



The 5th International Humanities – Society – Identity Congress: (UN)CERTAINTIES AND (RE)INVENTIONS

Faculty of Modern Languages
University of Warsaw

CALL FOR PAPERS

We invite proposals for thematic sections for the **HSIC 2026 Congress** that analyse how literature, philosophy, linguistics and cultural studies enable us to think with, inhabit and critically negotiate conditions of uncertainty. The congress is conceived as a space of intellectual experimentation: a **laboratory for the future** in which concepts, narratives and methods may be tested against the pressures of the present.

Engaging with the critical challenges of our time, the congress proposes a twofold inquiry: first, into the global consequences of technological acceleration, epistemic fragmentation and the theoretical as well as social impact of artificial intelligence; and second, into the social, political and geo-specific conditions under which human life becomes liveable, precarious or expendable. Taken together, these perspectives illuminate how contemporary technologies and ethical-political regimes jointly reshape not only the humanities as a field of inquiry but also the very category of the human itself: its normative constructions, boundaries, vulnerabilities, exclusions and possible futures.

Although the crisis of narrative and poetic forms has been repeatedly diagnosed since at least the modernist period, we propose to approach its contemporary configurations through two intertwined dynamics whose decisive acceleration can be traced to the 1980s: the growing commercialisation and affective intensification of cultural production, and the progressive marginalisation of cognitive elaboration. These tendencies unfold alongside broader processes of formal disintegration and symbolic exhaustion, producing what may be described as a para-pathological condition of literary space itself, marked by disorientation, proliferating individual poetics, and recurring images of emptiness and finality. Against this background, the congress foregrounds practices of (re) invention of temporalities, imaginaries and modes of knowledge, with particular attention to storytelling as a transhistorical dispositif capable of reconfiguring time and space. Far from constituting a retreat into archaism, storytelling emerges here as a critical operator through which contemporary cultures negotiate rupture, uncertainty and survivability, enabling alternative articulations of pasts, presents and futures at moments when established narrative and poetic paradigms appear exhausted.

This year's event draws inspiration from the intellectual "laboratories" of Jorge Luis Borges, Umberto Eco and Stanisław Lem — an homage marking the anniversaries of their deaths in 2026 — whose works probe infinity, algorithmic logic, archives and the instability of meaning, while consistently foregrounding the ethical contexts and consequences of ignorance, misinterpretation and thoughtlessness. We propose to draw upon their critical and creative approaches for a renewed interpretation and evaluation of the past, the present and the future. This lens will serve as the basis for developing heuristic and methodological tools with which to explore contemporary crises, survivability and contested futures.

The problems of the invention and reinvention of pasts, presents and futures, processes that compel us to rethink and reshape societal norms and intellectual presuppositions, will be examined in dialogue with recent currents in the humanities and social sciences. Particular attention will be paid to shifting epistemological paradigms associated with fake news, "post-truth", "postnormality" (Sardar), and the dominance of Big Data and algorithmic infrastructures in public life. Within this digital-algorithmic order (Vogl), distinctions between knowledge, belief and opinion are increasingly blurred; interpretation becomes a site of struggle, and 'information' may function less as meaning than as an event designed to shape expectations and modulate affect.

This condition of multilayered paradox (central to several twentieth-century experimental literary traditions) encapsulates the epistemic tensions of the present. On the one hand, the volume of available data appears boundless; on the other, this very excess renders the retrieval and stabilisation of meaning increasingly unworkable, echoing Borges's *Library of Babel*, in which total knowledge dissolves into unreadability. Likewise, while algorithms operating across immense data land-

scapes often produce results marked by probabilistic normativity and structural conformity, their capacity for endless variation returns us to a postnormal state shaped by complexity, contingency and contradiction. In response to such uncertainty, we attempt to construct coherence by linking disparate elements and imposing interpretative order; yet this same drive generates both systematic forms of knowledge and the most elaborate conspiracy theories. The congress approaches cultural production not as a retreat from crisis but as a privileged medium for testing how knowledge, belief, opinion and uncertainty are discursively produced, institutionally managed, technologically mediated and critically resisted.

The initiative will focus not only on literary and philosophical visions of the future: utopias, dystopias, technological anticipations and catastrophic scenarios, but also on the traditions, material conditions and epistemic premises that shape such imaginaries, as well as the means by which they may be explored, contested and transformed. In the context of reimagining futures, it is crucial to reflect upon ethical, political and social questions such as the conditions of a “liveable life” (Butler, Giorgi) in a world where access to care, recognition and agency remains unevenly distributed and structurally rationed. The future appears here not as an abstract temporal horizon but as a field of tension and struggle over the possibility of existence: who is granted a place in the world to come, and who is written out of it.

