

CALL FOR PAPERS

After Death, Afterlife and Afterparty: Diverse Approaches to the Meaning of Death

University of Warsaw, December 10 - 11, 2026

At the very core of the 'rationality' of our culture, however, is an exclusion that precedes every other, more radical than the exclusion of madmen, children or inferior races, an exclusion preceding all these and serving as their model: the exclusion of the dead and of death.

Jean Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death*

Corpses, ghosts, and the reanimated dead—these are the figures that haunt the margins of our everyday, cultural and literary landscapes. Death has evolved from a biological endpoint into a deeply vexed site of representation, a cultural construct laden with social legibility, taboo, and spectacle. Yet, as contemporary late-capitalist society increasingly sanitizes, professionalizes, and banishes death from the symbolic social sphere, our relationship with mortality is being greatly transformed. To examine how we represent the end is to investigate how we construct meaning itself. In line with Jean Baudrillard's claim, the modern banishment of death as an unproductive element has stripped it of its symbolic reciprocity, leaving us with a flat, one-dimensional survival and an omnipresent anxiety of biological demise. Consequently, the conference aims to explore the diverse and changing representations of death, dying, and spectrality in literature, theater, film, media etc.

Themes and Perspectives

We ask: how do texts of literature and culture represent the cold materiality of death in the corpse, the figurative transcendence of the ghost, and the liminal spaces of the reanimated dead? How do our narratives confront the crisis of representation when faced with the unspeakable void of non-being? By interrogating these themes, we hope to examine approaches to the aesthetics of mortality, the evolution of the concept of death, the social aspects of the shifts in imagining finality. We are interested in locating the sites of resistance where the symbolic disorder of death interrupts the closed codes of modern simulation.

Topics of submissions include, but are not limited to:

- symbolic exchange and death: reading death through a theoretical lens
- studying the corpse: materiality, spectacle, and politics of the dead body
- reanimating the dead: modern and postmodern figures of the undead (vampires, zombies, and cyborgs)
- the "White Noise" of mortality: death anxiety, consumerism, and simulation in late capitalism
- forensics and televised death: medicalization, technical surveillance, and the spectacle of dying
- the geography of mourning: national traumas, war necropolises, and monuments of loss
- elegies and the language of loss: poetic and narrative strategies of mourning and remembrance
- eroticism, sex, and death: the body as a site of phallic fetishization and organic decay

- the ritual vs. the simulation: from the day of the dead and sacred sacrifice to euthanasia and controlled endings
- digital afterlives and death online: personal illness blogs, the aestheticization and performance of death and terminal illness in digital media

Submission guidelines

Open to undergraduate, MA, and PhD students, no submission fee.

Interested participants are invited to **submit** a 250-word proposal (incl. title and keywords) and a 100-word bionote (including affiliation) via the online form below **by 14 October 2026**.

For researchers affiliated to a university, please use your institutional e-mail address.

Acceptance decisions will be communicated **by 1 November 2026**.

The conference will be conducted entirely in English and on site. Presentations should not exceed 20 minutes.

Submission link:

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSeChdaABSBjjG7-eGZN7r7W3isyHF9qT8dW4RN0NFMAhFWFqw/viewform?usp=publish-editor>

For questions regarding the call or submission process, contact the submission committee at:

bookin_it@uw.edu.pl