

Third interdisciplinary conference
organised by the Institute of Modern Languages
at the University of Bielsko-Biala

1st – 2nd March 2019
Bielsko-Biala

Shapes of Futures

What is realised in my history is not the past definite of what was, since it is no more, or even the present perfect of what has been in what I am, but the future anterior of what I shall have been for what I am in the process of becoming.

Jacques Lacan

The past, like the future, is indefinite and exists only as a spectrum of possibilities.

Stephen Hawking

Human spirit is the ability to face the uncertainty of the future with curiosity and optimism. It is the belief that problems can be solved, differences resolved. It is a type of confidence. And it is fragile.

Bernard Beckett

Confirmed keynote speakers: Ziauddin Sardar and Rafał Matyja

For the nineteenth-century man, the future was “a simple combination of already known things” that could be calculated on the basis of given probabilities. For the twentieth-century man, the concept of the future was entirely different. As Paul Valery observes, writing about his epoch:

[T]he rules of the game are changed at every throw. No calculation of probabilities is possible. ... Why? Because the ... modern world is assuming the shape of man's mind. [...] If ... we imprint the form of our mind on the human world, the world becomes all the more unforeseeable and assumes the mind's [own] disorder.

But, perhaps, disorder is not the last word that humanity has to say about its understanding of the future. Liquid modernity has melted into postmodernity and, after almost two decades of the twenty-first century have passed, one may ask about the contemporary visions and conceptions of the future. Is the future, as Hawkins asserts categorically just “a spectrum of possibilities”? Or, maybe, in Derrida's words, “the ineluctable world of the future [...] proclaims itself at present, beyond the closure of knowledge.” Do we follow Lacan's view of the future as an inescapable dimension of our ongoing efforts to maintain any sort of coherent subjectivity? Are there multiple futures ahead of us, as scholars of the science-fiction literature sometimes suggest? Or is there a future that sociological statistics, economical planning or causal layered analysis can anticipate?

Whatever perspective one would like to embrace – despite Hawkins' rather categorical assertions – the future is very much present today in a number of ways. It is precisely this openness to conceptualisations and indefiniteness of the future, combined with its inevitability, that seems to have made it an ever-provoking object of research. Apart from the thriving future studies, it is contemporary sociology's investigation into the development of the cultural trends which subsequent generations embrace, history's projection of bygone patterns on the present to model what might happen tomorrow, as well as literary studies' increased fascination with the visions of the future(s) surfacing both in works of fiction and non-fiction, that make it a theme expressly worth pursuing. Our conference addresses the need for such research. Therefore, we cordially invite sociologists,

psychologists, philologists, historians, and scholars of other academic fields to discuss various aspects and roles of the future(s) in contemporary discourses. Among the themes that might be discussed in twenty-minute long presentations are the following (the list is by no means exhaustive):

- conceptualisations/images of the future and their dynamics
- the futurists and future(s) studies
- functions of the future
- the future shaping processes (trendsetting, simulation, modelling, forecasting, planning)
- the politics of time / the temporality of politics
- the relationships between the present, the past and the future (*Zeitgeist* and the future, the future as an active aspect of the present, the future borrowed from the past)
- the future and the narrative (narratives and metaphors of the future, science and speculative fiction as catalysts in future studies, future history)
- the future as a promise, the future as a threat (dystopia, utopia and anti-utopia)
- indefinite and uncertain versus definite and certain futures
- normative, preferred, alternative futures

We welcome scholars from various academic fields to submit their proposals by 10 January 2019. Abstracts of 300 words in English should be sent to shapesoffutures@gmail.com. Please include your name, email address, academic affiliation and a short biography.

Notifications of acceptance will be sent out by 15 January 2019.

The conference fee is 280 PLN (70 euro), and 230 PLN (60 euro) for students. The fee includes lunch, coffee breaks and conference materials.

A selection of papers will be published. Details of publication will be announced during the conference.

Conference organisers:

Maria Korusiewicz,
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