Summary

Anthropology of the Future: Conflict Scenarios in Times of Upheaval

This special issue of *NLO* explores how cultures imagine and experience the future at moments when established temporal frameworks are breaking down. It focuses on the erosion of the modern idea of the future as a predictable horizon of progress and on the emergence of multiple, competing futures shaped by different social groups, institutions, and cultural practices. Scholars across different fields of humanities consider eschatological, mythological, evolutionary, and rupture-oriented models, as well as utopian, dystopian, fragmented, and absent futures. A central concern of the issue is the relationship between future and past: rather than treating the future as something determined by the present, the contributors examine how rethinking the past can open alternative possibilities for what is to come.

In his «The Vanished Horizon: On the Temporality of the Present» **Alexei Yurchak** examines the disappearance of a common temporal horizon that could orient collective life. Comparing the late Soviet period with the present, he argues that the former combined a seemingly endless present with an implicit common horizon of the future, sustained by social institutions even after belief in communism had faded. Today, by contrast, competing images of the future fragment attention without producing shared orientation. This fragmentation generates temporal disorientation and inequality and makes major historical ruptures difficult to anticipate. Yurchak argues that restoring a common horizon requires open-ended, inclusive, durable, and intergenerational institutions rather than ideological consensus.

Book as an Event:

Historians about the future. Riga: *Überbau*. 2026.

The book discussion includes critical essays by **Konstantin Mitroshenkov**, **Petr Safronov**, **Anatoly Korchinsky**, and **Igor Kobylin**, as well as preprints of the articles from the discussed collection by **Jérôme Baschet** and **Antonis Liakos**.

Nostalgia About the Future

The article «When Everything was no More, It Turned out to be Forever. The Soviet Past: Between Antiquity and Renaissance» by **Ilya Kalinin** traces the dynamics of the forms and modalities through which late Soviet and post-Soviet cultures engaged with the Soviet symbolic universe. How were distances created and gaps bridged between the subjects of these cultures and the Soviet

as a horizon of various kinds of identification (critical and parodic, nostalgic and restorationist, political and commercial)? How did the specific mode of deconstruction of the Soviet turn out to be a form of its museification? How did the commercial and postmodernist play on nostalgic sentiment create the technique for its subsequent political appropriation? The responses to these inquiries are articulated within the context of a theoretical contemplation on parody and nostalgia as two manifestations of secondary nature, in addition to a critical examination of the authoritative dichotomy between restorative and reflective nostalgia as proposed by Svetlana Boym.

New Horizons of the Future

Timur Atnashev in his «Reflecting on Defeat: Political Philosophy as a Social Institution of Sublimation» introduces the concept of sublimation (in the alchemical, not the Freudian, sense) — the mechanism through which political philosophy, working as a social institution of reflexive adaptation to macrohistorical shifts, produces new political subjects and orders. The article describes the four dimensions of the mechanism and its modes of incompleteness: deconstruction without prototyping, utopianism, and storage without activation.

Models of Temporal Imagination

The paper «Not by Future Alone: History as the Governance of the Possible» by **Andrey Oleynikov** reconsiders the category of the possible in contemporary theory of history. It argues that modern historical thought identified the possible with the future, linking it to the idea of progress and expectations of social change. The crisis of this model, however, reveals that the possible cannot be reduced to the future alone and is also connected to the past, which retains its incompleteness, contingency, and hidden alternatives. From this perspective, history appears not as a description of irreversible facts, but as a practice of engaging with the historically possible, uncovering unrealized potentials of the past in the present.

Central to many theorizations of temporality and «a widespread loss of the future» has been a consideration of the transformations of capitalism as it has taken on new, increasingly global forms and achieved new levels of penetration into the lifeworld and abstraction in the realm of finance, states **Kevin M.F. Platt** in his «No Future: History, or the Gift of Alterity». Strikingly, although these transformations took place in parallel to the collapse and disappearance of the socialist world, few of these theorizations consider closely the effects of that vanishing as significant for concurrent shifts in temporality. The present article takes up this undertheorized topic, demonstrating not only that competition with state socialist regimes of history and temporality was critical to the maintenance of liberal capitalist ones, but that the structure of social value in the liberal capitalist world was itself dependent on the existence of the alternative social values of the socialist world.

The article «Without Telos: New Directions in the Anthropology of the Future» by **Rusana Novikova** surveys the anthropology of the future, a relatively

recent but rapidly expanding field that emerged in response to anthropology's longstanding focus on the past and the present. It pays particular attention to approaches that treat the future as an integral dimension of social action in the present, whether through expectation, imagination, anticipation, hope, or speculation. The article also highlights key tensions within this body of scholarship, in particular, between approaches that view the future primarily as shaped by structural inequality and those that treat it as a productive force, capable of reconfiguring both past and present.

