



## Future Fears: Anticipation and the Politics of Emotion in the Future Industry

By

Christina Garsten and Adrienne Sörbom

### Future of Engineering – Warsaw June 2019

The room was abuzz with voices of excitement. After a long day of presentations about what the future of engineering may look like, it is time to make our own contributions in the craft of foresight. We are about 50 persons, seated in groups of eight around round tables. A cardboard game is placed at each table. Prominently placed at the center is the name of the game: *Stranger Futures*. To the right, eight trends are framed and listed, for instance, “Increasing cognitive and creative abilities of AI” and “Increase in applications of neurotechnology-based innovations.” There is a small brown cardboard board in front of each participant, and each board has four figures and four dots. Three of the dots are colored in lilac, jade, antique red, and the fourth dot is an empty circle outlined in black. Above the dots are four figures, resembling an eye/screen, an engineer/doctor, a tractor and a brain/neural network. In the coming hours, the Polish strategic foresight consultancy TCF – *Tempus est Carpendi Futurum* – explains to us how to play the game. Company CEO Adam Kowalski opens the session by briefly describing how TCF serves client interests to “stay on the wave of change.” He continues describing how “clients trust our foresight” because “we provide value.” To this end, TCF develops various kinds of tools – the game being one of these. The basic idea of *Stranger Futures* is to make use of the collective intelligence of the participants and challenge their unquestioned beliefs about the future. The goal of the game is to enhance the client’s “future actionability” and “have fun while doing it.” Kowalski ends by quoting Mark Twain, saying that “it ain’t what you don’t know that gets you into trouble, it’s what you know for sure that just ain’t so.” His comments are met with laughs, applause, and nods of recognition.

We now turn to our tables. The game master at our table, Maciek Dabrowski, who works at TCF, sits behind a ten-centimeter-high cardboard shield where

Garsten, Christina & Sörbom, Adrienne: “Future Fears: Anticipation and the Politics of Emotion in the Future Industry”, *Culture Unbound*, Volume 13, issue 3, 2021. Published by Linköping University Electronic Press: <http://www.cultureunbound.ep.liu.se>



he keeps his game instructions. He introduces the game to the players. Over the course of the next hour, we play a round with one of the trends on display at the table. During the game, trends can be intensified, weakened, or stay more or less as they are. The idea is to explore “the reality of creating innovations in 2050,” as Maciek explains. He continues: “Does anyone have any ideas, in regard to how one of these trends might change?” The woman seated next to us, Petra Lans, a noteworthy actor in the future industry working at a British futures learning foundation, says that she believes that in 2050 people will not need to eat because of advances in stem cell research. “You can just place back your growing cells, so you won’t need to eat food anymore.” Maciek makes a note of this, and as this trend will disrupt basic assumptions about human life, she is assigned the status of “precognite,” which is recognized by two coins. As it turns out, this is more than we will earn over the course of the entire game, since we are not deemed “innovators.” We supported Laura’s idea and developed it further by suggesting that in 2050 we would all live in global tyranny, under which new stem cells would be distributed to all humankind.

The game continues with other ideas regarding the stem cell process. Maciek is kindly developing participant suggestions to make them applicable in the game. Once each person at the table has taken her/his turn suggesting new ideas or adjusting others’ ideas, it is time to vote. Do the others believe that what is proposed is likely or not? The stem cell projection receives a majority of affirmative votes, whereas we are the only ones who find the idea of global tyranny plausible. We lose the coin we have earned. We all cheer and laugh, and it is time for the next round.

### **Introduction: A Landscape of Affectivity**

The futurist consultancy TCF and the game *Stranger Futures* exemplify practices within the market of the Future Industry, composed foremost of consultancies but also foundations, associations, and academic institutions. Commonly, narratives produced within this industry specialize in future scenarios in various formats, fixating the future as a “commodity,” i.e., something that can be bought and sold on a market, and whose abstract nature is made to appear substantial and real (cf. Taussig 1980). When futurists and engineers play *Stranger Futures*, emotions such as fear, hope, anxiety, and optimism are invoked in tandem with scientific concepts and visions based on science fiction. The very idea of the game is to make participants/customers experience and sense what this version of the future might entail and then reflect on this future, asking questions what this means for their own personal and/or organizational lives. The emotions are intended, by those provoking them, as a way of opening minds to imaginations and conceptions of a time to come, and, it should be added, of anchoring these images of the future

in the contemporary situation. The introductory vignette exemplifies practices used to “make up” potential future trends, in Hacking’s sense (Hacking 2006), fantasizing about their implications and about potential winners and losers.

Emotions are at the core of human day-to-day activities, and they permeate organizations profoundly, influencing them and their motivations, political behavior, decision-making, and relations (Fotaki, Kenny & Vacchani 2017). Emotions and affectivity have, accordingly, been of long-standing interest in the humanities and social sciences (Hopkins et al. 2009). Since the early 1990s, however, we have witnessed an emotional or “affective” turn which has engulfed almost all major disciplines (Clough & Haley 2007). More than 40 years of inquiry into emotions in social contexts have made significant contributions to the fields of anthropology and sociology (e.g., Flam 2018, Lutz & White 1986, Leavit 1986, Andrew 2014). The turn has also had consequences in the studies of politics. Until the early 2000s, politics had for decades been analyzed void of emotion (Demertzis 2013:1), but are now picking up pace (e.g., Valentino et al. 2011, Wodak 2015, Vasilopoulou & Wagner 2017). Despite this growth in emotions as a generic field of study within the social sciences, the role of emotions for understanding the world of futures consulting has yet to be explored.

