni ben più radicate e durevoli del concetto stesso introdotto da Hofer nel 1688. Nell'enciclopedia (Eco 1984) circola infatti un concetto diverso di nostalgia, connesso alla sua rappresentazione omerica (cfr. Austin 2010), dove il sentimento unisce al rimpianto per uno spazio altro il desiderio di agire e una spinta motivazionale. Indagando come il sentimento nostalgico si articola nell'*Odissea*, si mostrerà come la passione di Odisseo non sia solo relativa ad un luogo, ma ad una temporalità che include una posizione spaziale e attoriale, un desiderio di divenire e di evolversi che Odisseo insegue al di là di ogni promessa di immortalità. Per mostrare come questa nostalgia

del divenire si articoli partiremo del quadro di de Chirico *Il ritorno di Ulisse*, e analizzeremo diversi episodi come quello dell'isola di Calipso e dell'incontro finale tra Penelope e l'eroe.

The Room of the Saint: Museums and the Management of Nostalgia

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Keywords: museum; saint; indexicality; grief; memory

Greimas (1986) encourages researchers to explore the mechanisms by which the nostalgic subject, “débrayé” from the object of value, presentifies this object thus originating a “doubled” pathemic path characterized by an imaginary isotopy. In Proust, e.g., this mechanism is activated through the madeleine, but its varieties and characteristics are still to be fully explored. This paper intends to shed light on a specific kind of nostalgic mechanism, based on two premises:

1. The unreachable object of value can also be “a person”, and the loss can be due to death. Reflection must therefore be devoted to the relationship between nostalgia and the elaboration of the memory of the deceased (mourning).
2. The mechanism of nostalgia can be not only individual and private, but also collective and institutional. From this perspective, several kinds of museums can be seen as strategic cultural devices for the management of nostalgia connected to people, objects or events belonging to a mythologized past.

The case of the museums devoted to saints of the Catholic Church, generally owned by religious orders, provide a good example of this institutional management of the nostalgic memory of an exemplary figure, loved by the faithful.

Indeed, saints are recognized as such after their death: their cult is basically “retrospective”, and even though it entails the creation of a spiritual relationship, in Catholic culture there is a strong attachment to all the indexical signs that give the faithful the impression to maintain a bodily connection with the venerated characters. This is true not only for relics, but also for the saints’ room or cell. The importance attributed to the cell can be related to a religious imaginary that creates a parallelism between the interior and spiritual space of the soul and the exterior space of the room in which the spiritual experience takes place (cf. Ponso 2023; Leone 2013): the material space of the cell is deemed to bear traces of the spiritual quality of the exceptional individuals who inhabited them, thus resulting somehow “sanctified”. This explains why the saints’ houses or cells are often musealized, as part of the process of construction and transmission of their memory. These museums aim at providing a testimony which is both historical and religious, and have to face the potential clash – typical of Catholic culture – between the need for signs of the saints’ bodily life, and the need to deviate the attention from materiality to spirituality (cf. Leone 2014).

The analysis of a sample of museums of saints (e.g. Giovanni Bosco, Pio of Pietrelcina) shows therefore the strategies which make the saints’ room available to visitors, and how settings and paratexts improve the visitor’s cultural-historical knowledge, but also create or reinforce a pathemic bond with the saints by presentifying and materializing their absence. The analysis takes inspiration from studies about the construction of places of memory, the spatial language of the museums, and their semio-ethnographic observation (cf. Violi 2014, Pezzini 2011, Marsciani 2021). These theories, mainly elaborated with reference to secular museums, are re-thought in relation to the cultural-religious context of the considered case study, as well as to the mechanism of nostalgia, intended as a semiotic strategy used to regulate (both igniting and containing) the sense of loss and desire for the saintly figure.