Archaeologies of the Future

The survey on rereading Fredric Jameson includes responses by **Konstantin Mitroshenkov**, **Mari Jarris**, **Anna Nizhnik**, **Elena Petrovskaya**, **Artem Serebryakov** and **Nikolas Braun**.

Utopia — Dystopia — Modernity

In the «Perpetual Interwar» by **Paul Saint-Amour** author reads Thomas Pynchon's «Gravity's Rainbow» as a novelistic antecedent to his book. Adapting the formal strategies of «Ulysses» and its genre-mates to the frames of colonial genocide, species extinction, area bombing, and nuclear war, Pynchon's novel surfaces what is often latent in its precursors: the links between metropolitan and colonial violence, the relationship between total war and totalizing form, and the apprehension, well before 1945, of a traumatizing anticipation we still associate almost exclusively with the post-Hiroshima era.

Recent scholarship has theorized literature's relationship to the future as a site for transformation and an escape from the calamities of the past, begins Andrew **Fleshman** his piece «In the Shadow of Future Pasts: Futurability, Cruel Optimism, and Ambivalent Enchantment». Author elaborates on Franco Berardi's notion of «futurability» as a composite term for the possibilities inherent to a state of affairs, potencies as the agencies that can actualize particular possibilities, and powers as the constraints placed on which possibilities are encouraged or allowed to be actualized. He follows this with an articulation of Lauren Berlant's idea of «cruel optimism» understood as a desire for something that is thought to improve one's life, but which ultimately impedes such improvement and links this to a discussion of recent debates on the value of «enchantment» as an experiential quality, arguing for it as a kind of field that links the virtual characteristics of futurability to the warnings of cruel optimism through desire: a salutary mode of enchantment can shape desires and optimistic attachments into a form mappable by futurability.

Lolita Agamalova's paper «Modern, Language Poetry and Distillation of Utopia» examines the crisis and radical transformation of the concept of «utopia» at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries, putting forward the hypothesis that utopia has been «distilled» — a process whose origins can be traced back to Charles Fourier's utopian work, which reached its apogee in the 1970s in response to the crisis of Marxist teleology. This transformed the concept of utopia into something pure, or even empty.

During this process, a new hidden utopian discourse takes shape, understood as a field of meanings organised around the issue of the possible and its modalities in semantics and logic: the utopian proves to be irreducible, yet diffuse and politically powerless.

Culture of the Future. The Future of Culture.

Our questionnaire on the future studies in humanities include short essays by **Irina Sandomirskaya**, **Kirill Kobrin**, **Georgii Mamedov**, **Artemii Magun** and **Daniil Liederman**.

Artistic Practices: Variations on the «Future»

Literature and the Choice of Future

The article «Telling and Projecting. Anticipation of the Future in Romantic Narrative» by **Sergey Zenkin** examines several works of Romantic literature (particularly Charles Baudelaire's prose poem «La Fausse monnaie») describing a situation of anticipating the future, in which both the characters and the author himself participate. The future is interpreted in those works as a personal destiny, as winning an economic game, as receiving and reading a message sent by the poet. In contrast to fatalistic views and attempts of rational planning of the future, Romantic writers see the latter not as an object of prophecy, knowledge, and possession, but as a field of risky project, anticipating some ideas of 20th-century existential philosophy

Ilya Kukulin in the article «Satirical Poetry as Philosophy of History: The Emergence of the "Observer of History" in Nineteenth-Century Russian Culture» examines the role of Russian satirical poetry of the 1840s–1860s in shaping historiographical narratives in Russian culture. Focusing on Vasily Zhukovsky's poem «The Four Sons of France», Karl Marx's «The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte», and works by Aleksei K. Tolstoy, the study analyzes the emergence of the figure of the ironical «observer of history,» simultaneously involved in historical events and distanced from them. It argues that the satirical mode enabled authors to conceptualize history as repetition or degeneration and contributed to narratives that restrict the imagination of the future.

The essay «Figures of the Future in Nikolay Chernyshevsky's Novel "What Is to Be Done?"» by **Anatoly Korchinsky** proposes a hypothesis that Nikolay Chernyshevsky's novel «What Is to Be Done?» represents a model for an alternative understanding of the modern temporal-historical regime. This alternative type of historicity does not deny the dominant model of historicism («developmental historicism»), but carries out a radical reassembly of the temporal order itself from within. Specifically, it reconfigures the relations between past, present, and future; being and becoming; necessity and contingency; actuality and virtuality (possibility); history and utopia.

