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Editorial Futures Reframed, Issue 1: Darkness Reframed

dr. Roanne van Voorst, dr. Tessa Cramer

We will not save the day, but maybe we could befriend the night.
— Bayó Akomolafe (2026)

As the climate unravels, so do our certainties. Across the world, people struggle - often in isolation, sometimes in communal gatherings - to find ways of mourning what is disappearing: melting glaciers, vanishing islands, dying coral reefs. These practices obviously do not solve the crisis but they do grow our capacity to perceive it. This inaugural issue of Futures Reframed begins there. We ask what it means to think about futures from within uncertainty, grief, and loss. In a discipline that more often associates 'the future' with optimism, control, and planning than with mourning and unknowing, we insist on starting from the latter. This commitment to amplifying such marginalised futures is one of the commitments that defines the Futures Reframed journal.

This first issue revolves around two guiding questions. The first is: *How could futures thinking be otherwise?*

By way of an initial answer to this question, we chose the theme Darkness Reframed for this journal's first issue. When we issued the call for papers, we began from a simple observation: dominant futures discourse frequently associates 'the future' with light, hope, and possibility. Yet the future is also a space of grief, rage, uncertainty, and loss.

Darkness Reframed invited contributors to explore the generative potential of such darkness - not merely as a condition to be overcome, but as an epistemic space from which new forms of reflection and transformation may arise.

The contributions collected in this issue respond to that invitation in distinct and insightful ways. Together, they demonstrate that confronting darkness is not an act of resignation but of honesty; not the abandonment of hope, but its reconfiguration. Some authors analyse how despair or anger can mobilize social and political transformation. Others trace how relinquishing unrealistic optimism opens possibilities for more grounded care and collective responsibility. And in the interview, we conducted with Indigenous researcher Professor Vanessa Andreotti, she reminds us that hope does not have to be a way of avoiding grief, although it is often used as such. In contrast, it can also become something that can appear as useful after we face grief: not overly confident faith in progress, but a shared, mature hope that comes from processing loss and responsibility together.

Across all texts runs a shared thread: darkness and hope are not opposites but interdependent forces in futures thinking - like night and day, each necessary to the other.

As Martin Luther King Jr. famously noted in speech in 1968, *"We must accept finite disappointment, but never lose infinite hope".* The works in this issue suggest that acknowledging finite disappointment - grieving what is lost or cannot be changed - can, paradoxically, renew our capacity for critical hope. Not a naïve faith in progress, but a sober, relational hope that begins in the dark.

And that takes us to the question beneath the question: *how could science be otherwise?* If we want to imagine different futures, we may also need different ways of doing science. Returning to this question - of transforming not only our futures but our practices of knowledge-making - is, again, a defining concern of Futures Reframed, and it informs the editorial choices and experiments presented in this journal.

This question also arises from a widespread unease about the current condition of academia. Many of us have experienced how research becomes increasingly commercialized and competitive, how review systems strain under pressure, and how time for genuine intellectual engagement has diminished. Peer reviews are sometimes automated or written by overburdened academics under unrealistic expectations; civility and curiosity often give way to haste and hierarchy.

The founders of *Futures Reframed*, together with the members of our editorial board, share these concerns. Yet our aim is not merely to critique what has gone wrong, but to experiment with alternative models of knowledge production. *Futures Reframed* is conceived as a living laboratory for reimagining scholarly publishing - an effort to cultivate a practice of science grounded in openness, generosity, and epistemic care.

Our journal embodies several concrete experiments:

1. **Diamond open access.** Articles are freely available to all, and authors bear no publication costs. The *Futures Reframed Foundation* sustains this model through external funding from the University of Amsterdam library's Diamond Open Access Fund.
2. **Author ownership.** Contributors retain full rights to their texts - an uncommon but pivotal departure from conventional academic publishing.
3. **Double open review.** Authors and reviewers are known to one another and collaborate in improving the work. Each submission is reviewed by at least one, but mostly two, external scholars and one member of the editorial board. You can find a list of our growing reviewing board on our website. Our reviewers are not paid, but because of our non-anonymous approach, they at least receive credit for the important work they do.
4. **Kind review policy.** Reviews are approached as mentorship: honest, rigorous, yet always constructive. Academic writing demands time, attention, and respect; each piece deserves to be strengthened through dialogue, not diminished by critique. Our kind review policies have been inspired by the ideas of Charles Foster (2025) and can be found online.
5. **No rigid author guidelines.** Instead of prescriptive formats, we provide a simple template and ask only for complete references. This frees contributors to focus on substance rather than style.
6. **Transparent process.** Review exchanges are shared publicly, allowing readers to follow how ideas evolve through collaboration. Moreover, on our website you can find the exact details of how we have been funded, and what we spend it on.
7. **Experimental review formats.** A review may take the form of a podcast, a co-written reflection, or a live document. The aim is to explore which modes of engagement best nurture intellectual growth. Below each article you will find a link to a documentation of the review process - this is not only transparent, but also insightful for our readers and potential future authors. Below this editorial, for example, you will

find the link to the public review experiment we have conducted with the futures-thinkers community on linkedin, which helped us to improve this text.

