

Future Making: Imagining and Crafting Futures in a Diverse World

Why a Special Issue on Future Making?

Future making—broadly defined as the work of imagining and crafting futures—is carried out across a wide range of practices and areas of activity. It can be retraced, for instance, in professional practices such as designing new products, services, or ventures; leading and implementing strategic change; or managing a project-based organization. It also peeks into more mundane, but nonetheless important practices, such as raising children, planning for retirement, or engaging in a community project. Across such areas of activity, future makers—be they individuals, communities, or organizations—give shape to an imagined future by engaging socially and materially with the world at hand. As they work in and through time, future makers commit to a course of action that will alter a state of things in the world—often with expected as well as unexpected consequences.

Although future making is widely practiced and inherent to many areas of activity, this concept has entered scholarly debates only in recent years. Still, future making is spreading rapidly across disciplines such as design, organization, and future studies. Following publication of Susan Yelavich and Barbara Adams' seminal book *Design as Future-Making*,¹ the concept has become increasingly discussed from the perspectives of design anthropology.² The works of Tony Fry,³ Arturo Escobar,⁴ Cameron Tonkinwise,⁵ and Anne-Marie Willis,⁶ among others, offer further theoretical traction for design research on imagining and crafting futures. Here, future making marks a departure from speculative design:⁷ it is concerned not so much with provoking reactions by suggesting alternative state of beings, but with realizing a desired state of things.

- 1 Susan Yelavich and Barbara Adams, eds., *Design as Future-Making* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014). See also Pelle Ehn et al., eds., *Making Futures: Marginal Notes on Innovation, Design, and Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2014).
- 2 Yoko Akama et al., *Uncertainty and Possibility: New Approaches to Future Making in Design Anthropology* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018); Rachel Charlotte Smith et al., eds., *Design Anthropological Futures* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016).
- 3 Tony Fry, *Design Futuring: Sustainability, Ethics and New Practice* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2009).
- 4 Arturo Escobar, *Designs for the Pluriverse: Radical Interdependence, Autonomy, and the Making of Worlds* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018).
- 5 Cameron Tonkinwise, "Design for Transitions—from and to what?," *Design Philosophy Papers* 13, no. 1 (2015): 85–92, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14487136.2015.1085686>.
- 6 Anne-Marie Willis, "Ontological Designing," *Design Philosophy Papers* 4, no. 2 (2006): 69–92, <https://doi.org/10.2752/144871306X13966268131514>.
- 7 Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby, *Speculative Everything: Design, Fiction, and Social Dreaming* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013).

- 8 Theodore R. Schatzki et al., eds., *The Practice Turn in Contemporary Theory* (London: Routledge, 2001).
- 9 Matthias Wenzel et al., "Future and Organization Studies: On the Rediscovery of a Problematic Temporal Category in Organizations," *Organization Studies* 41, no. 10 (2020): 1441–55, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840620912977>.
- 10 Christopher Wickert, "What Is the Future of Future Making in Management Research?," *Journal of Management Studies* 62, no. 6 (2025): 2417–25, <https://doi.org/10.1111/joms.13230>.
- 11 Matthias Wenzel et al., "Future Making: Towards a Practice Perspective," *Journal of Management Studies* 62, no. 6 (2025): 2426–51, <https://doi.org/10.1111/joms.13222>.
- 12 Alice Comi et al., "Future Making as Emancipatory Inquiry: A Value-Based Exploration of Desirable Futures," *Journal of Management Studies* 62, no. 6 (2025): 2467–81, <https://doi.org/10.1111/joms.13227>.
- 13 Michael Shamiyeh, ed., *Practices of Futurecasting: Ways of Sharing Imagined Tomorrows* (Basel, Switzerland: Birkhäuser, 2025).
- 14 Riel Miller, ed., *Transforming the Future: Anticipation in the 21st Century* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2018), <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000264644>.
- 15 See for example Frédéric Lesage, Gillian Russell, and Samein Shamsheer, in this special issue.
- 16 For a review, see Lisa Suckert, "Back to the Future. Sociological Perspectives on Expectations, Aspirations and Imagined Futures," *European Journal of Sociology* 63, no. 3 (2022): 393–428, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003975622000339>; See also Barbara Adam and Chris Groves, *Future Matters: Action, Knowledge, Ethics* (Leiden, NL: Brill, 2007), https://books.google.fi/books?id=4_jvCQAQBAJ.
- 17 Elena Esposito, "Can We Use the Open Future? Preparedness and Innovation in Times of Self-Generated Uncertainty," *European Journal of Social Theory* 27, no. 2 (2024): 209–24, <https://doi.org/10.1177/13684310231224546>.
- 18 Mustafa Emirbayer and Ann Mische, "What Is Agency?," *American Journal of Sociology* 103, no. 4 (1998): 962–1023, <https://doi.org/10.1086/231294>; Richard Tutton, "Wicked Futures: Meaning, Matter and the Sociology of the Future," *Sociological Review* 65, no. 3 (2017): 478–92, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-954X.12443>; Jens Beckert, "The Firm as an Engine of Imagination: Organizational Prospection and the Making of Economic Futures," *Organization Theory* 2, no. 2 (2021): 1–21, <https://doi.org/10.1177/26317877211005773>.

