Word & Text (2025/2026)

(De)Constructions of the Future

Call for proposals

More and more say the future is posthuman, but what exactly do they mean by that – i.e. post- and transhumanists, eco-catastrophists, geo-engineers, extinction studies scholars, etc.? They seem to know or at least predict that a future without humans (at least in their current shape, form, being or self-understanding) is inevitable and might not be so bad. At least for the "planet". They work with projected scenarios based on extrapolations of what "we" currently know, with more or less sophisticated futurological tools that combine empiricism and conceptuality, i.e. a metaphorics that is often deliberately mixing science fiction with science fact (i.e. "science faction", cf. Herbrechter, *Posthumanism – A Critical Anaysis*, 2013). Mostly, this is part of a discourse that is regulated by a strange kind of circularity: technology has brought us here, only technology can get us out of here. Technology is thought to be "originary" (i.e. is what makes us human and is that with which we have been co-evolving). Recently (or indeed for a while, maybe even from the very "beginning"), technology has been making us "posthuman" (which will eventually lead to our self-inflicted obsolescence, and which we can embrace either in a nostalgic-dystopian or a euphoric-utopian fashion). This makes the "figure" of the posthuman and its projected and heavily disputed and conflicting scenarios eminently political. In fact, there is nothing more political by definition than the power struggle over and the ideologies concerned with the construction of futures.

Others, on the other hand, have been reminding "us" that future is radically unknowable because it is to-come (*à-venir*) – the Derrideans, the Levinasians – a stance which can take religious-theological as well as secular-ethical angles. Nothing is more certain than the arrival of a future – the best or the worst case scenario, or, more likely, none of them, because the future as such is by definition unrepresentable. Anticipating the future is the surest way of stopping it from arriving (which, again, can be good or bad). But how to act, in preparation so to speak, while waiting for an "other" future to happen, or the "Event", living in messianic "hope" (with and/or without messianism)? Especially in times like "ours" – of war, climate change, mass migration, loss of biodiversity, resource depletion and what have you – that seem to demand more and more urgent action in ever growing uncertainty.

In short, we are in the middle of a gigantic "politics of the future", in both genitives of this phrase: a political conflict about futures and how to construct them, and a politics-to-come, a politics "from" the future, looking for a futurepolitics (one word). Apparently we "owe" (something) to the future, but how are we supposed to know what the future wants, what exactly we owe, to whom and why? The only thing that is probably safe to say is that the old and more or less comforting (i.e. humanist, religious, ethical) answers to the futures and their (de)construction no longer wash.

If you're intrigued or indeed worried, maybe exercised by these questions please consider writing for *Word & Text*'s special issue on the topic.

We could imagine the following approaches and angles, but who knows what the future (in this case: you) brings?

- Posthumanism (discourse) and the posthuman (figure) and their futures
- Future pasts and past futures
- Known unknowns, unknown unknowns, unknowables…
- "Techniques" of constructing futurity – "futuring" as a technology (extrapolation, anticipation, fore- or sideshadowing, prefiguration, prolepsis-analepsis…)
- Deconstructions of futurity (but not the future of deconstruction, again, please)
- Politics (singular/plural) of the future, "after" the future and the future of politics
- Religious and secular forms of "paradising"
- Worlds "without" us, worlds "before" us
- Futurisms and neo-futurisms
- Spectulative fiction, science fiction and science fact ("science faction")
- From post- to proto- (pro-activeness, pre-vention, pre-crime, pre-cogs, pre-science…)
- From remediation to premediation (Grusin) and beyond
- …

Send your proposals (title, short abstract, bio) to: stefan.herbrechter_at_as.uni-heidelberg.de