The intention of this paper is to contribute to an understanding of the character of organizational processes within the Future Industry by analyzing how emotions come into play in futurist practices. The Future Industry, we contend, serves and feeds into the emotional streams of contemporary politics and economics. By doing so, they also play a part in making up new contemporary forms of influence and governance. We wish to describe how this industry makes use of emotions, oftentimes in combination with a lingo alluring to science, in the interest of selling edited beliefs of the future. In this industry (like in many others) the cultivation, articulation and management of fear, anxiety, and hope, as well as a reliance on rationality, reason, and evidence, are central components. The Future Industry attempts to let its customers sense the pros and cons of this future. It “sells” emotions and states of affectivity, and terms this “knowledge of the future.” Its anticipatory practices to a large extent involve the making of a “politics of emotion,” involving the voicing of “problems” and the presentation of “desirable futures.”

The paper is based on ethnographic work in the Future Industry, which consists of many types of organizations, involved in the charting and relating to the time to come. The bulk of organizations constituting the industry are various types of future consultancies, offering their products to governments and businesses. But research institutes, foundations, think tanks, academic departments, and even associations also form part of this burgeoning industry. Because of their varying principals and constituencies, they differ in the degree to which selling is at the core of the

organization. Exact demarcations of the industry are virtually impossible to draw. In practice, this means that, for instance, university researchers may figure as part of the industry, but also consultants and “futurists” in various capacities. The field is, therefore, nebulous in character. At the core, however, are attempts to anticipate possible, plausible, and preferred futures, and to sell these as commodities.

The paper is structured as follows: First we conceptually introduce the role that the Future Industry may play in contemporary political visions, and the way emotions can be made use of in these activities. Second, we make use of ethnographic data from within the industry, in order to describe the type of product that is offered for sale. Third, and lastly, we discuss how organizations within the industry build their claims on reason, cognition, and metrics, founding a large part of their sway in putting emotions to work.

The material drawn upon for the paper is based on a combination of semi-structured and conversational interviews (about 80), participatory observations at events (such as when playing *Stranger Futures*) and at workplaces (some 160 days), and reading a large number of reports, websites, and other texts. Observations range from complete participatory observations to an observer role. Data has been transcribed and thematically analyzed, using NVivo as a systematizing and heuristic tool. For this paper, we are using data relating to the theme of “emotions and affectivity.” Note that apart from Klaus Schwab all names are pseudonyms, introduced in order to safeguard anonymity of the informants. The empirical data set as a whole comprises some 30 organizations. For the purposes of this paper, three main sites are used as points of departure for studying the Future Industry: the Swiss foundation World Economic Forum (WEF), the global network/association Millennium Project (TMP), and the California-based consultancy Institute for the Future (IFTF). These three ethnographic sites vary in size, level of action (global or national), and the character of constituencies. This variation is useful for developing and illustrating our argument. Importantly, in spite of the variation, they share the trait of having overt political interests; a trait that is important in order to understand the possible political implications of the industry they form part of. As the motto of the World Economic Forum indicates, they are all in the game for “improving the state of the world.” Certainly, they would not easily concede to the idea that they are in any way “political.” We maintain, however, that they at the level of discourse contribute to the setting of future political agendas.

### **The Future Industry: Business, Politics, and Emotions**

Our interest in this industry is driven by a deep-seated curiosity regarding politics and modern problematics of government and governance. Inspired by Rose and

Miller, we see contemporary political power as taking shape through a profusion of shifting alliances (Rose & Miller 1992). Central to modern contemporary forms of politics are the linkages formed between those entities that produce knowledge of others and the projects they pursue in the light of conceptions such as healthy, prosperous, efficient, profitable, etc. Knowledge is thus at the core of political activities and the very formation of its objects. Paraphrasing Moisi, author of *Geopolitics of Emotions* (2009), we submit that the mapping of futures to a large extent involves the making of a politics of emotion, as “they impact the attitudes of peoples, the relationships between cultures, and the behavior of nations” (2009: 29). In the voicing of “problems” and the presentation of “desirable futures,” the cultivation, articulation, and management of fear, anxiety, and hope, as well as a reliance on rationality, reason, and evidence, are central components. In this capacity, they also play central roles in “the writing of future worlds,” in Hannerz’ (2016) terms. As described by Adam and Groves, “future” has in the late-modern world been emptied of content, extracted from historical context, and thus become open for imagination, colonization, and traversal (Adam & Groves 2007:13). The contemporary entails that we understand ourselves not as observers but as implicated participants, inescapably responsible “for that future in the making” (ibid: 15). This imagination of an open future, hinging on our actions, is the shop floor of the Future Industry and a key site for futures becoming cultural facts (cf. Appadurai 2013).