At the same time, future making is attracting attention in organization studies, following the turn to practice theories⁸ and the rediscovery of the future as a "problematic temporal category in organizations."⁹ From this perspective, future making has been widely discussed as an embodied, situated, and relational practice. Recent debates focus on whether a theory of future making should be value-free or value-driven.¹⁰ A value-free perspective is conducive to the exploration of a wide range of practices oriented toward the future,¹¹ whereas a value-driven perspective aims to sustain the emergence of more equitable, inclusive, and sustainable futures.¹²

Further efforts seek to position future making in relation to the vast body of knowledge on future studies and anticipatory techniques, discussing similarities and differences in the underlying assumptions about the future and resulting attempts to bring about change.¹³ Here, the works of futurists such as Riel Miller¹⁴ lay the foundations for future making research that connects to and reflects on future studies; with current debates focusing, for instance, on pedagogical approaches to futures literacy, developing participatory approaches to futuring, and designing interventions to trigger reflection on futures.¹⁵ Relevant to design, organization, and future studies, current research in the "sociology of imagined futures"¹⁶ provides further insight for exploring the types of futures at stake (e.g., open vs. closed)¹⁷ and the roles of agency, matter, and organizations as instruments of imagination and performativity in future making.¹⁸

While future making is developing into a rapidly emerging field of research, theoretical discourse is largely conducted in isolation from other disciplines. Furthermore, cultural differences related to the various fields of activity (e.g., design and management) and regions of the world (e.g., the Global North and South) where future making is practiced sometimes receive only marginal attention. This special issue is an attempt—albeit modest and non-exhaustive—to discuss future making within and across disciplines, cultures, and regions, and to enrich its understanding for scholars and practitioners of design and innovation, as well as organization and management.

She Ji is especially suitable for this purpose. It is a trans-disciplinary journal in design, economics, and innovation, owned by a public university in Mainland China and advised by a board composed of internationally renowned scholars. To edit this special issue, we—Alice Comi, Michael Shamiyeh, and Luigi Mosca—pooled our diverse academic and professional experiences from different geographical regions (China, Europe, and the USA). Owing to our varied backgrounds in design, organization, and future studies, we were able to attract and evaluate contributions from across these diverse disciplines, and to explore lines of inquiry that could enrich our understanding of future making.

The Editorial Process

Following the call for papers published in April 2024 and the closing of submissions in December 2024, we received a total of 60 manuscripts in

the areas of design, organization, and future studies. The quality and volume of submissions reflect a growing desire, among scholars and practitioners, to transcend disciplinary silos and explore how futures are imagined and crafted in a diverse world. The editorial process brought its own challenges. As guest editors, we discussed together each submission, navigating different vocabularies, evaluation criteria, and disciplinary traditions. Throughout this process, we were supported by a pool of 46 expert reviewers and received dedicated guidance from *She Ji*'s co-editor-in-chief Jin Ma.

We established novelty and insight as the prime criteria for assessing contributions across diverse disciplines, asking ourselves which novel insights we gathered from each submission, and how these novel insights advance current understandings of future making. We strove to appreciate the various submissions according to the conventions, traditions, and sensitivities of the diverse disciplines in which they were crafted. While refraining from methodological over-sophistication, we valued general criteria of clarity and transparency in reporting procedures for collecting data and arriving at findings. As we invited revisions and resubmissions of selected articles, we encouraged authors to follow the developmental comments of reviewers and strengthen their theoretical and/or empirical contributions, without however suppressing the freshness of their own intuitions, voices, and styles. This process unfolded through multiple iterations and entailed considerable engagement on the part of authors, editors, and reviewers.

