SW&S | **Social Work and Society**
International Online Journal

Introduction: Social Work Future(s)—What social work does the world need now?

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1   Introduction to the Special Issue

This special issue of *Social Work & Society* includes contributions made to an online conference held in June 2021 that invited speculative engagement with the question *What social work does the world need now?* The aim of the conference was to create space for uncommon and potentially less intelligible ideas and problematics, and in so doing, foster disciplinary engagement with the possible futures of social work in the context of major societal, environmental and technological changes.

At the time of the conference – a little over one year into the global Covid-19 pandemic – the 'future' was experienced by many as more uncertain than ever. Contingencies around the impacts of climate change and environmental degradation, the threats and possibilities of new technologies to arcane political and economic processes, and the spectre of zoonotic disease were all front-and-centre as the conditions of the present from which possible futures could unfold. At the same time, these meta-concerns could be experienced as remote from, or at least outside the scope of, the everyday urgencies of state-sponsored professional social work rooted in various "localized socials" (O'Brien, 2004) in which the units of analysis and action, and indeed, the perceived problems and solutions, have remained anchored to an earlier set of problematics.

Social work scholars are confronted with the challenge of distilling some sort of useful sense of what is going on, including how and where we might focus, out of these overwhelming shifts in perceptions of what is possible in the world. At the same time, we as conference conveners were acutely aware of how state, university, and funding contexts influence foci and content in the interdisciplinary, vocational domain of social work. The conference was an intentional intervention into these conditions, bringing established and early career researchers into conversation, and, we hope, providing a supportive space in which less common ideas could be raised and discussed at some remove from the orthodoxies and conceptual habits of any one national system of social work. This editorial introduces eight papers from that gathering that differently engage our organizing question *What social work does the world need now?* It also endeavours to foreground some of the broader philosophical logic underpinning social work engagement with the concept of 'the future.'

A search of the online Anglophone social work journals for the keyword 'future' suggests our engagement with the concept largely revolves around regrouping, benchmarking and agenda setting within specific state contexts and fields of practice (e.g., Daley, 2005; Macdonald, 2016), and is regularly accompanied by crisis rhetoric (e.g., Pecukonis, Cornelius, & Parrish, 2003). Social work education, in particular, is recognized as a site through which the future of

social work might be improved, though here, the focus is often on the changing nature of the jobs available to trained social workers (Caroff, 1988; Carrin-Martnez, Fernndez-Martnez, Prez-Fuentes, & Gzquez-Linares, 2019; Neden, Boddy, & Ramsay, 2021; Robbins, Regan, Williams, 2016). More rarely, the demands on social work education to be all things to all interests and issues have also been noted (Bertotti, Ward, & Zganec, 2019). The keyword 'future' is used to promote specific models of practice (e.g., Orenstein & Ganzer, 2006), and to establish the contours of perceived social problems not yet standardized through modern welfare infrastructures (e.g., Sharley, Ananias, Rees, & Leonard, 2019). The late 1990s saw the publication of broader summaries and comparatively more speculative engagement with what might matter to the profession in the new millennium (e.g., Gibelman, 1999). Dominant strains of future thought (Adams, Dominelli and Payne, 2005) are perhaps most evident in critical social work's promotion of a transformed future, one that is experienced as egalitarian and emancipatory by marginalized groups. Theoretically, the last major round of speculative conversation anchored to the keyword 'future' appears to be the wide range of thought termed postmodernism in the North America academy (e.g., Wilkin, 1999). There is of course much more to the social work literature than this small keyword anchored snapshot, including the growing popularity of topical edited book collections that circumvent some of the constraints of the journal genre to assemble and extend particular conversations (e.g., Bell, 2012; Boetto, 2019; Bozalek & Pease, 2021; Clarke & Yellow Bird, 2021; Hölscher, Hugman, & McAuliffe, 2022; Livholds, 2022; Morley, Ablet, Noble, & Cowen, 2020; Schwarzer, Kämmerer-Rütten, Schleyer-Lindenmann, & Wang, 2016, Jordan, 2021). Broadly speaking, Anglophone contributors to discourse on social work futures have precipitated movements that operate at the nexus of theory, policy and practice. These include the Grand Challenges for Social Work intiative (https://grandchallengesforsocialwork.org/) which seeks to 'solve some of society's greatest challenges' and Laura Nissen's Social Work Futures, a website that promotes forward thinking and future planning on 'social problems such as homelessness, child abuse, poverty, mental health etc', (https://socialworkfutures.com/welcome-and-overview/) both from the USA.

