



# Esse Humani: The (Non)Human Question

The 28th Carolina Conference for Romance Studies  
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill  
April 5-6, 2024

**Keynote Speaker:**  
Dr. Francesca Ferrando (NYU)

**New Submission Deadline:**  
January 15, 2024

The word *humanities* indicates that field of study concerning what is typical of the human being (language, literature, art, religion, philosophy, history), while also encompassing the latest so-called “social sciences” (anthropology, psychology, sociology, political science, etc.). This branch of knowledge has always been connected to *humanism*, a cultural trend born in Italy between the 14th and the 15th centuries with the philological rediscovery of classical authors and the emergence of a new worldview stating the importance of humanity. Perhaps it is not a coincidence that in Italian “humanities” are named *discipline umanistiche*, which literally is “humanistic disciplines.” Leaning on one thousand years of the Middle Ages, humanism inspired and permeated Renaissance while increasing faith in the possibilities of human beings to the peoples of Europe. It was a pivotal step on the road to our present time, spanning the scientific and technological revolutions, the inception of secularized societies, and the development of capitalistic economies and democratic governments.

Originating from Pico della Mirandola’s *De hominis dignitate* (1496), the cultural device of *humanism-humanities* has always defined the human being in an oppositional relationship to what the human being is not. However, a long wave of the “crisis of human subject” started at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries both in art and philosophy, and has progressed to encompass more recent scientific progress (for instance in the fields of ecology, genetics, and A.I.). New theoretical trends have thus challenged the condition of the human being: *transhumanism* aims to overcome all of human beings’ deficiencies with the use of technology; *posthumanism* states that human beings inevitably exist as hybrids with non-human beings; *antihumanism* even preaches that the same concept of “human” is ontologically and ethically untenable. In the meantime, many writers have explored the possibility of creating an artwork capable of letting “us escape the limited perspective of the individual ego, not only to enter into selves like our own but to give speech to that which has no language” (Italo Calvino, *Lezioni americane*, 1988), that is to non-human beings themselves.

In short, today the humanities appear to wonder with renewed energy: what does it mean to be “human?” What is the relationship between the human and the non-human? In an age of rapid A.I. development, how is the artificial conceived in relation to the human, and where does it fit into the paradigm? How does it challenge the paradigm? Is it possible for a human artist or theorist to take a non-human perspective? In which way? Should the concept of “human” change, or even continue to exist? What should happen, then, to the beings that we still name in such a way? And how should we engage with non-humans once we reconsider what being human means?

The 28th annual Carolina Conference for Romance Studies invites graduate and undergraduate students, professors, and scholars to consider and to engage with these and other questions in all forms through presentations and discussions. Topics of interest and approaches may include, but are not limited to, the following fields and themes:

- A.I.
- Anthropocene
- Antihumanism
- Architecture
- Biopolitics
- Colonial, Decolonial, and Postcolonial Studies
- Disability Studies
- Ecocriticism
- Environmental Humanities
- Feminist Studies
- Gender and Women’s Studies
- Humanism
- Medical Humanities
- Modern Literature Studies
- Performance Studies
- Posthumanism
- Queer Studies
- Renaissance Studies
- Sexuality
- Transhumanism
- Urban Studies
- Utopias/Dystopias
- Violence and Trauma
- Visual and Media Studies



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## Submission Information

Please submit abstracts of up to 300 words using the submission form via the CCRS website ([ccrs.unc.edu](https://ccrs.unc.edu)) by **January 15, 2024**. We welcome papers submitted in English, French, Italian, Portuguese, or Spanish. However, submissions in English will be preferred in order to facilitate the creation of panels based on common subject areas rather than language concentration. Panel proposals and roundtables that are language- and/or topic-specific are also welcomed, and each participant should individually complete a submission form. Please direct any questions to [ccrs@unc.edu](mailto:ccrs@unc.edu).

Submissions must include the following information:

Name:

Email Address:

Affiliation:

Classification: (Professor, Ph.D. Student, M.A. Student, Post-Doc, Independent  
Researcher, Undergraduate Student, etc.)

Presentation Title:

Abstract (300 words, single-spaced):

Relevant Time Period(s) and Country(-ies):

Keywords (up to six):

Please see [ccrs.unc.edu](https://ccrs.unc.edu) for more information.