

Call for Papers

Bouncing Forward:

Future Narratives, Scenarios, and Transformations in the Study of Culture

International Graduate Centre for the Study of Culture (GCSC)

Justus Liebig University Giessen

19-23 June 2023

ESSCS and TransHumanities Joint Summer School

Engaging the future is never more pressing than in uncertain times with a sense of no future. Hence concern with the future has become increasingly urgent in our own times, marked as they are by a proliferation of crises and existential challenges. Complex prospects of climate change, global health challenges and inequalities, precarious migration, erosion of trust, and new threats of nuclear war run parallel with sounding out new conjunctures and futures of cultural inquiry (cf. Grossberg 2010, Bachmann-Medick/Kugele/Nünning 2020). Part of the challenge lies in charting and navigating a world of non-linear, multi-agential complexity, uncertainty, and unpredictability. Any number of practitioners, pundits, and disciplines are engaged in developing scenarios and in envisaging transformations to contain “future shocks” (Alvin Toffler) that are already being felt today (cf., e.g., Epstein 2012, Heffernan 2020, Kahane 2012). What do the cultural imagination and the study of culture bring to this debate, especially if we consider the future not only or primarily in terms of techno-industrial promises, but as “cultural fact” (Appadurai 2013)? How can they contribute to assessing and ‘bouncing forward’ – rather than ‘bouncing back’ to some previous status quo, as in conventional resilience-thinking – from a sometimes overwhelming sense of constant change and uncertainty? How do these concerns influence and shape trajectories and transformations within our field of research, i.e. the study of culture, e.g. with regard to objects of study, methodology, (new forms of) interdisciplinarity, or questions of research and/as activism? How have earlier periods and intellectual constellations reacted to uncertain futures, with which visions of dystopia or utopia that we can turn to as historical precedent or ‘histories of the future’? How can we apply forward thinking as a “conceptual exercise to shed light on the present and anticipate political struggles over the future” (Loloum 2020: 307)? Given the existing dissimilarities and inequalities between, e.g., the global South and North, how can we come to terms, conceptually and epistemologically, with the vast differences in the temporality, emergency, and scale of ‘future’ narratives and scenarios?

With a conceptual focus on narrativity, scenarios, and transformations in (the study of) culture, this summer school addresses these questions through a variety of productive lenses, such as

planetary futures, resilience-thinking, “imagineering” (Metelmann/Welzer 2020), or notions of time and risk criticism in order to foster discussion on how we – both as a society and an interdisciplinary field of research – can bounce forward or perhaps move in multiple ways and directions to (re-)shape the future. Since future imaginations via their specific temporality as often as not rely on a certain degree of narrativization, we want to put our attention to the scenarios and transformative potential they yield. Our summer school takes a two-pronged approach: We are interested in 1) how future narratives, scenarios and transformations figure within our various research objects and 2) how the urgent and complex problems sketched above prompt us to rethink, recalibrate and renew our very conceptual and methodological apparatuses in the study of culture.

Topics include, but are not limited to:

- present and past cultural representations of (shocking) futures
- narrative scenarios and possible future worlds in literature and culture
- speculative fiction, utopia/dystopia and other genres of future transformations
- resilience as ‘bouncing forward’ rather than ‘bouncing back’
- “Imagineering” culture and cultural futures
- cultural narratives of slow violence and “slow hope” (Mauch 2019)
- economic, technological and social transformations
- scenarios and transformations at different scales, individual to planetary
- futures of planetary thinking and space
- the role of the non-human and more-than-human in future narratives and scenarios
- future histories and histories of the future
- new interdisciplinary conjunctures, “cultural studies in the future tense”; futures of the study of culture
- cultural notions and conceptualizations of futures (e.g., futurity, “possible vs. probable futures”)
- cultural aesthetics and politics of futures (e.g. queer futures, Afrofuturism etc.)