In the organizational settings of the Future Industry, processes of anticipation and foresight are invested with both emotions and rationalities. Here, these interlinked practices, emotions, and rationalities together form a “product” that has the capacity, and oftentimes intention, to reshape the world. The product is an amalgam which introduces both political sense-making activities and a feeling of place, identity and security. As such, rationalities and emotions are cultivated and used to mobilize around certain services and communicative processes in order to create a sense of direction and authority. For consultancies and other types of organizations active in the Future Industry, providing possible and plausible visions of futures are key activities for attracting attention, gaining credibility, and ultimately for designing present and future actions. They employ a wide range of technically sophisticated tools, methods, and models (metrics, indexes, forecasting, and scenarios) to assist them in imagining possibilities, sketching trajectories, and providing a basis for further decisions.

In this process, a range of emotions are involved and intermingled. Specifically, we suggest, emotions such as fear, hope, anxiety, and optimism are cultivated as part of the attempts of future consultancies to position themselves in the competitive market of political ideas and ideologies. Emotions hold the promise of destabilizing and unsettling us, to move us into new states of being. They are a means by which

such consultancies may gain attention and leverage for its work and propositions. At times, emotions also work to attract individuals to work with these organizations, as in communities of expertise and topical task forces. Affectivity, i.e., the emotions that we experience and display, especially in terms of how these emotions influence us to act and make decisions, is thus part and parcel of the methods used by the Future Industry as it endeavors to shape the interests and priorities of others. Not least, affectivity is put to work to attract and entice politicians and policymakers into engaging with urgent political issues. Through the strategic use of seductive communicative actions, Future Industry organizations work to shape and frame economic, social, and policy predicaments, as it were, and more specifically to advance how they wish, for instance, social, economic, and environmental challenges to be understood and worked upon. In this sense, emotions are integral to the seductive offer of future consultancies. Seduction, in the broad sense, entails drawing people in and holding them in one's thrall. It involves radiating some quality that attracts others and stirs their emotions and influences their thoughts in ways desirable to the seducer. Thus, seduction is intimately tied up with subtle forms of governance—the practice of a discreet and subtle form of soft power that works more effectively than coercion (Garsten & Sörbom 2018).

### **Seductive Emotions**

With reference to central bankers, Holmes (2014) argues that rather than predicting the future, they seek to create the elements of a tractable future, and they do so with words. They use language to sustain not merely the ideas that animate our economic future, but also the structures of feeling, the sentiments, and expectations that make them real. This view of the performative communication by central banks also corresponds to the Future Industry; explicitly aiming for organizing the future. Here, words are aligned with predictions in, for instance, the scenario format, and drawn upon in the interest of making the future operative. The products of the Future Industry are scripted pieces of a future showing discernible features that buyers of the industry's products and other audiences can reflect and act upon. Collectively, these bits of anticipation form narratives of possible futures.

Compared to central bankers, though, actors within the Future Industry do not have the same type of leverage or mandate to inscribe the future. When a central bank calls for a press conference, representatives of the media are most often there, keen to spread the word of this authority. Moreover, the actions taken by central banks are of immediate consequence to many other organizations. Organizations in the future consultancy market must work differently. These organizations cannot decide what other actors should do; they lack the external

decision-making capabilities that a state-based authority has. Yet, the industry is obviously not without consequence. Not only because economic and social transactions involving high stakes are taking place, but also because individuals and organizations will actually make use of the scripts and templates that the future industry provides (Flyverbom & Garsten, in press).

To achieve authority in Coleman's sense (1974), that is, to be able to influence the actions of others, think tanks and futurists in general commonly propel ideas and visions and induce action among other actors by drawing on seduction as a social mechanism (Garsten & Sörbom 2018). Seduction, as recognized by political scientist Joseph Nye, implies the exercise of a subtle, soft form of power—the ability to shape the preferences of others through appeal and attraction, not by force (Nye 2008). At the personal level, we all know the power of attraction and seduction. In politics, as Nye shows, seduction is a staple and tends to be associated with an attractive personality, culture, political values, and institutions. Many values propelled by futurists, such as democracy and human rights, individual opportunities, and sustainability, are deeply seductive and almost irresistible. Soft power means getting others to want the outcomes that you want, to move in your direction. It is thus a form of cooptation and constitutes, in Nye's words, "real power" (2004). We suggest to understand the workings of the Future Industry to be based on the same type of seductive actions that we may see in politics.

At the core of seduction, we find emotions. Emotions are key for understanding the energy of mobilization that seduction can entail. By analyzing the emotions that the Future Industry draws upon, we can better understand the micro-sociological foundations of what the actors of the industry do. As Collins (2004) underscores in his analysis of emotions, it is the emotional energy of taken-for-grantedness — not the *Sturm und Drang* emotions — that constitutes much of the mundane life. Considerable work goes into producing this sense of everyday life. As Collins argues, the feeling that "nothing out of the ordinary is happening here" is what permeates mundane life (2004:106). Conversely, the role of the Future Industry with respect to emotions, we find, is to disturb the routine and the sense of mundanity, to rattle and wake up the actor it interacts with, and to introduce new perspectives through emotions.