The aforementioned work substantively aligns with the central orthodoxy of Western social work positioned within modernist humanism (Philip, 1979). This humanism revolves around a secular belief in humanity as the central and superior moral concern in a world that can be understood and changed through science. That is a vision of a more progressive future for humans achieved through scientific activity in the present. What is largely absent from the disciplinary literature, and what we hoped to provoke through the conference, was interaction with disciplines and social theories that pose critical questions on what is meant by the 'future' at a time when the concept has become unstable, and when Enlightenment human exceptionalism is increasingly being questioned. This involves critical attention to how the present, as a prior future, has been produced. It also requires attention to the ways in which the existential issues of environmental degradation and new technologies that call such human exceptionalism into question are addressed in social work. Conference contributors were thus invited to think outside and beyond the habitual scope and orthodoxies of their respective social works. We were surprised at the range of response to this call with 40 contributors from four continents. This interest suggests a desire to propagate social work discourse with ideas contributors believe could not be uttered in other forums.

In what follows, we put the idea of the future into the historical context of modernity, and then we summarise aspects of the contemporary challenges of moving beyond this into a

present that was always more-than human. Into this wider arena we set out how the articles contained in this special edition contribute to the discussion.

Historicising the Future
In the West, common perceptions of the future are effects of centuries of religious, political and philosophical debate. Historicising the term is a way to defamiliarise an often taken-for-granted concept, and a means to foreground some of the ways in which it shapes perceived relations among past, present, and future, and importantly, foundational assumptions about social change and social progress.

Heidegger (1972), claimed that humanity is largely future-oriented but not always in the same way. German historian Reinhart Koselleck, a major figure in the history of ideas, argued that modernity brought about 'a temporalisation of history' (2004, p. 3). His argument is as follows: prior to the Enlightenment in the West, the future was based on the Christian expectation of the end of times. In Christian thought, the future belonged to God and it was balanced between 'constant anticipation of the End of the World on the one hand and the continual deferment of the End on the other' (2004, p. 6). Past, present, and future were, he argues, contained in a 'static movement,' a cycle that functioned within the horizon of the end of time. Koselleck claims that the 'end of time' was not a linear progression but a 'constituting element' of the church. An imminent possibility restrained by deferral, echoing the church's concern with eternal rather than linear time. This future was set and known, but it was not in human hands.

The end of the 30 years war and the Treaty of Westphalia brought the jurisdiction of the Holy Roman Empire to a close, and 'religious indifference' became the perceived basis for peace. The clergy were replaced by politicians who were motivated by the present rather than the eternal. The attrition of war on the ground, along with the intellectual and practical technologies of the Enlightenment, introduced the possibility of progress and the idea of a yet-to-be-known future. This new future was not in God's hands but instead might be achieved through human scientific knowledge and political action. In contrast to a known Christian future, the new scientific and political future was instead an 'unknown' that had the potential to offer something novel. Koselleck's work historicises ideas about the future, arguing that how time is understood and experienced is dependent on social, political and cultural factors alongside science and technology. This argument is supported by contemporary physics, where time is not considered a fundamental property (Rovelli, 2009, 2018), but is rather perspectival. Stated simply, how time is experienced depends on your vantage point and its horizon; there are many futures.

A further aspect of Koselleck's thesis is how the modern idea of the future has shaped understandings of both present and past. The idea of a 'medieval age' was only possible from the vantage point of modernity. As the moderns placed themselves on a trajectory of progress, they viewed the past as regressive and backward. By the same logic the future was understood through 'rationale prognosis,' that is, a consideration of what was possible and likely based on evidence. It created a time of progress made possible through human scientific endeavour. Koselleck claims that this impacts how time is perceived: 'prognosis produces the time within which and out of which it weaves, whereas apocalyptic prophecy destroys time through its fixation on the end' (Koselleck, 2004, p. 14). This modern idea of managing a preferred future into presence through rational action was a major shift away from earlier Christian conceptions of the end of times. An even more influential shift, however, was the emergence of the philosophical concept of 'historical process' which 'detached early modernity from its

past and at the same time inaugurated our modernity with a new future' (17). 'Historical Process' is the idea that the future follows past action, and the new 'appears as a constituent and integral part of a larger trajectory' (Simon, 2019, p. X). According to Simon (2019) this could well be the most 'significant invention' offered by modernity. The citizen of modernity unfettered from the church could rush toward a different, unknown, but better and more progressive, future. It is this shift that allows modern humanity to refer to the ages that preceded them as 'dark'. It also becomes possible to imagine fictions such as 'the classless society' (p. 18). When the future became amenable to human crafting then all manner of possible futures might be grasped. Politicians seek to eradicate child poverty or declare 'never again' on acts of human cruelty, in the belief that such futures can be chosen and crafted through human work.