La nuova nostalgia della letteratura ebraica

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Keywords: nostalgia; distacco; espulsione; letteratura ebraica statunitense; letteratura ebraica israeliana

Il distacco dal “villaggio dell’infanzia” produce una nostalgia che diventa un perno psichico per ciascuno di noi. Nel caso della cultura ebraica, la perdita della propria terra d’origine fa sì che i temi del rimpianto e della nostalgia siano delle vere e proprie costanti. Il presente contributo, senza aspirare

a una generalizzazione che lo spazio a disposizione non permetterebbe, propone alcuni esempi di scrittori e romanzi appartenenti alla cultura ebraica in cui il tema della nostalgia è particolarmente cruciale e soprattutto, a seconda delle epoche e dei contesti, in trasformazione. La letteratura ebraica del Novecento sembrava modulata prevalentemente su un registro secondo cui il distacco si alterava in una variante patologica più simile all'espulsione. Negli ultimi decenni del secolo scorso emerge però, soprattutto negli Stati Uniti, la determinazione a uscire dal *leitmotiv* del "popolo escluso": gli scrittori ebrei americani aspirano ad affermarsi come scrittori *tout-court* anche se, in questa fase, gli esiti rimangono parziali e la nostalgia legata alla peculiare tradizione ebraica sembra non essere mai stata veramente esautorata. Al contrario, le nuove generazioni di scrittori, pur non unificate da una comune percezione, hanno fatto notevoli passi avanti nel tentativo di emergere dalla drammatica storia del popolo ebraico per volgersi a un futuro dove anche la nostalgia sia un sentimento universale, comune a tutti gli uomini.

Saudade: A Central Passion in the Discursive Construction of Portuguese National Identity
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Keywords: saudade, Portugal, nostalgia, passions, national identity

Portugal has been bound to a clearly delimited territory since the thirteenth century. Since that time, this country located in the geographical margins of Europe has been the source of discourses revolving around Portuguese national identity. Over the past centuries, social actors have used these discourses to distinguish an alleged Portuguese way of being from those linked to other national groups. This article uses a socio-cultural semiotic perspective to argue that national identities can be approached as the output of a dynamic process of discursive construction that is extended in time. In particular, it studies the Portuguese case with a focus on the central role that *saudade* – a type of nostalgia frequently presented as typically Portuguese – has played in the discursive articulation of Portuguese national identity.

Nostalgic Advertising: Exploring the Dialogue Between Semiotics and Nostalgia Marketing
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Keywords: semiotics, nostalgia, marketing, advertising, Covid-19

The objective of this research is to analyze the passion of nostalgia in advertising from both theoretical and analytical perspectives. The theoretical part of the study aims to explain nostalgia in the field of semiotics of consumption by exploring the differences and similarities between nostalgia and the vintage mood, the different emotions that drive them, and how nostalgia works. It also investigates who are the perfect targets for nostalgia marketing strategies. Media and marketing collaborate to evoke old or new feelings of nostalgia, selecting what is worth recovering from the past. Nostalgic ads trigger memories of the past, permeating everyday life and continually influencing consumers' practices and choices. Therefore, advertising provides an interesting area for analyzing nostalgia. The use of nostalgia indicates a certain way of considering consumption: the past is rediscovered and re-proposed, without losing contact with modernity. The analytical part of the paper focuses on advertisements in the fields of automotive, fashion, food, and technology. The study conducts a semiotic analysis of the advertisements using the theoretical frame of structural semiotics. The aim is to analyze the different manifestations of nostalgia in advertising, in order to show how semiotics can help us to understand the values and the meanings behind the advertising messages, and how vintage mood is conveyed differently by each of them. From a narrative standpoint, nostalgia indicates a disconnection from an object of value, and the nostalgia strategy aims to establish a pathemic connection with the consumer by presenting past products, places, and practices in a modern way. Moreover, the nostalgic text inscribes within it a specific profile of the public and establishes with it a communicative pact in which the past is evoked as an element of connection. The analysis also includes nostalgic advertising during the Covid-19 pandemic, where commercials recalled moments of past daily life that were temporarily lost due to the pandemic. Semiotics allows us to grasp these aspects and analyze their implications.