Fundamentally, these emotions vary around fear, anger, happiness, and sadness (Collins 2004: 106). Our assumption is that out of these basic emotions, instilling a sense of happiness is what the Future Industry aims for. As Ahmed writes in her analysis of happiness in the contemporary, it "is the end state," and socially understood as "the perfect end," that to which all other things become means (Ahmed 2010:34). As such, happiness is "directed at certain objects, which point toward that which is not yet present." The actors of the Future Industry take an active interest in framing the "shared orientations" that groups/organizations

see “as being good” and “the cause of [future] delight” (ibid:35). Correspondingly, and worth underscoring, they also frame what to gravitate away from.

The ultimate interests of the actors in the Future Industry are varying, some more political and some more financial. That is to say, for some actors, fear and other emotions are made use of in the interest of shaping the future in a specific direction, while for others the main interest is to be a successful actor in the Future Industry, seen as a market. To be sure, combinations of the two are frequent, but the distinction is valuable as it underscores the simultaneously political and economic aspects of the industry. Irrespective of interests, the consequences are social, as they may bring about actions in and around the industry. In the coming examples of how this is attempted, we emphasize fear and happiness, as these are the core emotions drawn upon. These emotions are sent out like boomerangs into the unknown, coming back instilling both fear and hope for the future.

### Invoking Fear

The orientation within the Future Industry towards happiness, and the avoidance of fear, anger, and frustration, is predominantly constructed by words. Moving and static images are also drawn upon, but written texts and spoken words make up the bulk of the materials for these constructions. A large part of these words are based on some form of referred or mimicked scientific work, mediating what the organization wants the reader to feel. Science is made both the base of beliefs for the future, and the catalyst for affections.

The World Economic Forum (WEF) publishes a yearly report on global risks. The *2018 Global Risks Report* had the title: *Fractures, Fears and Failures*. The report provided a pessimistic view of the state of the world and the enhancement of risks. Whilst 2017 was described as a year of “widespread uncertainty, instability and fragility,” the 2018 report maintained that respondents to their annual Global Risks Perception Survey were much more pessimistic about the year ahead. The report highlighted four major concerns: (1) persistent inequality and unfairness, (2) domestic and international political tensions, (3) environmental dangers, and (4) cyber vulnerabilities. These risk domains all pointed to the increased dangers of systemic breakdown, it was claimed.

The WEF *Global Risks Report* is indicative of the fabrication and significance of fear and related emotions in organizations such as think tanks and future consultancies. It draws on the image of the globe, stressing how the contemporary generation holds the key to the future in its hand. This is both the generation “enjoying unprecedented technological, scientific and financial resources” and the “first generation to take the world to a systems breakdown” (WEF 2018: 5). The future is seen to be truly in the hands of this generation, open and ready for



action. At the same time, the specific characteristics of the future as sketched by the organization are commonly conceived as irreversible and inevitable. As often described by WEF founder Klaus Schwab, the world is with certainty witnessing a revolution, to which it has to adapt:

We stand on the brink of a technological revolution that will fundamentally alter the way we live, work, and relate to one another. In its scale, scope, and complexity, the transformation will be unlike anything humankind has experienced before. We do not yet know just how it will unfold, but one thing is clear: the response to it must be integrated and comprehensive, involving all stakeholders of the global polity, from the public and private sectors to academia and civil society (Schwab 2016: 1).

Technology is here treated as a force that may be part disruptive, part beneficial to humankind, but fundamentally natural, innate to the world, and elementary as is, for instance, the tsunami appearing after an earthquake at sea. You can—in fact, you have to be—proactive, drawing on foresight to protect and make the best of the situation, but you cannot avoid the evolution of technology.

The Millennium Project, a US-based but global think tank engaged in providing “global intelligence” for future foresight, warns about the threats of advanced technologies to employment. In a presentation of the think tanks’ future scenarios we read: “A growing body of AI experts believes that if socio-political-economic systems stay the same, and technological acceleration, integration, and globalization continue, then half the world could be unemployed by 2050” (Millennium Project 2019a).

To address this grand challenge, The Millennium Project has launched a Future Work/Technology 2050 study with eight steps, involving literature and a related research review, road maps and scenario drafts, policy implications, national planning workshops, and public discussion. To create a sense of urgency and acuteness, the organization works to make its readers imagine what a world in which half of the population would be unemployed would look and feel like. As its CEO presents it in a short film, the idea is “to make real the feeling, the taste, touch and feeling of the future” (TMP 2019b). Propelled by the unease and worry that such imaginations may stir, the think tank then mobilizes select groups of experts through planning workshops and scenario drafts, intended for policy implementation.

We took part in one of these workshops, set up in the US with foremost governmental staff participating. The aim of the workshop was to articulate what the US government needs to change in relation to AI and future work. As is

common at events within the Future Industry, a sense of seriousness encapsulated it. A few days before, we had been let to know that we could not bring any laptops, cell phones, or digital devices into the session rooms, as we were to enter a military setting of sorts. And, more specifically, as the two of us were non-US citizens, parts of the area were off-limits to us. Leaving all our digital belongings outside the session rooms where we were to spend the next six hours, we were contemplating the message of gravity this sent. The discussions to take place must be understood as serious business, we gathered.

The main meeting room was set in grayish tones. Gray walls with gray carpets, metal chairs with darker grey seats. The only color to be seen was found on the US flag, which was leaning against the wall, but nailed in order not to slouch. Also, the light blue shirts of the many (mostly white) men participating in dark grey suits, added color to the room. In the grey daylight outside, a tree with pink flower blossoms suggested something colorful to look at.

