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FILOLOGIA, LETTERATURA E LINGUISTICA



Essays Beyond Borders Conference

Between Theory and Practice: The Essay Beyond Borders

Università di Pisa, 9-10 April 2026

We invite scholars, writers, and students to an international conference exploring the essay's potential to foster civic engagement and to create spaces for reflective, critical, and individual thought in both public and private spheres.

As a fluid, exploratory, and experimental genre, the essay bridges personal reflection and public discourse, offering a space for deep thought and nuanced argumentation in rapidly evolving and complex times—characterised, among other things, by climate change, political unrest, the effects of post-truth discourse, and the increasing presence of Artificial Intelligence in areas once considered the exclusive realm of human thought and expression.

The essay is a self-reflexive form that favours dialogic thought. It allows for the development of an individual voice that remains open to exchange, seeking affinities and navigating tensions rather than reinforcing fixed positions. Open to experimentation and change, essayistic writing resists rigid ideological stances, thriving instead on curiosity, adaptability, and an evolving engagement with experience, context, and ideas. The essay situates individual experience within broader social, political, and philosophical frameworks, bridging the subjective and the collective while acknowledging the tension between the personal and the public.

These qualities define the essayistic not only as a literary practice but also as a way of thinking and teaching—one that encourages rigorous reflection, meaningful dialogue, and engaged citizenship. Within this conceptual framework, the conference asks whether the essay can serve as an antidote to—or find its place within—accelerated digital culture, fostering deep, reflective, and engaged reading and writing. In particular, it seeks to explore the essay's potential and limits within the context of the 'planetary turn.' As global crises demand new ways of thinking, the essay offers a means to interrogate interconnectedness, fostering critical and speculative approaches that move beyond anthropocentric and national frameworks—frameworks increasingly inadequate in addressing planetary concerns.

Themes and Topics

We welcome proposals addressing, but not limited to, the following themes:

The Planetary Essay

- The planetary essay: reimagining interconnectedness beyond the human
- The essay's role in planetary thinking: intersections with ecological writing and transnationalism
- Writing the planetary crisis: the essay as a response to ecological emergencies
- The essay as a planetary genre: transnational, multilingual, and ecological dimensions of essayistic writing
- The speculative essay: imagining planetary futures through essayistic form
- The planetary essay: gender and ecological thought

The Pedagogical Potential of the Essay

- The pedagogical affordances of the essay: teaching critical thinking, reflective writing, and active learning
- The essay as a method for fostering analytical, creative, and civic engagement in education
- The essay as a method of inquiry
- Teaching the planetary essay: fostering ecological consciousness through reflective writing

The Essay and Public Discourse

- The role of the essay in shaping public discourse
- Essayistic writing as a form of activism and civic engagement
- The essay as a space for critical thinking
- The ethics of attention in the essay: resisting digital acceleration and superficial engagement
- The interplay between the personal and the political in essay writing

The Essay, the Digital and the Age of AI

- The evolution of the essay in digital media and its impact on public debate
- The essay and AI: collaboration, disruption, or redefinition?
- AI and essayistic thinking: challenges and possibilities
- Experimental and hybrid forms of essayistic writing

Conference Format

The main modalities to be used at the conference are the academic paper and the roundtable formats. However, this conference is paired with an **Easter School**, which will be held at the same venue in the days preceding the Conference (7-8 April 2026). As part of this collaboration, some sessions will be in the form of essay-writing workshops related to the themes of the conference.

Submission Guidelines

We welcome submissions from scholars, writers, and practitioners across disciplines. The following formats will be considered:

- Papers (20 minutes)
- Panels (90 minutes, consisting of 3 papers)
- Roundtable discussions (60 minutes with 4 or more speakers)
- Essay Writing Workshops (90 minutes)

Please submit an abstract of 200–300 words (for individual papers or workshops) or 500–600 words (for panels and roundtables), along with a short biography (max. 100 words per participant).

Proposals should be submitted by **20th October 2025** to ebb.pisa2026@gmail.com

Confirmation of acceptance will be provided by **15th November 2025**.

If you have any questions or require additional information, please feel free to reach out to the conference convenors at ebb.pisa2026@gmail.com

Convenors

Prof. Roberta Ferrari (Universita' di Pisa)

Prof. Mario Aquilina (University of Malta)

Dr. Paolo Bugliani (Universita' di Pisa)