The Summer School will feature keynote lectures and master-classes/workshops by senior scholars, as well as panels in which PhD candidates and other younger researchers present their papers. Abstracts (max. 300 words) with a short bio (max. 150 words) should be submitted to bouncingforward@gcsc.uni-giessen.de by 10 February 2023. You will be informed whether your contribution has been accepted by 1 March 2023. Papers will be circulated before the conference and have to be submitted, in full (max. 4,000 words), by 15 May 2023. Internationally esteemed scholars working on related questions have been requested and will be announced as keynote speakers on our [conference website](#) in the coming weeks.

The European Summer School in Cultural Studies (ESSCS) is a network-based seminar for interdisciplinary research training in the fields of art and culture. The network comprises the University of Amsterdam, Leiden University, the University of Copenhagen, the University of

Giessen, Goldsmiths University, the Université de Paris VIII, the Lisbon Consortium and the University of Trondheim.

TransHumanities is a platform for dialogue between scientific cultures, between science and art, theory and practice, academia, and society. Through annual summer schools at the partner locations, TransHumanities serves to establish and cultivate discourses, initiatives and ideas that transcend institutional, socio-cultural, regional, linguistic, and disciplinary barriers. It was founded at the Graduate School of the Arts and Humanities (GSAH) at the University of Bern, in collaboration with the GCSC at JLU Giessen .

This summer school is devised in close collaboration with The Lisbon Consortium at Universidade Católica Portuguesa. ESSCS 2023 “Bouncing Forward” and the XIII Lisbon Summer School for the Study of Culture 2023 on the topic “Future/Futures” are intended as complementary summer schools investigating different elements of a common concern.

Works Cited:

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- Heffernan, Margaret. 2020. *Uncharted. How to Map the Future Together*, Simon & Schuster.
- Kahane, Adam. 2012. *Transformative Scenario Planning: Working Together to Change the Future*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.
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- Toffler, Alvin. 1970. *Future Shock*. New York: Random House.

Suggested Reading (a comprehensive reader will be available in preparation of the summer school):

- Adelson, Leslie A. 2017. *Cosmic Miniatures and the Future Sense: Alexander Kluge's 21st Century Literary Experiments in German Culture and Narrative Form*. Berlin: De Gruyter.
- Chandler, David/Julian Reid. 2016. *The Neoliberal Subject: Resilience, Adaptation and Vulnerability*. London: Rowman & Littlefield.
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- Fraile-Marcos, Ana María (ed), *Glocal Narratives of Resilience*. New York: Routledge.
- Friedman, Thomas L. 2010. *Ethical Compass: Coming of Age in the 21st Century*, New Haven: Yale University Press.
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- Fry, Hannah. 2018. *Hello World: How to Be Human in The Age of The Machine*, London: Doubleday.
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- Latour, Bruno. 2018. *Down to Earth: Politics in the New Climatic Regime*, England: Polity Press.
- Mazzucato, Mariana. 2021. *Mission Economy. A Moonshot Guide to Changing Capitalism*, London: Allen Lane.
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- May, Andrew. 2018. "Future Shock." In: *Rockets and Ray Guns: The Sci-Fi Science of the Cold War*. Science and Fiction. Springer, Cham. 195-214.
- McGonigal, Jane. 2022. *Imaginable: How to See the Future Coming and Feel Ready for Anything – Even Things that Seem Impossible Today*. New York: Spiegel & Grau.
- Meiner, Carsten/Kristin Veel. 2012. *The Cultural Life of Catastrophes and Crises*. Berlin/New York: De Gruyter.
- Mozorov, Evgeny. 2011. *The Net Delusion: How to Not Liberate the World*, London: Allen Lane.
- Nello, Oriol/Renata Mele (eds.) 2016. *Cities in the 21st Century*, New York: Routledge.
- Nixon, Rob. 2011. *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. Cambridge/London: Harvard UP.
- Nünning, Ansgar/Kai Marcel Sicks. 2012. *Turning Points: concepts and narratives of change in literature and other media*. Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter.
- Potts, John. 2018. "Futurism, Futurology, Future Shock, Climate Change: Visions of the Future from 1909 to the Present." In: *PORTAL Journal of Multidisciplinary International Studies*. 15:1/2. 99-116.
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