After a brief introduction by the organizers, we split up into smaller discussion groups; Christina sits down with the culture and technology group and Adrienne with the group discussing government's role in 2050 for the world of work. Discussions in the groups are engaged, and since we have left our digital devices outside, no one is googling or checking out other stuff. The groups are leaning in towards each other, eagerly facing the person talking.

The future we are discussing is presented in the scenarios provided by TMP. Even though three versions were presented – truly positive, pretty bad, and really bad – discussions set out from the worst scenario. No one seemed to believe or at least be interested in the positive scenario, neither entertaining the idea of the “the self-actualization economy” nor the playful conceptual inventions such as “Next Tech and artificial super intelligence” from the positive mixed-bag scenario. Rather, it is conclusions such as the following that dominate the discussion: “Two thirds of the world’s workforce is either in the informal economy or unemployed,” and “Since guaranteed income systems are not in place, social strife, and the growth of cybercrimes, terrorism and organized crime dominate much of world affairs” (TMP 2017:138). The discussions circulate around words such as “disruption,” “friction,” and suggestions that “it’s gonna be completely different,” and “institutions need to change because the current model isn’t serving.”

In the afternoon, it is time for participants to formulate their recommendations for government to move forward with. Participants take the task seriously, even though the whole workshop is a voluntary exercise and recommendations are not to be taken to the government, but form part of what TMP suggests in its coming activities. We work quietly and intensely in smaller groups on how to get these recommendations right. Still, in this part of the workshop, suggestions are somewhat lighter in tone. A major conclusion from the groups is that we need

better stories on progress and specifically with respect to the US, and why not establish a museum of the Future at the National Mall in DC? Another group suggests that the government needs to engage citizens in its future activities. A third group raises the question of how we can measure progress, and not merely failures? Finally, Peter Fox, convener of the event, concludes by saying that “we need to be smarter, we have been warned by Elon Musk and others.” While leaving the workshop – feeling tired after a whole day of workshopping – we discuss what messages had been conveyed. A sense of fear and urgency had been communicated, but also an instance of hope and room for action. The governmental actors of the workshop were sincere in their aspirations to solve future issues. Yet, we wonder, what could a day such as this accomplish?

### Future Metrics

Creating a sense of need, and readiness for action, by its narratives of the time to come, the Future Industry also builds upon statistics, pictures, graphs, and texts. The *WEF Global Risks Report* is a strong seller in this respect. The reports come out impressively, with texts and graphs intertwined with the narration of future risk. Rita Lesley, a senior manager at the WEF headquarters in Geneva and responsible for the report, describes the complexities of the work involved in constructing the risks in the following way:

We’ve got fifty global risks that we look at as a set, and then we conduct a perception survey over summer to fall every year, and then coming out from that we sort of identify the key emerging themes in peoples’ minds about the potential high-impact, high-likelihood risks for the coming ten years, and then we extract it into three different cases. It’s almost like telling a story around these risks. (Interview, 2013)

When we met Rita Lesley there were 50 risks, but the number has changed over time. The number had just expanded from 37 in order to balance the risks internally. She explains that this was done because “some were much more macro, like climate change, and others were more like micro, like flooding, but we try to keep it on the same order as much as possible, so there is comparability.” Later, the number of risks continued to change. In 2015 the number of risks were reduced to 28, whereas in 2020 the number had gone up again, to 30 risks.

The criteria for being presented as a risk in the survey are set by the WEF itself. Rita Lesley explains:

Each risk will have global implications, in the sense that it affects more than one region and more than one industry, and it would be something that cannot be solved by one stakeholder. These risks can be of two sorts: coming about as a shock, like the financial crisis in 2008; or underlying factors amplifying the shock. In the case of the financial crisis, that would be the sort of structural issues around the financing incentives, or there might be structural issues around how the financial market is organized.

These risks are not static: they can all be put on or removed from the list at any time. If the creeping risk of ineffective antibiotics would be mitigated, for instance, it would be removed from the list.

As Rita Lesley says: “We can’t really be repackaging old news, but at the same time we can’t be too far out, because otherwise it becomes science fiction.” Thus, the construction of the risk report is a balancing act between at least two issues affecting their work. One issue is the danger of missing something that later turns out to be a significant risk, affecting the lives of many people, simply because it is not mentioned in the channels that Lesley and the team have established. A second issue is to address a risk that many people do not truly consider to be a global risk, but merely something that some actor wants to bring into the discussion. There is, of course, a strong interest among many actors to get their specific concern into the analysis and rated as a risk by the WEF. Since the WEF intends not to take sides in political issues, however, it is of great importance for the team to keep the risks that end up in the report as neutral and non-political as possible. Accordingly, an important part of the team’s work is to validate and evaluate the importance of risks raised by their many contacts.

