

HOW TO FUTURE NOW?





REFLECTIVE

JOURNEYING

In June and July 2022, twenty-two researchers and professional services staff came together with artist Paul Hurley to travel into the future. We walked in silence, talked on trains, chatted on buses, took notes and drew maps of space and time. We reflected on the futures and the ethics that we are engaged with.

This zine is a document and an invitation for you to do the same.

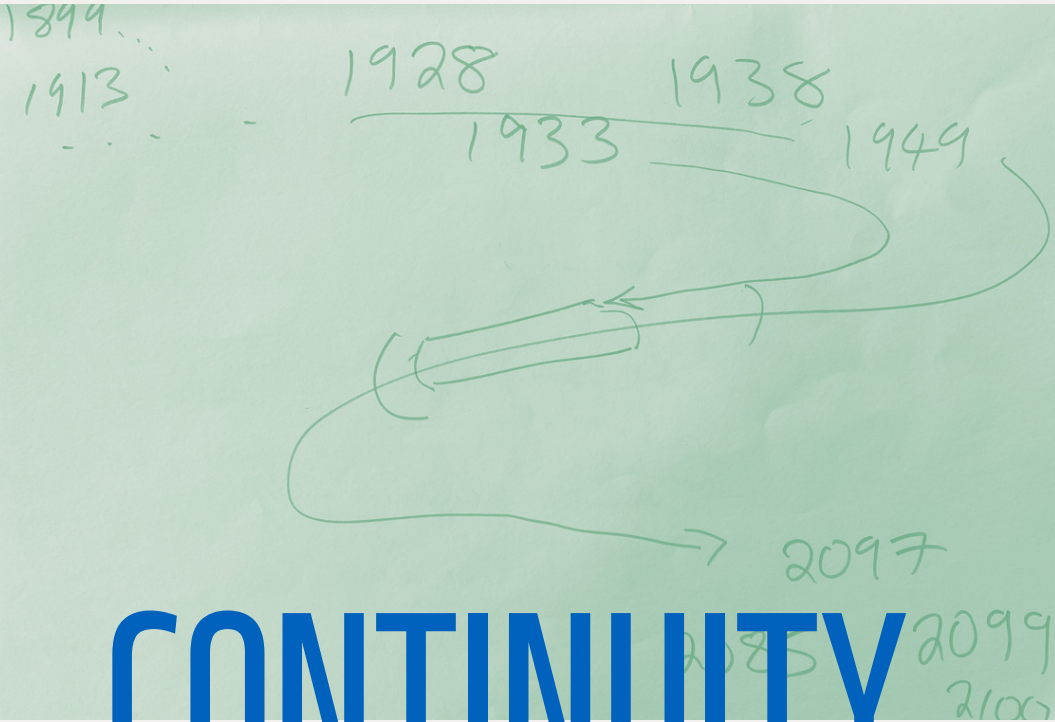
Our lives are connected and dissected by space and time. The landscapes we are a part of hold can back the future or the past, or propel us towards it.

What scales of future are you engaging with? Global catastrophe? Household challenges? The feelings in our bodies? Try to locate a difference.

Perhaps you're preparing for crisis, or working towards an ideal future. Utopia and dystopia have been conceived spatially and temporally – a parallel *not-here-now*, and a projected *here-then*. How does this play out globally, as well as temporally?

We must consider the terrain on which we think about futures. We must pay attention to the *terroir* that flavours them and to the potential it might bring.





CONTINUITY AND DIFFERENCE

EXERCISE 1:

You may undertake this alone or with a friend or colleague.

Begin by thinking of the oldest person you know. Work out (roughly) the year they were born. Then think of the youngest person you know, and use average life expectancy (81.65 years in UK), to work out when they might live until.

Plotting these years on a timeline connects us to living people across centuries. The experience of continuity, difference and change might help us think or feel temporalities more concretely.

END

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EXERCISE 2:

You may undertake this alone or with a friend or colleague.

Travel to somewhere unfamiliar. The place is less important than the method. If you can, travel by train or bus. Notice who travels there too.

2a:

On arrival, walk in silence for 15–30mins. In a notebook, document the things you notice – sights, sounds, smells, feelings, encounters. Draw maps, take photographs.



Notice the times you travel through – past futures, ecological futures, economic futures, personal futures, technological futures, future pasts.

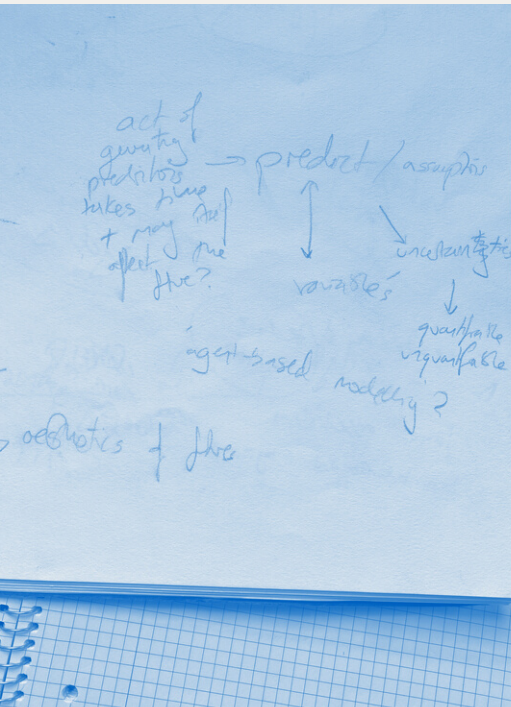
2b:

Take a train or bus to a different location – industrial, urban, coastal, rural. How are we, as researchers and as citizens, engaging with futures here? Document as before, or maybe differently this time.

