

Narrating the Future: Cultural Narratives of Survival, Exclusion and Possibility

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Section language:

English and Spanish

Call for Papers:

This thematic section examines how contemporary cultural production functions as a critical site in which futures are not merely anticipated but actively constructed, negotiated, and contested. It focuses on literary, theatrical, cinematic, and visual practices that engage with the uneven distribution of futurity under conditions of ongoing global crisis, while foregrounding the question of temporality as central to these processes.

Rather than approaching the future as a neutral or universal temporal horizon, the section conceptualises it as a domain structured by asymmetries of power, access, and recognition. At the same time, it attends to the plurality of temporal regimes through which the future is imagined and experienced: suspended presents, recursive pasts, deferred promises, and foreclosed horizons. Cultural narratives thus emerge as sites where time itself is reconfigured, revealing how temporal structures participate in the production of exclusion and possibility alike.

Within this framework, cultural narratives operate both as archives of exclusion and as speculative spaces in which alternative modes of existence are imagined and tested. From speculative fiction to dystopian cinema, from experimental theatre to politically engaged visual art, contemporary works explore tensions between collapse and survival, dispossession and resistance, often through disrupted or non-linear temporalities.

The section draws on selected strands of contemporary critical theory to interrogate the limits of the human and the politics of inclusion. Building on the work of Judith Butler and Gabriel Giorgi, it considers the shifting conditions of “liveable life”; with Giorgio Agamben, it revisits the figure of “bare life” as a paradigm of political abandonment; and through Roberto Esposito, it explores immunitary logics that both protect and exclude. The work of Hannah Arendt provides a framework for analysing recurring figures of exclusion such as refugees, pariahs, and the “superfluous” in contemporary cultural narratives.



At the level of affect, the section engages with Sara Ahmed and Lauren Berlant to examine how cultural texts construct and challenge regimes of normativity, attachment, and aspiration. Particular attention is given to the ways in which affective economies are temporally organised and how these structures shape experiences of futurity in (con)texts marked by precarity and structural inequality.

The section also incorporates posthumanist perspectives, drawing on Rosi Braidotti and Donna Haraway, in order to question anthropocentric assumptions embedded in dominant future imaginaries. By attending to more-than-human subjectivities, interspecies relations, and techno-ecological entanglements, it explores how cultural practices reconfigure not only the boundaries of the human but also the temporal scales of existence.

More broadly, the section understands narrative and artistic practices as critical technologies for engaging with uncertainty. Cultural works do not simply reflect crisis; they participate in the reconfiguration of temporalities, imaginaries, and forms of knowledge. In doing so, they offer a space for examining how futures are differentially imagined, distributed, and contested.

We invite contributions addressing, but not limited to, the following areas:

- **Narrative configurations of the future and temporalities:** utopian and dystopian imaginaries; catastrophic scenarios; speculative engagements with technological, ecological, and social transformation; non-linear, recursive, and fragmented temporal forms.
- **Survival, precarity, and exclusion:** representations of marginalised and displaced lives; cultural articulations of vulnerability, resilience, and resistance; temporalities of waiting, suspension, and endurance in contexts of crisis.
- **Affect and normativity:** constructions of happiness, attachment, and aspiration; affective dimensions of social control; temporal regimes of optimism, delay, and exhaustion.
- **Posthuman and more-than-human perspectives:** non-anthropocentric subjectivities; interspecies relationalities; ecological and technological reconfigurations of the future.
- **Reimagining the common:** collective practices, alternative communities, and experimental forms of solidarity, care, and cohabitation; temporalities of renewal and coexistence.