Through its activities, WEF articulates and opens up a specific “horizon,” to use Koselleck’s (2004) term, here used as a figurative and analytical device for negotiating relationships among experience, everyday life, and historical and future time. The sense of future time at the WEF is generated through tensions between experience and expectation, between identified risks and possible solutions. Their increasing divergence opens a horizon, toward which agency can be projected, and the authority and influence of the WEF may be leveraged. This horizon is envisioned from its headquarters by the shores of Lake Geneva. They articulate a particular form of “anticipatory knowledge” (Gusterson 2008), geared to contribute to the shaping of political priorities and agendas, reflecting WEF’s central values and priorities. Its future risk scenarios aim to shape perceptions of what constitute “global problems,” and how they might best be addressed and governed. In this way, they contribute to the anticipatory governance potential of the WEF: governance geared to integrate imaginaries of the future into regulatory

processes. The scenarios for possible futures developed in this context inform new ways of building resilience to risks and threats of various kinds through close collaboration with its funders: the largest transnational corporations in the world.

Just as the risk scenarios of the WEF, the metrics of the future presented by TMP also tend to invoke a sense of *evolution*, thus combining a sense of crisis and urgency with something completely natural. What we are facing according to TMP, and the Future Industry at large, is a societal evolution where we go from one phase in history to the next, driven by technology. As James Cantor from the Institute for Global Future opens his book on the Extreme Future (showcased by the WEF as one of the world's ten best predictions of the future: "We were at the beginning of a sea of change" (Cantor 2006). In the 2017 version of its *State of the Future Index*, TMP presents how the Earth and its human population will fare in the coming decades. Based on its own calculations, which began in the mid-1990s, it argues that we, humankind, are gaining more than we are losing. In the table describing the general trend of humankind, a more or less straight upward line goes from 1990 to 2030. After 2017 until 2030, the line is only indicated by dots, but the general prediction is that "we are gaining more than we are losing" (TMP 2017: 173). It states that, "the rate of global improvement for the coming decades will be 1,14% versus 3,14% for the period 1990 to 2017." (TMP 2017: 6). Apparently, the world had a hiccup of positive evolution around 2007, prior to the financial crisis of 2008, because that is the only indication of non-linear transformation in the calculations of the state of humankind. TMP warns, though, that "although we are winning more than we are losing, where we are losing is very serious. 'Business as usual' trend projects for water, food, unemployment, terrorism, organized crime, and pollution could create complex future disasters" (TMP 2017: 8). The essential idea is that you can and need to design the future. The future is so extreme that it does not look like anything we have seen before. The plodding along will not make do.

### Instilling Hope

In June 2018, the California-based think tank Institute for the Future (ITF) announced on its web site that its Institute "first ever "Magician-in-Residence," Ferdinando Buscema, will inject even more wonder into Futures Thinking":

Institute for the Future (ITF) has partnered with magic experience designer, author, and organizational consultant Ferdinando Buscema as ITF's first ever 'Magician-in-Residence.' Buscema and ITF will co-develop events, corporate workshops, and research at the intersection of technology, organizational strategy, and magic to spark

the imagination. (<https://www.iftf.org/future-now/article-detail/iftfs-magician-in-residence>, accessed March 18, 2021)

The Institute intends to use magic, as a way of constructing affectivity and precipitating insights. “Magic provides audiences an opportunity to playfully challenge the very notion of what’s possible, fueling curiosity, and renewing people’s sense of wonder about the world,” says Buscema (*ibid.*), an internationally acclaimed conjurer and sleight-of-hand artist who regularly performs at the prestigious Magic Castle in Hollywood. The Institute describes its new collaboration:

IFTF will meld its time-tested methodologies for futures thinking with Buscema’s magic experience design to help organizations and the public think systematically about the future in astonishing new ways and, ultimately, make better decisions in the present. (<https://www.iftf.org/future-now/article-detail/iftfs-magician-in-residence>, accessed March 18, 2021)

The above quote makes visible the importance of hope and positivity, indeed magic, in future-oriented think tanks and the Future Industry at large. The conjuring of hope is yet another way by which the industry tries to offer possible ways forward; moving the globe away from the dangers and risks of environmental disasters, weak state formations, massive unemployment, or other types of systemic breakdowns. The quote also captures the sense of agency and empowerment that is often underscored by, for instance, think tanks and consultancies geared to designing the future. As expressed, for instance, by James Canton: “I want to challenge you, the reader, to see the future as a designable event that the individual can influence” (Canton 2006: 4). He continues:

It’s a new kind of future, not the steady plodding of progress from one moment to the next, punctuated by brief bursts of innovation, that characterizes much of history. Now we face a post-9/11 future. The future of our lives, of our work, of our businesses – and most all the future of our world – depends on us gaining a new understanding of the dizzying changes that lie ahead. I call this future-readiness (Canton 2006: 4).

This “future-readiness” suggests that there are ways to understand and manage the openness of the future and that both individual and organizational actors may learn how to do this. In a similar vein, Bob Johansen, at the Institute for

the Future, articulates much of the same positive empowerment and hope in his book *The New Leadership Literacies* (2017). He argues for the development of a specific leadership capacity that is required in order to meet a disruptive future, the so called “future literacy”. This is a term that has both been launched within the industry and established as a framework of UNESCO’s future oriented activities (<https://en.unesco.org/themes/futures-literacy>, accessed 2019–10–08). The idea within UNESCO is to foster a “capability” and a “skill that allows people to better understand the role that future plays in what they see and do.” To some extent, then, orienting towards the future, apprehending risks and opportunities, and articulating ways of dealing with these are capabilities that can be learnt. It also implies that actors may organize themselves to develop and expand these kinds of capabilities. Future literacy can be taught and learnt. In this process, “voluntary fear exposure will allow leaders to create low-risk spaces where they can practice rapid prototyping for innovation” (Johansen 2017: 45). Fear and hope are thus constructively conjoined by and within the Future Industry.

