We find ourselves in a time that has brought significant changes to the way we communicate. The technological progress and rise of social media have shaped both the news media and the contemporary political landscape, impacting and altering political discourse. As a result, the role of social media in political communication has become pervasive, and politicians now tend to communicate more directly with the public without the intermediary of traditional media. The position of the mainstream media as a neutral actor in reporting the news has also been tainted as the media has become increasingly dependent on advertising and thus more vulnerable to the pressures of corporate or state sponsors. Combined, we find ourselves situated in an era where more people are turning to social media for their news, while terms such as disinformation, fake news, post-truth, hate speech and conspiracy theory have become commonplace. In this new public square of communication, it often happens that one person’s conspiracy theory is another person’s truth, one person’s facts are another’s fake news, and one person’s hate speech is someone else’s freedom of speech.

In his essay entitled “Politics and the English Language”, George Orwell (1946) observed what he called the decline of a language, noting that in English big words such as democracy, freedom, realistic, justice, totalitarian, progressive, and so on were turning into empty labels, often used with variable meanings in a consciously dishonest way. His observations have echoes in the present, especially in the context of contemporary political discourse where the concepts of propaganda, public relations and persuasion seem to blend into one indistinguishable concept. In their work on organized persuasive communication, Piers Robinson et al. (2018) distinguish between the propagandistic form of persuasion, which is based on deception, incentivization or coercion, and consensual persuasion, which includes all the relevant information that can allow a rational and informed decision to be made.

This distinction points to the problem of how to enable and regulate consensual persuasion based on the free flow of information in modern media, particularly on the platforms provided by the social media giants. These present themselves as universal public squares, but are actually private corporations primarily motivated by profit and bound by the legislation of their countries of origin. The ease of global communication on these platforms thus raises some of the important questions of communication today: who decides what is the truth or what is disinformation, and who is allowed to speak, as well as how the freedom to express a diversity of views can be reconciled with the fight against harm through disinformation or hate speech.
In view of these questions, it is important for experts across disciplines and from different theoretical backgrounds to re-examine different aspects of persuasive discourse, specifically, what constitutes persuasive discourse and how ideologies of different times are reflected through the languages of media, politics and fiction. The present issue of the journal *Ars & Humanitas* offers 14 articles by domestic and international authors exploring these questions from a variety of perspectives within the field of humanities and social science, including literature, political communication, rhetoric, advertising, social media, didactics and film studies.

The first thematic strand focuses on persuasive discourse in literature. The article by Tomaž Onič and Nastja Prajnč Kacijan explores repetition as a means of verbal and psychological violence in interrogation scenes in plays by Miller, Pinter and Jančar. In his article, John Stubbs brings the example of Jonathan Swift’s literary *personae* to bear on current trends in satirical culture. The article by Wafaa A. Abdulaali in Ghada A. Mohammad provides insight into the exilic consciousness in the poetry of the Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish and Nigerian poet Tanure Ojaide.

The second group contains articles that deal with political discourse, political rhetoric and the discourse on Twitter. Waheed A. Bamigbade in Lawan Dalha examines the delegitimization strategies used on Facebook in Nigeria’s 2019 electioneering discourse. In her article, Nina Gorenc explores the notion of post-truth society with regard to political communication in the 2016 US election. Suzana Jurin and Daniela Kružić offer a text linguistic analysis of political catchwords and their role in creating the political opinions of voters during the 2016 election campaign in Croatia. Maiken Ana Kores examines the linguistic and visual tools used by parties across the political spectrum in the 2018 parliamentary elections in Slovenia. In her article, Nadine Rentel shows verbal and visual resources that characterize the persuasive discourse of the political party *Alternative für Deutschland Saxony* on their Facebook account. Katja Plemenitaš focuses on the use of framing strategies in Barack Obama’s speeches on violence targeting African-American men. On the example of the political discourse in France, Ana Zwitter Vitez analyses the linguistic structure of tweets by which users react to political discourse and consequently express highly polarized opinions.

The topics also include persuasive discourses in advertising, film, education and environmental discourse. The article by Agata Križan focuses on the persuasive power of words in advertisements by identifying types of monoglossic propositions and investigating their evaluative charge. Aleš Čakalić analyses the discourses in the post-Yugoslav body of work of the Serbian filmmaker Emir Kusturica, and in selected examples of recent Croatian film and TV production. The article by Dragan Potočnik explores representations of Islam in history textbooks in relation to the relationship between Islam and the West. The thematic issue ends with an article by Elsa Skënderi Rakipllari, who examines framing in the debate about waste imports in Albania.