

LIVING IN THE PRESENT: PRESENTISM, FOREVERISM, AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF SOCIAL REALITY

- Call for Papers -

edited by

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At the turn of the century, social theory identified the present as the key temporal frame of reference for contemporary societies marked by high institutional and media complexity. A new configuration thus emerged: while classical modernity long conceived of itself as suspended in tension toward a promised future, “late” modernity registers a crisis of the future, downgraded from a space of possibility to a repertoire of threats (economic, ecological, existential). Within this shift, the present tends to expand until it comes to constitute the dominant horizon of meaning — whether residual or openly claimed. It is “absolute” (Heller, 1999) insofar as it is inhabited by individuals detached from any other form of belonging; “autarchic” (Laïdi, 2000) insofar as it is self-sufficient and capable of substituting for both past and future; “extended” (Nowotny, 1989) as a new dimension of planning and projection. The suspended time of precarity intersected with the instantaneity of digital communication; the hedonistic present of consumption ran alongside a revaluation of the present as the dimension of lived experience, everyday life, and emotion; the constraints of a future imposed in forced stages by twentieth-century ideologies crumbled in the instantaneity of daily life. Its dominance gave rise to the drift of presentism (Hartog, 2003), a regime of historicity in which the short term becomes imperative, compressing the entire temporal horizon (Di Chio, 2015) and undermining historical depth and the very possibility of change (Leccardi, Jedlowski, Cavalli, 2023).

More recently, algorithmic logic and digital archiving have produced an unprecedented form of the eternalization of the present, which some contemporary authors and artists have described as foreverism: the explicit reference here is to Tanner (2023), who proposes the concept as a dominant cultural discourse capable of promising continuity and growth without genuine transformation, reducing loss (and hence nostalgia) to a problem to be neutralized. Within this framework, Tanner introduces the concept of foreverizing: practices that “reanimate” what is degraded or has disappeared (for example, cloud archiving, cultural reboots, voice cloning), keeping it active within a present that aspires to be indefinitely inhabitable. Our own use of the term engages with this framework while linking it to the tendency to preserve everything, to keep track of every gesture, image, or word, within a digital memory that never forgets (Stiegler, 2010; Mayer-Schönberger, 2011; Sisto, 2018). Foreverism is not simply the opposite of oblivion: it is a form of perpetual presence in which time loses directionality and social reality is constructed as a flow of simultaneity.

These temporal transformations carry profound implications for the construction of social reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Couldry & Hepp, 2016) and for the structuring of

relational architectures of post-reality (Grassi, 2022). If time is a constitutive dimension of collective experience, then the way we live, represent, and share it directly shapes how we produce meaning, memory, and identity. The permanent present alters the processes of institutionalization, mediatization, the legitimation of knowledge, and the construction of symbolic authority. In digital societies, the very notion of reality appears more fluid, more contingent, and continually renegotiated in the here and now of visibility. The “permanent present” is also a material fact: archiving everything entails infrastructures, economies of conservation, asymmetries of access, and ecological costs. Digital memory is not merely a cultural metaphor but a political issue involving platforms, governance, rights, and responsibilities.

In this special issue, we will use “foreverism” in operational sense, as a socio-technical regime of permanence: the systemic tendency to retain, make searchable, and reactivate traces (data, images, texts), turning forgetting into the exception rather than the rule. The focus remains on the digital infrastructures of memory and their social and political consequences; the aim is to critically explore the nexus between the primacy of the present, contemporary temporality, and the construction of social reality, questioning how presentism and foreverism are redefining the ways in which individuals and collectivities shape the social, political, and symbolic world.

The aim is to gather contributions that, from sociological, anthropological, and philosophical perspectives, address the transformations of temporality as one of the crucial issues of our time: the crisis of the future, the saturation of the present, technological acceleration, and the tension between the ephemeral and the permanent.

Topics of Interest

- Presentism and temporal regimes: genealogies, conceptualizations, and sociological consequences
- Foreverism and digital memory: archives, traces, algorithms
- Presentist temporality and the construction of social reality
- Subjectivity and time: temporal experiences, update anxiety, burnout, and everyday chronotopes
- Political temporality: the crisis of the future, populism, acceleration, and immobility
- Digital temporality and platforms: social media, algorithms, and the production of “real time”
- Ethnographies of time: how communities and bodies negotiate forms of temporal manifestations
- Temporality and aesthetics: representations of time in media and the arts
- Posthumanism and technological temporality
- Post-pandemic temporality: discontinuity and the reinvention of social time

- The materiality of permanence: infrastructures, data centers, energy, ecological impacts, and inequalities of access

KEY DEADLINES

- Submission of structured abstract with essential bibliography (4,000 characters, bibliography excluded): **November 15, 2026**
- Notification of abstract acceptance: **December 15, 2026**
- Submission of full paper (drafted according to the journal's editorial guidelines): **June 15, 2027**
- Outcome of first review round: **July 20, 2027**
- Submission of revised article: **September 6, 2027**
- Outcome of second review round: **October 11, 2027**
- Publication: **December 2027**

SUBMISSION OF CONTRIBUTIONS

Structured abstracts should be sent to the following e-mail addresses:

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Full papers may be written in the following languages: Italian, English, and French, and must be submitted to the journal by selecting the section “Special Issue – Vivere nel presente” in the submission procedure at <https://thelabsq.sp.unipi.it/>

Images and tables may be inserted directly into the main document.

The editorial guidelines are available on the website of the journal The Lab's Quarterly: <https://thelabsq.sp.unipi.it/LQ/submission-guidelines>

Upon request to the guest editors of the special issue, a Word template of the journal will be made available to facilitate formatting.

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