The editorial process led to the selection of six research articles for inclusion in this special issue. These articles advance understandings of future making, reflecting the breadth and richness of current research on this topic, and its diverse theoretical and methodological foundations. While engaging in editorial work for this special issue, we also sought to discuss future making with world-class scholars in design, organization, and future studies. In addition to the research articles that we selected and edited, this special issue includes an interview with Don Norman on "Design, Business, and What It Takes to Make the Future," conducted by Michael Shamiyeh.

Before publication, we invited the authors to discuss their contributions in an International Symposium on Future Making, which we held at Tongji University in November 2025 ([Figure 1](#)).

Although each article in this special issue offers a unique perspective, they collectively demonstrate how future making is best understood as a relational, situated, materially grounded, and socially transformative practice. They also reveal a concern for enabling democratic participation in future making, empowering communities to make desirable futures, and unleashing imagination through sensorial engagement with materials and spaces. Through this collection of articles, the special issue seeks to open dialogue across disciplines, and to create a space for learning from across different perspectives on future making. In the next section, we take a closer look at the articles in this issue.



Figure 1
A panel discussion during the International Symposium on Future Making (Shanghai, November 6–7, 2025). Image courtesy of Alice Comi.

The Special Issue at a Glance

This special issue includes six research articles and one interview article. The first article, by Gijs van Leeuwen, Abhigyan Singh, Bregje van Eekelen, and David Keyson, approaches future making from the perspective of design anthropology. Van Leeuwen and colleagues use a local energy transition project in Amsterdam to illustrate their *ontological approach* to future making. This is aimed at transforming the ontological conditions that prevent the making of shared futures, through local action based on understanding the future orientations of diverse participants and the immediate tensions that arise in their negotiation. The second article in this special issue, by Marysol Ortega Pallanez, shares a similar emphasis on modest, yet transformative acts. Drawing on participatory data from women's embroidery circles in Hermosillo, Mexico, Ortega Pallanez challenges dominant futuring methodologies that exclude marginalized communities, and instead introduces *conviviality* as a relational, affective, and situated mode of future making that entails transforming exclusionary conditions.

The next article — by Alessandra Migliore and Chiara Tagliaro — explores the spatial dimension of future making, through a qualitative, longitudinal

- 19 Coincidentally, this interview is published at a time when Don Norman — who has made a lifelong contribution to designing for a better world — is turning 90. With publication of this interview, we intend to also pay homage to a leading figure, whose contributions have spanned multiple disciplines and worlds.

case study of an Italian company redesigning its headquarters. Drawing on the spatial turn in organization studies, Migliore and Tagliaro show how day-to-day, recursive experiences of organizational space shape, and are shaped by, imagined futures of work and workspace. Relatedly, the fourth article in this special issue, by Ilaria Durante, Claudio Dell'Era, and Stefano Magistretti, explores how design artifacts, such as visual templates, can support practitioners in crafting imagined futures through the interplay of discourse and materiality. Durante and co-authors foreground the crucial role of emotions in future making, showing how the visual representation of an imagined future sparks an emotional awakening, which leads participants to engage in discussion about its plausibility and desirability.

In the next article, Frédérik Lesage, Gillian Russell, and Samein Shamsher deal with democratizing practices of future making. Adopting a pedagogical perspective, they point out the limitations of the cognitivist and linguistic focus of futures literacy. Instead, they draw on design and organization studies to develop a pedagogical framework based on the concept of *scaffolding*. This pedagogical framework widens access to practices of future making by shifting the emphasis from predictive expertise to sociomaterial learning. The sixth article in this issue, by Samuel Yu, is concerned with supporting the imagination and realization of more desirable futures. Specifically, Yu seeks to mitigate defuturing — a condition in which desirable futures are constrained or precluded by established trajectories of unsustainable, industrial design practices. Drawing on transition design and ontological design, Yu proposes a typology of *redirective tactics* that counter defuturing trajectories by challenging additive, market-driven models of innovation.