This idea of human-generated progress, and of humanity in control of the future, makes multiple possible futures imaginable and perhaps even within reach. This perception of the future accelerated the experience of the present through the drive to attain a better future. However, this acceleration 'robs the present of the possibility of being experienced as the present, and escapes into a future' (p.18). Foucault, revisiting Kant, argued this new modern relation to past, present and future resulted in a particular cultural 'attitude': 'Modernity is not a phenomenon of sensitivity to the fleeting present; it is the will to "heroize" the present.' (Foucault, 1984, p. 40) as both a break from the past and a site of action that promises to realize a better future. The modern future is a hopeful future with prospects. This heroic and hopeful attitude is foundational to the knowledge work of modern universities and professions like social work. For example, in the North American context, Indigenous scholar Eve Tuck (2009) argues the 'implicit theory of change' of the social sciences is that documenting damaging experiences will inevitably lead to social progress, and the slogan of the USA's social work Grand Challenges initiatives is "Social progress powered by science."

Koselleck's modern rendering of the future held until the Hiroshima bomb was dropped (Simon, 2019). The creation and use of the atomic bomb marked the point at which human technology had reached a level of existential threat that no longer aligned with the modern progress narrative and thus marked, at least for some thinkers, the end of modernity (Simon, 2019). An influential alternative interpretation was offered by the American political scientist Francis Fukuyama (1992) who argued that rather than the end of modernity, modernity has instead found its optimum resting place. We should instead think in terms of the 'end of history.' This argument is based on Fukuyama's reading of Hegel's work on progress as an outcome of *passion* rather than *rationality*. Passion leads to conflict, the resolution of which might be called progress. This is the premise of the Heglian dialectic, through which Fukuyama renders history as 'a dialogue between societies, in which those with grave internal contradictions fail and are succeeded by others that manage to overcome those contradictions' (Fukuyama, 1992, p. 61). The fulfilment of these is the arrival of a means of managing conflict without revolution. For Fukuyama this is democracy. Thus, he can claim that society is at the end of history—many possible futures have been rendered down into modern democracy. He wrote this in 1992 after the fall of the Berlin Wall ushered in a generally held belief that liberal democracy had won out over other forms of political organization. Although Fukuyama stands by his initial claim (Campbell and Stewart, 2023), at the time of writing this editorial introduction there are very good reasons to suggest that democracy is now in retreat with a rise in authoritarian states and policies including within the US and Europe (Diamond, 2022). Whichever view we hold true –as either the end or as a new phase—there is no doubt

that modernity is in flux. This must have consequences for social work, a discipline born from modernity.

The well-charted origins of social work generally start with 1800s charitable organisations that offered support to the urban poor. It is widely written that this was a response to industrialisation, the growth of cities, and the breakdown of the social support networks that existed prior to this era (Cree, 1995; Jordan, 2021). Through analysis of the UK context, Burnham (2011) robustly argues that the orthodoxies of social work's origins do not hold up to scrutiny and that rather than centring on charitable organisations and philanthropic women, social work developed through the state as a mechanism to improve the circumstances of the poor and mentally ill. In settler North America, social work is similarly understood to be a child of the industrial city (Williams, 2016), established to help settle mobile peoples pursuing improved life chances (Chambon, 2013; Chambon & Köngeter, 2012). At the same time, however, early regional social welfare infrastructures were developed in many cases to support colonial resource extraction industries (Loo, 2019; Ruiz, 2021). That is, to improve the health and welfare (variously defined) of poor people labouring on behalf of imperial and capitalist interests. Other histories of social work highlight how different actors and strands of activity across state, university, charity, church, and the new middle class congregated around the city as a newly perceived social problem (Köngeter, 2017), and that one effect of these activities was the development of modern professional social work. That is a profession developed to act in the present as a means to improve the future of a perceived collective (again, variously defined).

