CALL FOR PAPERS

The Cultural Imaginaries of (Dis)Trust

> Though more to know could not be more to trust,
> From whence thou camest, how tended on: but rest
> Unquestion'd welcome and undoubted blest.
> Give me some help here, ho! If thou proceed
> As high as word, my deed shall match thy meed.
>
> ***All's Well That Ends Well*, Act II, Scene I**

The proliferation of words like "autocracy", "post-truth", and "permacrisis" in global media and everyday discussions, coupled with the uncertainties linked to the lasting impact of AI on conceptions of subjectivity and the protocols of social life, has made it necessary to reappraise what constitutes the 'staying with the trouble' (Haraway 2016) in the extended meanwhile of precarity that Lauren Berlant has aptly described as 'crisis ordinariness' (Berlant 2011). While the recent analytical work on resilience has highlighted a gamut of critical applications ranging from the 'cruel optimism' of neoliberal energetics (Berlant 2011) and a 'culturally embedded understanding' of neoliberal self-governance (Bourbeau 2018/2021) to feminist and postcolonial imaginations of resilience as a difference that can upset as well as reify the structures of neoliberal policymaking (O'Brien 2025), its dominant emphasis on structural endurance and adaptation has favoured the conceptual proximities of hope and care, largely bypassing the dialectic of trust/distrust, which have arguably made the glitch in the ongoingness of social life a possibility in the first place. In this context, Berlant's questions "With whom can you imagine sharing the world's sidewalk? What do you do with the figures of threat and dread that your own mind carries around?" (Berlant 2022) develop an urgency for critical and creative vernaculars that can address the old and new forms of relationality, which underpin the ethics of social contract and generate the affective pressures of co-existence 'within damaged life's perdurance' (Berlant 2022).

With this volume, we aim to think about the cultural configurations of trust and trustworthiness (and lack thereof) not only as a set of dispositions, cognitions, and affects, which reaffirm the tenacity and viability of social relations (Jones 2012), but also as 'a form of corporate governance' (Barbalet 2019) as well as a 'transitional infrastructure' (Berlant 2022) that bring

to relief the contradictory modalities of nonsovereign relationality inherent in the political ecologies of late modernity. How does the dialectic of trust/distrust operate in the reproduction of life and its social institutions? What does it mean to suggest that trust constitutes the implicit givenness of our world and unfolds the 'affective depth' (Utley 2014) of our experience of vulnerability? What does the phenomenology of trust make visible in crisis ordinariness? What poetic forms do trust and distrust take in cultural imaginaries? How do trust and its ethical siblings help (or hinder) scholars of the humanities and creative artists reimagine, reconfigure, or renew commitments to new pluralities or collectivities?

We invite contributors to address any of the questions asked above, or any of the following additional questions or topics, or your own **trust**-related question or topic:

- What theoretical problems are raised by the idea of the decay of **trust**? How does it relate to 'permacrisis' and/or 'crisis ordinariness'?
- Trustworthy and/or trusting – institutions, texts, or readers?
- Can and should we read **trust** historically? What would that entail?
- 'Hope for the best, prepare for the worst': how does hope relate to **trust** in addressing the political impasse between hope and resilience and creating the imaginaries of the future?
- How do postcolonial and decolonial frameworks reframe **trust** in relation to sustainability and ecological justice?
- How might concepts such as slow violence, multispecies justice, and speculative futures expand our understanding of **trust**?
- What alternative epistemologies of **trust** emerge from marginalized communities?
- How can literature, art, and cultural production intervene in the breakdown of **trust**?
- Respond to or situate the idea of **trust** in any of the following contexts:
  - as a genre of self-knowledge
  - as a crisis-epistemology
  - as a form of affective judgment
  - as a (neo-liberal) governance of the self in conditions of uncertainty and risk
  - as a (neo-)conservative measure
  - in cultural memory and mnemonic politics
  - in the construction of the idea or possibility of truth
  - in the dynamics of sincerity, suspicion, and surveillance
  - in the posthuman ecologies of alien agency: AI, nonhuman animals, elemental forces, etc.
  - in the microecology of disaster: catastrophe, comedy, awkwardness, intimacy, work, care work, noticing, dissociating, etc.
  - in Indigenous trauma and the aesthetics of *survivance*
  - in climate emergency and/or ecological criticism
  - in questions of moral and/or legal (un)accountability
  - in the ethics of vulnerability

References

Barbalet, Jack. 2019. "The Experience of Trust: Its Content and Basis." *Trust in Contemporary Society*, edited by Masamichi Sasaki. Leiden: Brill.

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Bourbeau, P. 2021. *On Resilience. Genealogy, Logics, and World Politics*. Cambridge: CUP.

Haraway, D. J. 2016. *Staying with the Trouble*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

Head, V. 1968. "On the Meaning of Trust." *Ethics*, Vol. 78, No. 2, pp. 156-159.

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Pugliese, A. 2019. "Phenomenologies of Trust." *THEORIA*, No. 2. pp.111-132

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Please submit proposals of no more than 300 words with a 100-word bio-note to westernliterature@flf.vu.lt

Deadline for proposals is 15 November, 2025.

Full chapter deadline: 1 June 2026