8. Accessible language. The Futures Reframed editors encourage authors to refrain from unnecessary jargon. Abstract language is welcome if they serve an author's clear purpose, but preferably accompanied by concrete examples. If a text remains somewhat inaccessible for readers without academic training, for example because the author explicitly aims to theorize, we ask the author to write a more accessible text in parallel to it, or to provide context about their disciplinary background and their aims with the article.

All of these initiatives are imperfect by design. *Futures Reframed* is a living entity - an evolving process - rather than a fixed institution. We invite our community of fellow academics, practitioners, interested readers, writers, and reviewers to learn with us - to test, adapt, and collectively shape what science might become.

Yet our intention extends beyond methodological reform. Futures Reframed also asks what, and who, counts in the making of futures knowledge. As one of the reviewers for this editorial asked: how can we make sure that people without academic backgrounds feel comfortable and invited to engage with the discussions published in this journal? Can we communicate in a language that is accessible to a wide range of readers, whether this be people working in the field of futures thinking who are less familiar with the highly abstract jargon that has come to define so much academic writing, or people with neurodiverse ways of thinking and understanding? This is a relevant challenge for a journal such as this, which hopes to attract both scholars and practitioners. Together, they - or, we should say: we - have the opportunity to change the field of futures thinking, and perhaps even the world.

These questions around knowledge production do not arise in a vacuum. We find ourselves in a moment when the very infrastructures of knowledge - and the futures they sustain - are under strain. Climate collapse, digital acceleration and the changing world order expose how fragile our systems of knowing have become. The familiar promises of 'progress' no longer suffice; what we need are modes of science attuned to complexity, humility and care. To ask how science could be otherwise is, therefore, also to ask how we ourselves - as individuals, as communities, as societies - might think, collaborate, and imagine otherwise.

As a journal rooted in *futures studies*, we recognize the epistemic blind spots that persist in our field: the topics rarely addressed, and the voices seldom heard. Mainstream futures thinking often privileges Western, technocratic, and policy-driven visions of progress. It tends to overlook the imaginative, affective, and relational dimensions of how people everywhere engage with possible futures.

We seek to amplify those neglected perspectives. This includes knowledge emerging from children and youth, from artists and activists, from Indigenous and community-based thinkers, and from those whose ways of knowing do not fit within academic convention. We also aim to foreground themes that the discipline often sidesteps: grief, care, silence, spirituality, uncertainty, and everyday forms of resilience. In this sense, *Futures Reframed* is both a journal and a reframing of the field itself - an attempt to broaden what counts as legitimate futures knowledge and who is recognized as its producer.

With this first issue, *Futures Reframed* thus opens two interlinked conversations: one on how science could be otherwise, and another on how futures thinking itself might be reframed. Both are driven by the same conviction: that knowledge-making is not only about

clarity and advancement, but also about the willingness to dwell with ambiguity, to confront what is unseen, and to find, in darkness, the beginnings of a more honest light.

To carry these conversations forward, we did not commission an afterword so much as respond to one. César García Martínez, a social and cultural anthropologist with experience in intercultural education, approached us with the proposal to write a reflection on this first thematic issue, and we welcomed it precisely because, as an editorial collective, we are acutely aware that our own perspectives on futures thinking are partial, even as we occupy a relatively powerful position in shaping how futures knowledge circulates. Drawing on the articles gathered in this first thematic issue, his text traces what we might learn from them – also for the issues still to come – while at the same time pointing to what remains implicit, tentative, or only hinted at between the lines. His afterword connects directly to our earlier reflections in this editorial on who feels invited into futures conversations through the language used. He reminds us how the terms and metaphors authors use in writing, shape which futures - and whose knowledge - become thinkable, and which remain in the dark. Garcia Martinez furthermore suggests that reframing darkness also requires unlearning: deframing inherited associations between light, progress, and 'the future' so that other temporalities (other ways of understanding time), other ways of sensing and feeling the world can come into view. In listening to his critique, we hope to learn - in our characteristic, experimental manner - how Futures Reframed itself might become more accountable, and more attentive to the diverse audiences that engage in futures thinkers: scholars and practitioners alike.

PUBLIC REVIEW

For this editorial, we conducted a reviewing experiment in which we asked the futuresthinkers community to comment publicly (through linkedin) on a first draft. We received many excellent suggestions, which we tried to integrate into this final version. The main comments revolved around 1) language and accessibility - how do we make sure that a wide range of readers (people with non-academic trainings, people with neurodiverse brains) feel invited to engage in the discussions we publish, and 2) can we make the writings practical - in other words, if practitioners from the futures thinking community read along, then what can they practically learn from our authors?

You can read the public reviews, plus the original draft here.

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