Together, the research articles in this special issue help build a trans-disciplinary understanding of future making as a practice grounded in democratic participation, material engagement, and social transformation. They show how futures are not merely imagined but also enacted — emotionally, materially, spatially, politically, and pedagogically — within the cultures and communities in which they take shape. Importantly, many articles in this special issue actively sustain the rights of marginalized communities, under-represented actors, as well as future generations to realize their own desired futures. [Table 1](#) summarizes the research articles included in this special issue, highlighting their main contributions, theoretical underpinnings, and methodological approaches.

The special issue concludes with Michael Shamiyeh's interview with Don Norman. This interview explores the roles of design, economics, and innovation in making what is not yet existing — that is, the future. Here, Norman advocates for a humanity-centered, system-wide approach to creating better futures, emphasizing the need to move away from profitability while restoring humanity and its capacity for transformation. As a postscript to the special issue, this interview is a call for further research on future making as a transformative-generative act in the world, and on the world.¹⁹

Table 1 Summary of research articles in the special issue.

Research articles	Main contributions	Theoretical underpinnings	Methodological approach
Van Leeuwen et al., "Design Anthropology and Ontological Future Making: Transformative Action for the Emergence of Shared Futures"	The article frames future making as a transformative practice that entails local action, engagement with political issues, and a relational approach. It further develops <i>ontological future making</i> , a three-step approach that consists of: understanding the future orientations of the involved actors, engaging with the immediate tensions that arise from their negotiation, and transforming the ontological conditions that constrain the making of shared futures.	Design anthropology and ontological design provide the theoretical foundations for the study. These disciplines suggest that futures are plural, emergent and uncertain, and that the future orientations of actors are ontologically conditioned and related. This, in turn, draws attention to contested and political issues in future making; and to the potential for design anthropologists to engage in transformative action.	A longitudinal study of a local multi-stakeholder energy transition project in Amsterdam, which entailed promoting social inclusion in an underprivileged neighborhood. The researchers critically reflected on and intervened in the project. They conducted ethnographic fieldwork, participant observations, document analysis, as well as collaborative auto-ethnographic reflections within the research team, and co-creation workshops with the research participants.
Ortega Pallanez, "Resensing Visions: A Convivial Approach to Future-Making from a Global South Context in Hermosillo, Mexico"	The article introduces <i>conviviality</i> as a future making approach that empowers (disadvantaged) individuals and communities alike to transform their present conditions through affective, relational, and material practices. The article contributes by offering an account of future making that "foregrounds territoriality, affect, and embodied memory as materials for more plural approaches to imagining and enacting alternative futures" (p. 453).	The article is grounded in participatory, more-than-human, transition design; takes inspiration from feminist, posthuman, and decolonial traditions; and engages with related conversations in organization studies (on future making as emancipatory inquiry). It criticizes visioning practices that fail to reflect the conditions of people living in Global South contexts. It mobilizes the concepts of conviviality (Ivan Illich) and re-existence (Adolfo Albán Achinte) to develop an approach to pluralizing future making and challenging linear, modern, dominant temporalities.	The author designed, facilitated, and participated in embroidery circles. They offered embroidery prompts, grounded in dimensions of temporality, position and sociality, and place. They collected materials in the form of audio reflections, photographs, embroideries, and fieldnotes; and traced themes across time and embroiderers. They used letter writing as a mode of analysis (grounded in narrative inquiry and relational epistemologies). Through letters, they wove together individual voice, collective experience, and the researcher's own interpretation. This, in turn, surfaced emergent findings.
Migliore and Tagliaro, "Back to the Future": Making the Future Organizational Space from Experience to Imagination and Back"	The article explains how the experiences of organizational space shape the enactment of imagined futures. It sheds light on the spatially situated and mutually constitutive relationship between imagined futures and the lived present. It further reveals the role of actors' identities, orientations, and positions in shaping the future; and theorizes a liminal or in-between space where future making emerges from stakeholders' tensions. It offers a theoretical framework of future making in the in-between space, showing how spatial experiences shape future imaginations (via speculating, projecting, and realizing) and how future imaginations, in turn, loop back to reshape spatial experiences (via aspiring and criticizing).	The authors draw on the spatial turn in organization studies and the organizational literature on future making, which frames the future as situated, relational, and emergent.	A longitudinal study of a large Italian company, preparing for a major redesign of its headquarters. The researchers devised various activities to support the company in imagining the new workplace, such as prototyping workshops with students (outside actors) and focus groups with employees and executives (inside actors). Data was collected primarily through field work and consisted of multiple sources. Two online surveys supplemented the field work, offering baseline data on employees' current perceptions of space. Data was analyzed via an iterative process, which involved several exchanges among authors and discussing emerging interpretations with participants.
Durante et al., "Making Imagined Futures through Design: The Interplay between Discourse and Materiality"	This article explains how design artifacts, such as visual templates, can support practitioners in making imaginings concrete. It theorizes how imagined futures are made concrete via the interplay of discursive and material practices, sheds light on the role of emotions in fueling the imagining process, and points at the relationship between desirability and plausibility in imagining futures. It further offers the Future Moments and Future Experiences of Life as visual templates for practitioners.	The authors draw on organizational studies of future making, and weave together organizational and design studies on artifacts, discourse, and materiality.	The authors organized a Future Workshop, as part of a broader research project involving practitioners to envision desirable futures of human wellbeing in 2035. The workshop engaged practitioners from diverse organizations and industries. Working in teams, participants used the provided templates (digital and physical versions). The filled templates, along with recordings of participants' conversations, provided the main data for the study. The analysis involved classifying data, coding practices, and theorizing the discourse-materiality interplay.