The Anglophone social work literature is saturated with Western modernity's versions of past, present and future. For example, the ubiquitous use of crisis narratives—arguably the most common strategy to, in Foucault's terms, "heroize the present"—that have largely lost their rhetorical power outside of their deployment in funding applications. Other modern logics are evident in narratives of hopeful progress (via social work intervention in the present) and narratives of loss (via neoliberal restructuring contrasted against an earlier idealized version of social welfare infrastructures) (Davies, 2023; Wilson, 2017, 2020). The latter is perhaps most obvious in work affiliated with critical (power focused) and radical (structure focused) traditions that perceive social work to have declined as a progressive social force since the 70's (e.g., Jordan, 2021; McGregor, 2015; Rogowski, 2020). The general conclusion of much of this work is that social work must regain some of that 70's spirit and return to 'radical social work' (e.g., Yadav, 2022). That is, endeavour to get modernity back on track. It is therefore unsurprising that many critical social work scholars regularly offer a past idealized communitarianism as the answer to a range of present crises. In settler North America in particular, this idealization of a golden age of social welfare glosses over the colonial violence of the state project. What is experienced as progress for some is regularly experienced as devastation by others. Futures are perspectival.

Our question, *what social work does the world need now?* is thus a question of how modern social work might engage with the end of, or least serious flux in, modernity and its cultural logics of past, present and future. This is a massive question and one that our conference and contributors only began the labour of probing. Some of that effort involved critical attention to social work's central tropes.

Susan P. Kemp's (2023) main challenge to social work is that it must become more future-aware, and that a more 'expansive perspective is essential'. She goes on to make the case for this based on the impacts of climate change, but the context that she addresses is that of the

multiple technological and sociopolitical challenges that are unique to this era. Three of the papers in this edition deal specifically with the ways in which the social work conceptual orthodoxy stifles the discipline's ability to move beyond the horizon of modernity. Lynch and Wilson (2023) take on the reification of 'neoliberalism' held up as the bogyman that is the root of social and social work problems. Drawing on key authors of neoliberalism, Hayek, Friedman and von Mises, they argue that this fixation on an idea that has been so reduced as to be meaningless is getting in the way of alternative modes of problematization more helpful for understanding contemporary issues. Park and Chatterjee (2023), look to pre-modern Buddhist philosophy to critique Western models of posthuman thought that are currently instrumentalised in the practice of 'mindfulness'. They argue that this mode of thought is trapped in its own humanist modern and Westernised past, and as such is a misreading of the philosophy on which it is premised. Tom Grimwood (2023) critiques criticality, as a means of responding to the current post truth era. Criticality, he argues, is a trope of social work practice that, quoting Latour, has 'run out of steam'. Grimwood leads us away from the established power binaries common in critical social work toward an immanent critique that is found in situation, in 'the applied and localised practices of social work education'. In different ways and drawing on very different epistemologies these authors propose that there is a need to undo current orthodoxies if social work scholarship is to be able to think beyond its modern containment and formulate problems that adequately respond to current issues.

The Future has Always been More-than-Human
If the modern options – rational scientific accumulation and passionate Hegelian (and/or Marxist) dialectical conflict and resolution – no longer widely hold the promise they once did, then where does this leave state and university anchored social work with its pragmatic and localized intervention mandate and broader progressive-justice aspirations? Quite simply, social work must engage the various phenomena undermining Western modernity's future— climate change and environmental degradation, new and potentially dangerous technologies, and multiplying group-stratified populisms and bordering practices—and attempt to generate next steps that do not rely solely on the orthodox strategies of scientific accumulation and state politics, rationalism and passion. Thus, our organizing question was not what is the future of modern social work in increasingly unstable times, but the decentred and arguably more speculative question, *what social work does the world need now?*

Three major umbrella concepts dominate contemporary social theory in the West: nature, technology, and the human. Phenomena associated with these interrelated concepts are radically and unpredictably exceeding the control of science and politics. That is, nature, technology, and human are acting in excess of the heroic and hopeful scripts of masterful Western modernity. The popularity of these concepts is such that they are increasingly captured under the interdisciplinary rubrics of the posthuman (e.g., Braidotti, 2019) and ontological (e.g., Holbraad & Pedersen, 2017) turns in social theory (for some accounts of how this maps onto social theory common in social work in the UK and North America, see Wilson, 2021; Lynch, 2019, 2021, and in this issue, Park and Chatterjee (2023) raise the extractive geopolitics of intellectual origin stories and claims of theoretical innovation in the West). Social work must take the excesses of nature, technology, and human seriously and allow them to change our habitual ways of thinking and practicing.