The hermeneutic deconstruction of Evgeny Schwartz's fairytale play «The Snow Queen», proposed by **Oleg Gorelov** in his «Evgeny Schwartz's Fairytale Play "The Snow Queen" as a Laboratory of

Political Imagination» allows us to approach the text as an artistic laboratory of political imagination, in which the fairy tale becomes a form for reflections on the relationships between myth, power, and human life, as well as a space that simultaneously recalls eternal narrative patterns and develops a reflexive metaposition for transforming the future. The article examines the contradictory interrelation of politico-anthropological models — authoritarian-technocratic (the Snow Queen), liberal-civilizational (the Prince and the Princess), anarcho-revolutionary (the Little Robber Girl), and organically humanistic (Gerda) — which are integrated at the meta-level of narrative and theatrical action (the Storyteller).

Natalia Grinina's article «Forms of Commonality in a Dissolving State: Reading Solzhenitsyn Through the Prism of Stanely Cavell and Ordinary Language Philosophy» suggests a re-reading of the famous essay by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn «Repentance and Self-Limitation in the life of nations» from the collected volume «From Under the Rubble» (1974). By working with philosophical categories developed by Stanley Cavell, this paper attempts to challenge the usual interpretation of Solzhenitsyn's agenda as «nationalist» and suggests a possibility for a democratic interpretation. The primary focus of analysis will be the similar usages of the pronoun «we» and the speaking from the perspective of an imaginary community in both Cavell and Solzhenitsyn, which in turns invites to revisit what is «national» and what is «universal» in thinking about political collectives.

Creative Technofantasies

The essay «An Ordinary Month, or the Unborn Future in an Unborn Movie» by **Igor Kobylin** analyzes the historical temporality of a late Soviet production drama. Using the film «An Ordinary Month» (1976), whose plot focuses on the cybernetic reform of management at an instrument-making plant, it demonstrates one of the genre's main paradoxes — the contradiction between the film's content and visual «texture». At the level of content, production movie always speaks of the «future», «development», «acceleration», and even «revolutionary renewal» (or at least its necessity). However, at the level of the film's «dim» «matter» and the a-temporal atmosphere of boredom that envelops it, this ideologically motivated content is refuted.

The article «From Dystopia to Utopia: Aldous Huxley as an Architect of the Future» by **Dmitry Simanovsky** explores the images of the future in the works of Aldous Huxley and covers the period from the publication of his dystopian novel «Brave New World» (1932) to the release of his final utopia «Island» (1962). The author traces the development of Huxley's thought, the corresponding changes to the images of the future, and the influence these images have had in shaping the intellectual and political landscapes.

One of the keys to understanding the distinctive nature of Soviet sci-fi films — which has not yet been fully utilized by researchers — lies in «framework» narrative and characters, voice-overs, expert commentary, performative constructs, and so on, as claims **Tatiana Dashkova** in her essay «Justifying the Future: Narrative Frameworks in Soviet Space Science Fiction Cinema». Through the prism of these elements, she examines the development of Soviet sci-fi cinema from the late 1950s to the early 1980s,

revealing its emotional foundations. This kind of analysis demonstrates that Soviet sci-fi cinema was not only a herald of space enthusiasm, but also sought ways to rein in its utopian impulse.

The article «The World We Lost: Dystopias of a Future Gone Wrong» by **Oksana Bulgakowa** focuses on cinematic dystopias, in which the future of humanity unfolds according to a catastrophic scenario. Through depictions of ruined cities, survival in the wake of the apocalypse, and total control, cinema explores contemporary fears relating to the consequences of technological, environmental, and social crises. It asks: Does humanity stand any chance of preserving its humanity in a postapocalyptic world? Films depicting a catastrophic future, produced in the US, Europe, Australia and Asia, present worlds that have come about as a result of present-day mistakes.

The Future and Limits of the Human

The article «Who Will Care for Us Tomorrow? Algorithms, Care, and Moral Significance» by **Petr Safronov** investigates how users come to attribute moral significance to algorithmic agents. When people regularly entrust AI with emotional support and moral judgement, the system's reliability begins to register as sufficient grounds for moral recognition. This happens regardless of whether the agent actually «feels» anything. Drawing on the *Replika* case study, research on user disempowerment, and AI safety data, the article shows that this is not a perceptual error but a stable effect that emerges through sustained engagement with algorithmic systems.

The algorithmic and computational nature of contemporary models of Artificial Intelligence (AI) raises doubts about applying traditional humanities and social science methodologies — typically used to analyze human actions and artifacts — to AI-generated texts, says **Daniil Aronson** in his «The Affective Dynamics of Human-Machine Dialogues». This article addresses this challenge by drawing on semiotics and affect theory. By distinguishing between external scriptors (algorithms) and intratextual personae (narrative entities), he analyzes a human-AI dialogue as a sign system endowed with its own affective agency.

The special issue features works by contemporary artists **Anna Andrzhievskaya**, **Alexandra Gart**, **Andrey Kuzkin**, **Denis Patrakeev**, **Ilya Fedorov-Fedotov**, **Sasha Kokacheva**, and **Fyodor Hiroshige**, courtesy of *Anna Nova Gallery*.

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