Table 1 (continued)

Research articles	Main contributions	Theoretical underpinnings	Methodological approach
Lesage et al., “Scaffolding Futures Making: Facilitating a More Democratizing Futuring Practice”	Adopting a pedagogical lens, the authors develop a conceptual framework for democratizing futures making. This involves shifting away from cognitivist, linguistic, and prescriptive approaches used in much futures literacy and teaching practices. The proposed framework emphasizes the entwinement of thinking and acting (which in turn foregrounds design as central to futures making), views the design component of futures making as ontological (which in turn foregrounds the transformative potential of design), and leverages socio-material practices of scaffolding in futures making. These entail attending to the embedded nature of knowledge, activating embodied ways of knowing, and setting the conditions for emergent outcomes.	The authors take distance from anticipatory and predictive approaches to the future, and instead emphasize the inherent plurality of futures (hence, their choice of the term “futures” making). They also criticize futures literacy for its cognitivist and linguistic focus, its increasing standardization, and its tendency to reproduce exclusionary mechanisms. They also note how the pedagogical and psychological metaphor of scaffolding (Wood et al.) involves anticipation and control, which is ill-suited in the context of futures making. To correct these issues, they draw on design and organization studies, specifically ontological design and Orlikowski’s socio-material conception of scaffolding.	Conceptual work based on the authors’ reading of futures literacy, ontological design, educational literature, and socio-materiality studies. Examples from the authors’ own practice are used to illustrate the pedagogical approach.
Yu, “Redirective Tactics for Designing Transitions: A Typology of Sustainable Future-Making Pathways”	The article develops a typology of seven redirective tactics for future making (i.e., refusal, elimination, revival, amplification, maintenance, modification, and invention). These tactics serve both as creative prompts for envisioning alternative futures and as practical approaches for realizing such futures. They offer pathways for redirecting future making towards (more) sustainable outcomes, by challenging the ontological inertia of what has been designed before and is presently acting as a defuturing force. This extends current research on transition design for desirable futures and future making as an emancipatory inquiry.	The article is grounded in transition design as a redirective, vision-led practice. The concepts of defuturing (Fry) and ontological design (Willis) provide further traction for developing a typology of redirective tactics.	Conceptual work based on the author’s reading of ontological design, transition design, and defuturing studies, and formulation of implications for future making research and practice. Examples are used to illustrate the seven tactics.

20 Here, we do not discuss the final article by Shamiyeh, which is, in itself, a discussion of the main theme of the special issue, in conversation with Norman.

What Does This Special Issue Offer to Future Making Research?

The primary contribution of this special issue, we believe, is to bring into view future making practices that can lead to more desirable—that is, democratic, inclusive, and sustainable—futures. The special issue further contributes by showing how such practices are grounded in the cultures, places, and materials in which they are implemented, and by engaging explicitly with ethics and politics in an attempt to transform current conditions. This threefold contribution is realized through a trans-disciplinary perspective on future making, which draws insight from across design, organization, and future studies. In the next paragraphs, we unpack the special issue contributions.²⁰

First, this special issue extends current debates on future making by offering a set of modest, yet transformative practices that can support