An important category for analysis is “bare life” (Agamben). We welcome contributions that examine literary, filmic, artistic and philosophical narratives in which there emerges the figure of a person deprived of legal protection, expelled from the political order and reduced to biological existence: visible and exposed, yet uncounted and “ungrievable”. Drawing on Roberto Esposito, we propose to address the paradox of immunisation as a mechanism that purports to protect the community yet may produce closure, isolation and hierarchisation, leading, paradoxically, to what Achille Mbembe calls the “necropolitics”, e.g. a system of power relations where the very right to live is limited to a privileged group, class or race. In dialogue with Hannah Arendt, the conference will trace recurring figures of exclusion in crisis narratives: the pariah, the refugee, the stateless and the “superfluous” person, while also considering counter-figures of hospitality, relationality, solidarity and shared exposure.

A key dimension of the congress is the inclusion of a posthumanist perspective, drawing on the work of Rosi Braidotti and Donna Haraway, who propose a redefinition of subjectivity beyond traditional anthropocentrism and liberal individualism. Such a perspective enables us to conceive of the future as a dynamic network of interdependence, responsibility and co-becoming, in which the boundaries between human and non-human, natural and artificial, biological and technological are continually reconfigured. This perspective compels us to move beyond established Western definitions of reality and of humanity’s place within it. It invites the inclusion of non-European Indigenous traditions in our reflection on the world, while also opening the way to renewed interpretations, and, where necessary, reinventions, of Europe’s philosophical, literary, and artistic heritage. Within this heritage, the strict demarcation between nature and culture, and between humans and other beings, may never have been fully tenable (Latour); alternatively, it may reflect an anachronistically simplified reading of earlier periods and of the vocabularies through which they articulated the world. Reflections on survival and futurity therefore require not only an analysis of contemporary power formations, but also a re-examination of the ontological and epistemological premises that underwrite the category of “life” itself, together with a renewed attentiveness to how earlier epochs imagined the future.

Language constitutes another crucial site of struggle over meaning, recognition and survival. Particular attention will be given to multilingualism, translation, misinterpretation and epistemic injustice, as well as to minoritised, endangered and suppressed languages: their precarisation, loss, revitalisation movements and status within global linguistic hierarchies. We are interested in colonial

and postcolonial language regimes, linguistic stratification, and the digital marginalisation of minoritised languages within algorithmic systems, natural language processing models and AI training corpora. Drawing on Umberto Eco, it can be argued that modern technologies based on natural language processing are yet another manifestation of the age-old quest for a universal language and universal, unimpeded human communication, although, paradoxically, they lead to a decrease in linguistic and discursive diversity. Language emerges here as a medium of power, memory and survival, but also as a potential instrument of exclusion or resistance.

The congress aims to create a transdisciplinary platform for reflection and intellectual experimentation, rooted in literary studies, linguistics, philosophy, critical theory, sociology, anthropology, media studies and contemporary art. In the face of accumulating crises (climatic, political, economic, technological and epistemic) it becomes necessary to rethink the very concept of crisis and to reconceptualise the future as a plural, contested and open field of possibility. Drawing inspiration from experimental literary traditions and from the posthumanist proposals of Haraway, Braidotti and Latour, we seek to position the humanities as a space for critically testing concepts, narratives and forms of life – foregrounding practices of (re)invention and storytelling as transhistorical modes of knowledge – that enable us not merely to describe uncertainty, but to inhabit and transform it, particularly in contexts marked by formal exhaustion, affective intensification and the erosion of established narrative paradigms.

We warmly invite our Faculty's research groups and colleagues who wish to propose a thematic section (particularly in collaboration with international scholars) to submit their proposals to the official congress address: hsic.wn@uw.edu.pl. We encourage prospective organisers to ensure that the proposed section engages with the overarching scope of the conference and is aligned with its lines of research. As the number of thematic sections that can be accommodated within the programme is necessarily limited, all submissions will be subject to a careful and collegial selection process.

ORGANISATIONAL TIMELINE

16 FEBRUARY-31 MARCH:

Submission period for proposals of thematic sections.

15 APRIL

Publication of the CFP for abstracts addressed to the approved thematic sections and to a general session dedicated to early-career researchers.

15 APRIL-30 JUNE

Submission period for individual abstracts.