### **Sense, Sensibility, and Seduction**

Contemporary forms of governance build to a large extent on the assumption that what is critical and valued can also be measured and compared. The reliance on and trust in numbers, on which the work of Future Industry organizations largely reside, articulates the combinatory exercise of aligning aspirations towards credibility, legitimacy, and quality with subtle yet coercive forms of control and oversight. The forms of knowledge created by the use of metrics and indicators rely on the magic of numbers and the appearance of certainty and objectivity that they convey. “Indicators have the capacity to convert complicated contextually variable phenomena into unambiguous, clear, and impersonal measures” (Engle Merry 2011: S84). They represent a technology of producing readily accessible and standardized forms of knowledge and reason, and are thus highly attractive to think tanks and similar organizations with governance ambitions.

Alluding to the tension presented in Jane Austen’s novel *Sense and Sensibility* (2017, first published 1811), we see tensions between how Future Industry actors present a conflict between two opposite ways of approaching the world. Jane Austen indicates that both sense and sensibility are necessary for a complete life, but in this novel, she demonstrates that the pain and vagaries of living require a greater use of sense than of sensibility. Although the definitions of these two abstract nouns repeatedly shift meaning, the reader quickly comes to understand that Elinor and Edward Ferrars represent “sense” and Marianne and John Willoughby are the book’s representatives of “sensibility.”

In a somewhat similar vein, the story of the Future Industry is built around this tension. Despite their claims to evidence-based knowledge production and facts-based reports – sense, as it were – future consultancies and the like are, like any other organizations, repositories and fabricators of emotions of all kinds – i.e. of sensitivity. And indeed, what explains a large part of their seductive qualities may be found in their deployment of emotion. The “texture of affectivity” may be said to be more multilayered and convoluted than that of rationality (Albrow 1997: 107). Sensations, feelings, and moods inhabit emotions, attitudes, vices, and virtues. As Martin Albrow (ibid.) has it: “As with rationality the descriptive and evaluative are hardly to be disentangled except as phases in a process.” Affectivity should be recognized as a key aspect of organizational performance. Moreover, and more importantly, the affective dimension may allow us to understand and explain how Future Industry actors are transforming themselves from fringe voices to persuasive political actors who set the agenda and frame media debates (cf. Wodak 2015). This “politics of fear” is entrenching new social divides of nation, identity, gender, and educational background.

Speaking with political theorist and cognitive scientist George Lakoff (2008), we object to the dichotomy between reason and emotion. The old view of Enlightenment and its modern rational version saw reason and emotion as opposites, with emotion getting in the way of reason. This view is utterly misleading. Instead, reason requires emotion. Also, in the political domain, as Westen has shown in his book *The Political Brain* (2007), emotion is both central and legitimate in political persuasion. Emotions *are* rational, rather than irrational.

The politics of emotion that is cultivated within the Future Industry builds to a great extent on the seductive capabilities of its communicative actions. It rests, in other words, on the invocation, framing, and leverage of emotions. The new authority relations, forged by way of Future Industry foundations, consultancies, think tanks, etc. may build their claims on reason, cognition, and metrics, but a large part of their sway resides in the emotions that are put to work and that attract and seduce its audiences and stakeholders. A focus on affectivity may reveal the micro-politics of educated populism: how discourses, genres, images, and texts are performed and manipulated in both formal and also everyday contexts with potentially profound political, economic and social consequences.

## References

- Adam, Barbara & Chris Groves (2007): *Future Matters: Action, Knowledge, Ethics*, Leiden: Brill.
- Ahmed, Sara (2010): *The Promise of Happiness*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Albrow, Martin (1997): *Do Organizations have Feelings?*, New York: Routledge.