- 21 Ali Aslan Gümüşay and Juliane Reinecke, "Researching for Desirable Futures: From Real Utopias to Imagining Alternatives," *Journal of Management Studies* 59, no. 1 (2022): 236, <https://doi.org/10.1111/joms.12709>; See also Claudio Dell'Era et al., "Future Making: Foresighting, Imagining, and Crafting Desirable Futures," *Research-Technology Management* 68, no. 6 (2025): 2–8, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08956308.2025.2561538>.
- 22 Alice Comi and Jennifer Whyte, "Future Making and Visual Artefacts: An Ethnographic Study of a Design Project," *Organization Studies* 39, no. 8 (2018): 1055–83, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840617717094>; Krista L. Pettit et al., "Transforming Visions into Actions: Strategic Change as a Future-Making Process," *Organization Studies* 44, no. 11 (2023): 1775–90, <https://doi.org/10.1177/01708406231171889>; Neil Aaron Thompson and Orla Byrne, "Imagining Futures: Theorizing the Practical Knowledge of Future-making," *Organization Studies* 43, no. 2 (2021): 247–68, <https://doi.org/10.1177/01708406211053222>; Merle Kathleen Ibach, "Unmaking Ready-Made-Futures of the DIY Chair," *She Ji: The Journal of Design, Economics, and Innovation* 12, no. 1 (2026): forthcoming. The work of Ortega Pallanez also adds to related research on craft and futures, by exploring embroidery practices as a site for imagining and crafting desirable futures, see Emma Bell et al., "Craft Imaginaries — Past, Present and Future," *Organization Theory* 2, no. 1 (2021): 1–18, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2631787721991141>.
- 23 See, for example, Wickert, "What Is the Future of Future Making."
- 24 Tonje Hungnes et al., "Future-Making Power: A Study of Competing Imagined Futures in Healthcare," *British Journal of Management* 36, no. 3 (2024): 1111–31, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8551.12888>; Sam van Elk et al., "Constructing Promissory Futures to Defer Moral Scrutiny: The Dilemma of Healthcare Austerity," *Human Relations* 78, no. 8 (2024): 995–1029, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00187267241265921>.

individuals, communities, and organizations in bringing about desirable futures. These include Van Leeuwen et al.'s ontological approach, Ortega Pallanez's conviviality approach, Lesage et al.'s scaffolding approach, and Yu's redirective tactics. Further approaches are the mobilization of design artifacts such as Future Moments (Durante et al.) and the engagement of outside actors (Migliore and Tagliaro) in practices of imagining futures. These approaches are modest and local, but entail transformative acts. Together, they offer a response (albeit provisional and incomplete) to previous research that has called for future making scholars to actively sustain the emergence of desirable futures—that is, "to use the methodological and theoretical toolkit at our disposal to co-create the future; and to actively feed forward soci(et)al change—not despite theory, but through it."²¹

Second, this special issue advances our understanding of future making by suggesting that desirable futures are responsive to local cultures and contexts, and are embedded in the various materials and places at hand. Specifically, Van Leeuwen et al. and Ortega Pallanez attend to the culturally situated contexts in which futures are imagined and crafted, and devise local approaches that empower the members of disadvantaged communities to engage in future making. Other articles in this special issue theorize the role of liminal spaces (Migliore and Tagliaro) as the places where imagined futures and lived spaces become mutually constitutive; and elucidate the role of material artifacts in sustaining imagination, negotiation (Durante et al.), and learning (Lesage et al.). Importantly, Yu points out how material artifacts participate not just in futuring but also in defuturing, when they are implicated in reproducing unsustainable practices of modernity. Together, these insights extend previous research in design and organization studies that has explored the role of artifacts, materials and spaces in future making;²² and hinted at the role of cultural differences and local specificities in imagining and crafting futures.²³

Third, this special issue sheds light on issues of ethics and politics in future making. Most articles in the special issue embrace a value-driven approach to future making, expressing a concern with identifying practices that preserve life for the next generations. These call into question colonialist, extractivist and modernist practices of designing, researching, and learning about the future—as visible in the articles by Van Leeuwen et al., Ortega Pallanez, Lesage et al., and Yu. These authors consistently seek to transform the ontological conditions that prevent the emergence of desirable futures, and to redirect future making toward more sustainable and inclusive practices. Durante et al. and Migliore and Tagliaro also point at the crucial nexus between the desirability and plausibility of futures in the making, and foreground the role of discussion, negotiation, and inclusion of multiple voices in making desirable futures. Hence, the articles in this special issue extend current research that has begun looking into the political dynamics, power contests, and moral dilemmas inherent in future making²⁴ by pointing at the role of affect, ethics, and relationality in developing an attuned sensitivity for the specific circumstances of individuals, communities, and organizations participating in future making.