Public discourse on the more-than-human challenges of environmental degradation and new technologies such as AI are regularly discussed in the register of threat (Diamond, 2022). Subsequent to Ulrich Beck's (1992) infamous declaration that we live in a risk society, a number of authors (Levy, 2016; Gentili, 2021; Fraser, 2023) propose that 'crisis' is in fact the

motif of contemporary life. For example, the volume of caution on climate change has been increasing over the past 40 years, while the related but distinct issues of biodiversity loss, soil erosion, water depletion and multiple forms of pollution have had less emphasis in wider public discourse (WWF, 2022). There is agreement that human-generated environmental degradation of all forms has resulted from or been exacerbated by the unintended consequences of the technologies of 'human progress', carbon extraction, industrial farming and the exploitation of land and animals for human benefit, pesticides that eliminate life forms and the multiple forms of polluting by-products of human activity (IPCC, 2023). Mainstream discussion on how to address these concerns employs predictive practices of futuring (Gidley, 2017). The lauded goal of keeping global warming to no higher than 1.5 degrees is premised on a calculation that this is the least bad achievable goal, beyond that there is a narrative of inevitable and increasing catastrophe. In response, a different calculus sets out the possible impacts of technological fixes, such as carbon capture. However, many environmentalists are critical of this reliance on human technologies (Monbiot, 2016).

Environmental philosophers with differing views (Lovelock, 1979; Næss, 1989; Serres, 1995; Latour, 2017) find that the environmental problems faced by humanity result from a logic that sees humanity as above all other forms of life. They argue for a different set of values. Their alternative propositions seek to leave behind modernism that puts humanity at the centre and instead position humanity as but one form of life amongst many. The political implication of this is that humanity must nurture the ecology upon which it depends if it is to thrive. For example, the traditional human-centric social question is these days challenged by the increasingly unavoidable 'biosocial question' (Ingold and Palsson, 2013) in which human life is not separate from all life. Social work 'after modernity' needs to directly engage with what it might mean to intentionally open 'the social' to include soil and sea, vegetal and animal, microbe and machine. We must find ways of surpassing 'the anthropological machine' (Agamben, 2004) that has perpetuated the modern lore of human exceptionalism.

Riffing off debates about the end of hopeful reasoned modernity (Koselleck) and the end of alternative political futures (Fukuyama), French philosopher and social scientist Bruno Latour (2017) proclaims that we are at the 'end of nature'. 'Nature' is a purified term, one that belongs to a defunct modernity. The separation of nature and human in modern thought alienates human life from the world and is making the world uninhabitable. For Latour, any possible human future is Gaian, an idea he takes from James Lovelock (1979). Gaia is a 'chthonic power' that recognises the unknowable and confronts what with Serres (1995) he calls the 'pure myth' of 'science purified of any myth' (120). Gaia, is not, according to Latour what Lovelock's detractors would have us believe, a unified system. No, it is the 'outlaw' an 'anti-system' that cannot be contained. Gaia is a term for the multiplicity of networks of matter and animals that conflict, collide and collude to precipitate life. To live in Gaia is to attend to these networks with care, not to control or exploit. This seam of environmental thought holds human centric Western modernism responsible for the current environmental challenges and argues that a flourishing human future must eschew this position. This offers a lateral, networked immanent present in preference to a modern linear idea of the future.

In social work, the response to environmental crisis is led by a small but growing field of scholarship (e.g., Coates & Gray, 2018; Krings et al., 2020; Matthies et al., 2020). While some (Besthorn, 2012), inspired by Næss, call for a deep ecological approach that decentres human life, the environmental mainstream is largely preoccupied with an agenda for environmental justice that focuses on social over environmental inequality (Dominelli, 2012).

Such approaches are less interested in the need for human life to forge a different relationship with the life systems upon which it depends. In this special edition Verena Fisch (2023) reports on research that occupies the vantage point of the more-than-human. Her deliberation on the operations of community gardens invites us to consider multi-species relationships and benefits to non-human actors within these networks, as a means of benefit to all.