- Appadurai, Arjun (2013): *The Future as Cultural Fact: Essays on the Global Condition*, London: Verso.
- Austen, Jane (2017/1811): *Sense & Sensibility*, London: Arcturus.
- Barsade, Sigal & Donald Gibson, (2007): "Why Does Affect Matter in Organizations?", *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 21:36–59.
- Beatty, Andrew (2014), "Anthropology and Emotion", *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* (N.S.), 20, 545–563
- Canton, James (2006): *The Extreme Future: The Top Trends That Will Reshape the World*, New York: Penguin Group.
- Clough, Patricia T. & Jean Haley (2007): *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social*, Durham: Duke University Press.
- Coleman, James (1974): *Power and the Structure of Society*, New York: Norton.
- Demertzis, Nicolas (2013): *Emotions in Politics: The Affect Dimension in Political Tension*, New York: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Elfenbein, Hillary, A. 2008. "Emotion in Organizations", *The Academy of Management Annals*, 1:1, 315–86.
- Engle Merry, Sally (2011): "Measuring the World: Indicators, Human Rights, and Global Governance", *Current Anthropology*, 52 (S3): S83–S95.
- Elfenbein, A. C. (2008) "Emotion in Organizations", *The Academy of Management Annals* 1(1): 315–86.
- Fineman, Stephen. .2003. *Understanding Emotion at Work*, London: Sage.
- Fineman, Stephen (2004): "Getting the Measure of Emotion – And the Cautionary Tale of Emotional Intelligence", *Human Relations* 57(6): 719–40.
- Flam, Helena (2018): A Note on the Sociology of Emotions. *ISA E-symposium for Sociology*. <https://www.isaportal.org/resources/resource/a-note-on-the-sociology-of-emotions/> Accessed 2021–03–12.
- Fotaki, Mariana, Kate Kenny and Kate Vacchani. 2017. "Thinking Critically about Affect in Organization Studies: Why it matters", *Organization*, First Published January 6, 2017.
- Garsten, Christina & Adrienne Sörbom (2018): *Discreet Power: How the World Economic Forum Shapes Global Market Agendas*, Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Gusterson, Hugh (2008): "Nuclear futures: anticipatory knowledge, expert judgment, and the lack that cannot be filled", *Science and Public Policy*, 35: 8, 551–560.
- Hacking, Ian (2006): "Kinds of People: Moving Targets", *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 151:285–318.
- Hannerz, Ulf (2016): *Writing Future Worlds: An Anthropologist Explores Global Scenarios*, Basingstoke. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Holmes, Douglas 2(014): *Economy of Words: Communicative Imperatives in Central Banks*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

- Hopkins, Debra, Jochen Kleres, Helena Flam & Helmut Kuzmics (eds.) (2009): *Theorizing Emotions*, New York: N.Y. Campus.
- Johansen, Bob (2017): *The New Leadership Literacies: Thriving in a Future of Extreme Disruption and Distributed Everything*, Oakland: Berret-Koehler Publishers, Inc.
- Lakoff, George (2008), *The Political Mind: Why You Can't Understand 21st Century Politics with an 18th Century Brain*, London: Penguin Books.
- Leavitt, John (1996): "Meaning and Feeling in the Anthropology of Emotions", *American Ethnologist*, 23:3, 514–539.
- Lutz, Catherine & Geoffrey White (1986): "The Anthropology of Emotions", *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 15:405–436.
- Loseke, Donileen (2009): "Examining Emotion as Discourse: Emotion Codes and Presidential Speeches Justifying War", *Sociological Quarterly* 50:3, 497–524.
- Moisi, Dominique (2009): *The Geopolitics of Emotion*, New York: Doubleday.
- Nye, Joseph (2004): *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, New York: Public Affairs Press.
- Poels, Karolien & Siegfried Dewitte (2019): "The Role of Emotions in Advertising: A Call to Action", *Journal of Advertising*, 48:1, 81-90.
- Rose, Nicolas & Peter Miller (1992): "Political Power Beyond the State: Problematics of Government", *British Journal of Sociology*, 43:2, 172-205.
- Schwab, Klaus (2016): *The Fourth Industrial Revolution*, Cologne: World Economic Forum.
- Stearns, Peter & Carol Stearns (1985): "Emotionology: Clarifying the History of Emotions and Emotional Standards", *The American Historical Review* 90:4, 813–36.
- Taussig, Michael (1980): *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- The Millennium Project (2017): *State of the Future 19.0.*, Washington DC: The Millennium Project.
- The Millennium Project (2019a): <http://www.millennium-project.org/projects/workshops-on-future-of-worktechnology-2050-scenarios/#spanish> (access 2021-0318), Washington DC: The Millennium Project.
- The Millennium Project (2019b): <https://themillenniumproject261.newswire.com/news/future-work-technology-report-by-the-millennium-project-to-be-launched-21010193> (accessed 2021-03-18), Washington DC: The Millennium Project.
- Valentino, Nicholas A., Ted Brader, Eric W. Groenendyk, Krysha Gregorowicz, & Cincent L. Hutchings (2011): "Election Night's Alright for Fighting: The Role of Emotions in Political Participation." *Journal of Politics*, 73:11, 156–70.
- Vasilopoulou, Sofia & Markus Wagner (2017): "Fear, Anger and Enthusiasm about the European Union: Effects of Emotional Reactions on Public Preferences

- towards European Integration”, *European Union Politics* 18:3, 382–405.
- WEF (2018): *The Global Risks Report 2018*, Cologne: World Economic Forum, 2018.
- Westen, Drew (2007): *The Political Brain: The Role of Emotion in Deciding the Fate of the Nation*, New York: Public Affairs.
- Wodak, Ruth (2015): *The Politics of Fear: What Right-Wing Populist Discourses Mean*, London. Sage.
- Wright, Christopher & Daniel Nyberg (2012): “Working with Passion: Emotionology, Corporate Environmentalism and Climate Change”, *Human Relations*, 65:12, 1561–87.
- Xie, Chunyan, Richard P. Bagozzi & Kjell Grønhaug (2019): “The Impact of Corporate Social Responsibility on Consumer Brand Advocacy: The Role of Moral Emotions, Attitudes, and Individual Differences”, *Journal of Business Research*, 95: 514–530.
- Xu, Jie (2017) “Moral Emotions and Self-construal in Charity Advertising: Communication on Focus”, *Journal of Promotion Management*, 23:4, 557–574.