In sum, the value of this special issue is neither to finalize a definition of future making, nor to offer a prescriptive framework for future making.

- 25 See also Madeleine Rauch, "Between War and Peace: How Boredom Shapes the Enactment of Idealized Futures in Extreme Contexts," *Academy of Management Journal* 68, no. 3 (2025): 1–32, <https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2023.0618>.
- 26 See also Akama et al., *Uncertainty and Possibility*.
- 27 Wenzel et al., "Future Making"; Wickert, "What Is the Future of Future Making."
- 28 Alice Comi is currently conducting a research project on "Future Making: A Chinese Perspective," funded by the National Natural Science Foundation of China.
- 29 Chun-chieh Huang and Erik Zürcher, *Time and Space in Chinese Culture* (Leiden, NL: Brill, 1995).

Rather, it is to open a productive space for dialogue, comparison, and experimentation, and to identify future making practices that support more equitable, inclusive, and sustainable futures. These are responsive to context and materials, attentive to power dynamics, and conscious of the rights of future generations.

Future Directions for Research on Future Making

The articles in this special issue not only advance current understandings of future making but also illuminate promising directions for further research. A first avenue is to explore the ontological conditions of future making, as well as their negotiation and transformation. In the articles by Van Leeuwen et al. and Ortega Pallanez, future making is positioned as relational, situated, and shaped by existing social and material conditions. Their works call for further research that examines how futures are negotiated in contested settings marked by plural interests, power asymmetries, and unresolved societal issues and challenges. This raises critical questions: How do conflicts²⁵ or uncertainty²⁶ shape the emergence of shared futures? Which forms of agency and accountability are required to transform prevailing conditions (rather than reproduce them)? Future research would benefit from comparative and longitudinal studies documenting how transformative actions unfold across different contexts (particularly those outside dominant, Global North contexts).

Further research might seek to advance understandings of the performativity of materiality and spatiality in future making. Migliore and Tagliaro, alongside Durante et al., demonstrate how imagined futures take shape not only as discourse or visions, but also through recursive embodied interactions with organizational spaces, artifacts, and sensory experiences. This invites deeper exploration into the performative dimension of materials and spaces in enabling or constraining imagination, alignment, and enactment of futures.²⁷ Further studies could examine how different forms of design artifacts, spatial prototypes, and immersive environments (e.g., digital or physical) support engagement with both near and distant futures. Questions also remain regarding the temporality of such interactions: When do spaces and materials stabilize futures, and when do they serve as liminal zones for experimentation, ambiguity, or dissent?

Also, this special issue is a first attempt to enrich understandings of future making by considering the local cultures and contexts in which futures are imagined and crafted. A related direction for future research is to explore cultural differences in temporal perceptions, and their implications for future making. Current research has begun to explore the differences between Western and Eastern perspectives on futures.²⁸ While most of the existing research on future making reflects linear, progress-oriented conceptions rooted in Western epistemologies, many Eastern traditions foreground cyclical temporality, interdependence, and continuity between past, present, and future.²⁹ These diverse cultural orientations may shape not only how the future is imagined but also who is perceived as responsible for it, and which futures are considered legitimate or desirable. Scholars could therefore benefit from cross-cultural studies that examine how diverse temporal philosophies inform

- 30 See also Gabrielle Donnelly and Alfonso Montuori, eds., *Routledge Handbook for Creative Futures* (London: Routledge, 2023), for related contributions on creating alternative futures.
- 31 Terry Irwin et al., "Transition Design: An Educational Framework for Advancing the Study and Design of Sustainable Transitions," *Cuadernos del Centro de Estudios en Diseño y Comunicación. Ensayos*, no. 105 (2022): 31–65, <https://doi.org/10.18682/cdc.vi105.4188>.
- 32 Tatsuyoshi Saijo, *Future Design for Creating a World Worth Inheriting* (Singapore: Springer, 2025).
- 33 Mariam Asad, "Prefigurative Design as an Alternative Approach to Civic Engagement," in *CWCS '18 Companion: Companion of the 2018 ACM Conference on Computer Supported Cooperative Work and Social Computing* (New York: ACM, 2018), 97–100, <https://doi.org/10.1145/3272973.3272983>. See also Cameron Tonkinwise, Prefigurative Design Seminar, September 27, 2025, <https://shorturl.at/pQcWb>.

practices of future making. Comparative and empirical research may also reveal tensions as well as opportunities for hybrid approaches that bridge linear and cyclical temporalities in future-oriented work. This exploration of cultural differences, in turn, might lead to formulating a more nuanced, relational, and dialogical approach to co-produce desirable futures that recognize both global diversities and interdependences.

