

Emotions of the Future

Friday 22 November 2024
Macquarie University, Sydney



William Holbrook, *The Lost Balloon* (1882)

To think about the future is to attend to temporality. The future lies ahead and so the emotions that we might anticipate are those that speak to what is to come. The go-to future emotion is often hope. We hope for a better world. Hope is the emotion – sometimes cruel – that fuels our fantasies and drives our action. But hope is not the only emotion associated with what is to come. We might anticipate or expect; we may feel joyful or despair; we might fear or feel anxiety about the unknown. The future might bear down, loom, or intimidate, and we might respond with despondence or indeed hedonistic avoidance. The future might be invested in families, lineage and children, or learning and education, commitments to the future through our investments in the now.

What we feel when we consider the future reflects how we come to imagine it and so too opens up histories and stories of how we have chosen to envision what is to come. Many cultures have prophesied and predicted, each with their own emotional resonances. Writers, artists and scientists have produced utopic and

dystopic accounts of tomorrow, and such world-building often brings with it an underlying ‘tone’ or ‘atmosphere’ that disciplines how those who live in such worlds should feel. Invention and creativity are often explained as much through references to feeling – curiosity, passion, inspiration – as to reason and hard work. Historians, sociologists, anthropologists and psychologists alike have sought to articulate how emotions have changed over time, and so to lay out imaginaries of what the emotional subject of the future might look like (or *should*). Educators and businesses promote ‘emotional intelligence’ as a skill to learn and so propose a future world that would benefit from such learning.

Thinking about the future that we want seems increasingly pressing in the contemporary world, not least as climate crisis, war, and evolving demographics raise uncertainty. This call for papers seeks contributions that speak to this theme, and that pursue the question of how thinking about emotions might help us better understand how we think about the future. Proposals from any discipline and from scholars at all stages of career are welcome.

Papers should typically be twenty minutes long; proposals for panels and roundtables are also welcome. If you would like to propose something less conventional, please do get in touch. Hybrid options are a possibility; please indicate on your proposal if that is desired.

Please send a title, 200 word abstract and two-sentence bio for each speaker to katie.barclay@mq.edu.au by 31 July 2024.

Conference organisers: Katie Barclay, Dianne Hall, Dolly MacKinnon, Una McIlvenna, Charlotte-Rose Millar

This event is the first in a series by the organisers that press us to consider the intersections of future, feeling, children, temporality, crisis and our imagined responses. Please look out for further information.