Are we creating, imagining, resisting, predicting, changing, ignoring? Whose futures are we engaged with and whose are we overlooking?

Reflect on your notes – alone or with your fellow traveller. Maybe have some cake while you do so. How has the course of your journey changed?

END



WE NOTICED



Ships, smoke, bleach, signs, flowers, dog shit, houses, gambling shops, benches, lorries, men, cafes, cement works, asbestos removal, trees, COVID-19 litter, electric cars, social housing, gardens, wealth, horsetail, seafood processing, noise, brambles, motorbikes, bunting, funfair, community rail noticeboard, flood defences, food bank, puppy training, flotsam, fag ends, bridges, trailer park, birdsong, baby boomers, air pollution, electric scooters, job adverts, Victorian houses, school, park, graffiti, mosques, quiet people, funeral services, locked toilets, broadband engineers, learner drivers, poppies, shipping containers, heat of the sun, orchards, playground, chapel, bumper sticker, bees, rocks.

GO BEYOND YOUR COMFORT ZONE





WHERE WE

FIND OURSELVES

We found ourselves in the middle of oceans of uncertainty. We noticed that our work (via funders, employers, end users) sometimes demands assumptions of permanence, stability, and continuity. Where, in such times, do we find our own comfort zones? How do we know when to dwell in them and when not to?

When you think about your work and the futures that it is a part of, are you predicting? resisting? changing? aligning? directing? *What* are you predicting? resisting? changing? aligning? directing?

What is the relationship between wildness and control, in your life and in your work? What effect might that have on your ethical engagements with other people and worlds, now and in future times?

On our walks we talked about research ethics as safeguarding, as a tool, as a relationship, as a space of play. We considered what shape research ethics might be – a two way line? a circle? a solid or a liquid?

We wondered what research ethics would look like if they were a person, if they were iterative and reflective. We spoke about (dis)trusting the assumed ethics of the researcher or the university.







We shared some things of our ethical relationships with the university, and speculated on personal and professional futures that are (always) already uncertain. We reflected on (dis)loyalty, on precarity, and on the narratives that shape our days and our years.

As well as the bigger futures that we might be creating for the world, we talked about the futures we are creating for the individuals that we work with – our colleagues, our students, our research participants.

Futuring is inherently ethical. It reveals our responsibilities to other people and to other times and places, be they one year or 100,000 years away.

We imagined what our lives would look like if we tried to find, nurture and embed ethical practice in our daily lives. Would our daily lives look different? Would yours?

Some of us are sensing possible futures that we might be heading towards, others are preparing us for those changes. Diverge, converge.





NOTE TO SELF

EXERCISE 3:

You are invited to write a letter to your future self.

The conditions are important:

- You will need a pen, paper and an envelope, preferably one that is pleasing to your eye and touch. If you don't have one to hand, you could find your way to a stationery shop and come back to the activity at a later date.
- Find a place that's free of unnecessary distractions. This might not be your usual desk. It might be somewhere outside. It might be somewhere quiet or with music. Remember that you can do what you want.
- Make time to write your letter – half an hour at least.

When you are ready to write:

- Choose the year of your future self that you wish to address (e.g. "To Paul, 11th August 2037"). The date is up to you. It might coincide with a personal or professional milestone, or it might be an arbitrary number such as two, five, ten years away.
- What you include in the letter is also up to you. You might write about current issues that you wish to remember; you might reflect on what might be pertinent to your future self's life and work; you might have questions about what's changed and what hasn't; you might want to offer congratulations or commiserations on events of the intervening years.
- Remember to address yourself as "you" - this is a letter rather than a diary entry.

When you have written your letter, seal it in an envelope with a kiss and with the date on which to open it. If you use an electronic calendar, you could set a reminder, which may or may not work in the future. We don't really know what will happen.

END



INFORMATION



With warm thanks to all of the time travellers for their generous and incisive participation: Malu Villela; Hannah Berg; Vanessa Hanschke; Tom Allport; Helen Manchester; Tot Foster; Ola Michael; Jasmina Stevanov; Robbie Mackenzie; Viv Kuh; Steve Bullock; Jessie Hamill Stewart; Mari-Rose Kennedy; Remco Peters; Liam McKervey; Debbie Nicol; Nina di Cara; Tom Gorochowski; Giovanni Biglino. The future is yours.

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