Importantly, the articles in this special issue advance trans-disciplinary research on future making. They develop novel insights by drawing connections across design, organization, and future studies. While working across disciplines enables cross-fertilizing research on future making, it also foregrounds tensions across disciplinary traditions: for instance, between observing future making as it happens in the field of study (a perspective inspired by sociological research) and doing future making through close engagement with field actors (a perspective inspired by design research). Future research might explore whether these descriptive and normative traditions are incommensurably different or rather can be usefully combined in a research agenda on imagining and making more desirable futures. Other tensions that emerge within disciplines warrant further research. Future scholars might, for instance, examine clashes and synergies between speculative design and future making, and explore how the design discipline simultaneously becomes implicated in practices of futuring and defuturing. These tensions, in our view, are generative rather than destructive, providing a springboard for critical reflection.

Relatedly, (trans-disciplinary) research on future making requires methodological pluralism. Ethnographic inquiry, design interventions, speculative prototyping, longitudinal case studies, participatory approaches, and experimental pedagogies may all play complementary roles in examining how futures are made in everyday life and institutional contexts alike. This special issue offers an initial starting point for methodological experimentation. For instance, Ortega Pallanez's letter writing to the embroiders in her field study reveals a more affective, embodied, and engaged way of researching futures in the making. Other articles in this special issue hint at the role of Future Workshops (Durante et al.), collaborative autoethnographic reflections (Van Leeuwen et al.), as well as at the engagement of outside actors such as students in doing research on future making (Migliore and Tagliaro).

This special issue also invites further research that addresses the present crisis of imagination (see also Yu, in this special issue) and the loss of hope in alternative (and more desirable) futures (see also Ortega Pallanez, in this special issue). Addressing the crises of imagination involves learning capabilities to think about a future that disrupts trajectories of unsustainability, colonialism, and modernism set in place by neoliberal modes of innovation (see also Lesage et al., and Shamiyeh, in this special issue). The articles in this special issue collectively offer initial suggestions for challenging current trajectories of future making and unleashing capabilities for imagining an alternative, hopeful state of things.³⁰ Future research could further explore these issues, by delving into the imaginative and political aspects inherent in future making. Such an exploration could benefit from related research conducted in the areas of transition design,³¹ future design,³² and prefigurative design.³³

- 34 Ali Aslan Gümüşay and Juliane Reinecke, "Imagining Desirable Futures: A Call for Prospective Theorizing with Speculative Rigour," *Organization Theory* 5, no. 1 (2024): 1–23, <https://doi.org/10.1177/26317877241235939>; Gümüşay and Reinecke, "Researching for Desirable Futures."
- 35 Subhabrata Bobby Banerjee and Diane-Laure Arjaliès, "Celebrating the End of Enlightenment: Organization Theory in the Age of the Anthropocene and Gaia (and Why Neither Is the Solution to Our Ecological Crisis)," *Organization Theory* 2, no. 4 (2021): 1–24, <https://doi.org/10.1177/26317877211036714>.

Finally, the articles in this special issue surface yet another question for further research: How can future making scholars engage even more explicitly with questions of justice, temporality, and responsibility?³⁴ This involves, among other things, devising theories that deal with issues of contested desirability, address the crisis of imagination, and restore hope in the future. While the articles in this special issue offer initial paths, more work is needed to fully understand and unleash the transformative potential of future making. Further and related questions emerge: Whose futures are being imagined or foreclosed as participants converge on a shared direction or course of action? How can future making practices acknowledge past harms and safeguard possibilities for generations to come? How can we acknowledge nonhuman actors³⁵ in future making? Addressing these questions will require interdisciplinary exchange, critical reflexivity, and collaboration across cultures, communities, and professions. We hope this special issue will provide a stepping stone in this direction.

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