

CRITICAL TIMES 2022

FUTURITY NOW?

Online

6-8 September 2022



Overview

It is not so long ago that Mark Fisher, in *Ghosts of My Life* (2013), pronounced the “slow cancellation of the future.” Riffing on a phrase of Franco ‘Bifo’ Berardi, Fisher identifies a cultural inertia that resides in a collective inability to “grasp and articulate the present.” The ubiquity of capitalism – and of a capitalist realism that presumes there is no alternative to the neoliberal global order – has, Fisher argues, given rise to a condition in which “life continues, but time has stopped.” The “slow cancellation of the future” thus becomes, in Fisher’s hands, a critical expression of this insidious creep that gradually but relentlessly corrodes the social imagination – and with it, the radical potential of the future. As Wendy Brown describes it, this loss of futurity and of forward momentum “makes the weight of the present very heavy: all mass, no velocity.” Or “in the terms of late modern speediness ... all speed, no direction.”

Is, then, the future over? Not quite. Indeed, there is no greater critical concern in the contemporary moment than the future, and recent years have seen a marked resurgence of thinking about futurity. Fired by the urgency of our current condition, writers, theorists, artists and activists have turned anew to consider the possibilities of the future, both as a subject of theorization and as an orientation for practice in the world.

Against this background, the Critical Times workshop proposes a multi- and interdisciplinary discussion around the topic of “Futurity Now?” A joint venture of seven international partner institutions on four continents, the workshop will offer a creative and stimulating space for exploring critical and theoretical perspectives on the future “as time, as event, as condition, as an orientation to the oncoming” (Saint-Amour). Focusing on different contexts, and drawing on diverse theoretical literatures, workshop sessions will ask and unpack such critical questions as:

- How can we reclaim futurity?
- Which practices, forms and strategies are available for making our present condition legible?
- What makes critique in “dark times” untimely and necessary? (Brown)
- Is there still a way of disentangling ourselves from the global order of capitalism and disarticulating the connections made by current forms of power?
- What alternative visions are possible for nurturing the desire for progressive change, for imagining law and politics otherwise?
- How might we cultivate a sense of the future that looks forward rather than back – “un avenir” that is, to speak with Derrida and Latour, “à-venir”?

Programme & Workshop Descriptions

NB. All times listed below are in Central European Summer Time. Local times are given in brackets, where these differ.

Tuesday 6 September, 14.00-16.00

Can Law Control the Future? Or is it Just a Part of the Past?

Hosted by the Faculty of Law, University of Roma Tre

This two-hour workshop session will explore different questions relating to law's historicity and futurity. Presentations will include:

- Emanuele Conte (University of Roma Tre and École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales of Paris), "Did Law Control the Future in the Past?"
- Teresa Numerico (University of Roma Tre), "Categorizing, Evaluating, Predicting: The Future as a Battlefield between Artificial Intelligence and Law"
- Fiona Macmillan (Birkbeck University of London, University of Roma Tre and University of Technology Sydney), "Back to the Future: Is There Any Point at all in Protecting our Cultural Heritage?"

Wednesday 7 September, 08.00-10.00 (16.00-18.00 Eastern Australia Time)

Colonial Legal Imaginaries / Southern Literary Futures

Hosted by the Centre for Law, Arts and the Humanities, The Australian National University, in association with the University of Adelaide

Literary imaginaries have been deeply implicated in European colonialism since Thomas More first conceived that 'prototype of the settler colony', *Utopia* (1516). Yet speculative fiction, centred on the rendering of an 'unknown world' or *terra nullius*, has a far longer history than that. Think of Pythagoras' theory of geographical balance (BC 500), or Ptolemy's idea of a 'terra incognita' (AD 2). Or Macrobius' commentaries on the existence of an 'antipodes' (AD 400), which by the time of the *Liber Floridus* (AD 1100) had become the home of literally backward people ('anti-podeans').

The long tradition in the North of imagining the South cannot be disentangled from the imperial projects that continue to colonise Southern lives. But there is also a vibrant critical tradition of writing back, from Black Utopianisms to Indigenous Futurisms. For authors such as Ambelin Kwaymullina, speculative fictions, written from the standpoints of Indigenous peoples, have the potential to 'open the way to futures free of the colonial project; a world that can only be imagined because it does not (yet) exist'. The same has been true for Pan-Africanist writers and for writers across the Americas and Asia. The utopic act of negating a given place and projecting onto it a 'better', future-perfect one, is the colonial move; but it can also be anti-colonial, and in a very real sense, post-colonial.

Featured speakers: Debolina Dutta (Jindal Global Law School), Christopher Gevers (University of KwaZulu-Natal), Luis Gómez Romero (University of Wollongong), and Honni van Rijswijk (University of Technology Sydney)

Moderators: Desmond Manderson (The Australian National University) and Shane Chalmers (University of Adelaide)

Thursday 8 September, 12.00-14.00

Organising the Future (Or: How to Demand a Million More Years?)

Hosted by the Institute for Interdisciplinary Legal Studies - lucernaiuris, University of Lucerne, in association with the Institute for International Law and the Humanities, University of Melbourne

In a time of futureless future, how do we reclaim the means of production of futurity? How do we imagine, pre-form and organize collective futures anew? In this talk, artist and propaganda researcher Jonas Staal will introduce his artistic practice, with a focus on what he terms “organizational art”: artworks that take the form of alternative institutions, such as stateless parliaments, utopian training camps, intergenerational climate courts and experimental biospheres.

The talk will be followed by responses from Carey Young (artist, Slade School of Fine Art) and Tim Lindgren (University of Melbourne), and an open Q&A session.

Moderators: Steven Howe (University of Lucerne) and Laura Petersen (University of Melbourne)

Monday 12 September, 09.00-11.00

Discussion Session

Hosted by the Institute for Interdisciplinary Legal Studies – lucernaiuris, University of Lucerne

This additional session will provide a space for student participants to reflect upon and discuss the three workshops with faculty from the partner universities. Inasmuch as they will be invited to comment on questions and issues arising out of the various talks, students will also be encouraged to think about possible connections to and applications for their own current work.

Recordings of all workshops will be made available prior to the discussion for those who may have missed certain sessions.

Acknowledgements

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For further details on the Critical Times project, including future events, please visit the project [webpage](#).