A very different strain of scientific thought offers another view that also involves a more-than-human future. Here, however, humanity should not give up its exceptionalism but instead exceed this through technological enhancement. The idea of the 'trans-human' first entered discourse in the 1950's through the work of evolutionary biologist Julian Huxley (More, 2013). The trans-human passes beyond the bounds of the human through technologies that exceed existing human capacities. 'Human nature in this broader sense is dynamic, partially human-made, and improvable. Our current extended phenotypes (and the lives that we lead) are markedly different from those of our hunter-gatherer ancestors…' (Bostrom, 2005, p. 213). This is premised on the human capacity to develop through technologies of the social, cultural and technological. There is no 'natural' human state to preserve as human bodies have always been in a state of change (More, 2013).

Unlike the deep ecologists cited previously, trans-human thought is an extension of the Enlightenment project and tends to be optimistic. (More, 2013; Boström, 2014). A central trope of trans-human thought is 'inevitability' (More, 2013), that we have no choice on whether or not human future reaches beyond the human while we already have the technology to achieve this. In a counterintuitive way this has a resonance of the pre-modern era when the future was not in human purview but God; God has been replaced by technology. If mainstream social work scholarship has been slow to pick up on environmentalist thought it has been slower still on the technologies relevant to trans-humanism. Yet this field ponders questions of what it is to be human and how to relate. Surely both are significant to social work.

None of the papers in this edition operate in the high-tech zone of Bostrom, AI and cyberscience, and yet they do point to the need to develop methods that do not sacrifice sensibility at the altar of science and recognise that technologically driven, more-than-human worlds require new ways of knowing. Three of the papers pick up on questions of how to navigate the technologies of more-than-human worlds. Zean et al' (2023) explore 'Foresight' as a tool that enables deliberation of alternative futures. Faced with social media that propagates misinformation, such forms of deliberation will be necessary. From a different stance, Tudor and Barraclough (2023) draw on Karen Barad's agential realism as a means of making sense of more than human relationships. Central to their method are stories. While Goldkind et al.'s (2023), study of telemental health observes how technology imposes itself on the structure and modes of relationship. These draw attention to the need to take account of the ways that technology shapes caring relationships. Technology is not simply a means to a human end but is active in the formation of public discourse and intimate relationships. Both of which are core components of the social work context. Yuval Noah Harari (2023) argues that the technological intrusion on intimacy poses a much greater threat than we have seen from the data harvesting by social media companies over recent years (Zuboff, 2019). This is surely a field that social work must concern itself with.

Conclusion
We have opened many seams of thought in this introduction that demand much more attention than we can give in the space permitted. The central premise of these musings is that from the

vantage points of politics, environmental science, and new technology, the logic of modernity is disturbed. The line of progress offered by Enlightenment has been unmasked as fiction. The technological building blocks of modern progress are now measured as harmful effects, while the technologies of the future risk the erasure of what it means to be human, and even the politics of democracy are under threat. This destabilising of modern foundations is a disruption to what social work, a progeny of modernism, is, could be, or is needed. What does 'social' mean when humanity is no longer exceptional? And what 'work' is required in a relational world that is more-than-human?

Federico Campagna has some thoughts on how to live in the ruins of modernism. Drawing on Heidegger's concept of 'worlding' Campagna (2021) states that all worlds end and that new worlds are created from the ruins. Campagna rejects the idea of conservation as 'if a world is ever to survive the end of its own historical body, it is through syncretic disfigurement rather than in the efforts of archival conservation' (p. 55). He worries that caught up with trying to preserve what is, in order to carry this into an imagined progressive future that 'this civilization will fail to deliver anything of use to the creation of a new world?' (p. 56) Campagna's is a nihilist vision but only to a point. He calls for a prophetic mode of living, one that 'observes the new reality that begins to surface in front of their own eyes' (p. 139). Bifo Berardi (2017), Campagna's mentor and interlocutor refines his thought as a call to 'see the present'. This is the call of this edition, to engage with the present and generate a problematics attuned to the material, technological and political challenges that are impacting all aspects of life. In everyday practice social workers are familiar with working in the 'ruins' and the challenges of moving forward from impossibly bleak positions. Contemporary problems that traverse societies and geographies, where the promises of modern progress no longer hold, require some of these skills to be mobilised and put to work on the meaning and purpose of social work itself.

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