



CALL FOR PAPERS

# HOPEFUL ATTACHMENTS ON A RUINED PLANET

Humanities Centre for Advanced Studies  
“Futures of Sustainability” at Universität Hamburg

9–11 October 2024

Art: Marie Klingebiel

What orientations towards the future are emerging as intertwined ecological, social, and political crises intensify? The conference explores the entanglements of catastrophic and hopeful thinking in the Anthropocene. In particular, it examines the role of hopeful attachments in the midst of the ongoing destruction of life-worlds. As more and more ecosystems and social fabrics are threatened, what forms of visionary, future-oriented politics might still emerge? What promises are made at a time when the future seems lost (Garcés 2023)? Where are people investing in alternative “architectures of possibilities” (Simone 2020), and to what effect?

Hope has a bad reputation in social and political theory: it is often construed as a mere synonym for passive waiting and inaction, distracting us from „our disturbing now“ (Zaliwska and Boler 2018) and the task of critique. Sociologists and political theorists have analyzed how the abandonment of hope and the creation of a narrative of hopelessness become preconditions for imagining new forms of political engagement in the Anthropocene (Cassegård and Thörn 2022, Huber 2023, Thaler 2023). Since hope has been seen as intimately linked to the „cruel optimism“ (Berlant 2011) of modernistic notions of progress, some scholars and activists have argued that we need to get rid of hope as a catalyst for transformation and instead nurture melancholy and apocalypticism as more adequate forms of being in the midst of planetary destruction (Dries 2024).

But the crisis of the Anthropocene has also engendered new ways of thinking and practices of hope that are not necessarily oriented toward a bright future (Adam 2024), but rather toward finding different attachments to the future as the horizon darkens (Anderson 2022). Some of these have peculiar relations to catastrophic thinking, such as „radical hope“ (Lear 2006),

„hope from despair“ (Huber 2023) or hope as an engine for alternative worldmaking, even or especially when ‘sustainability’ appears distant and unattainable. New hopeful attachments are experimented with, for example, in practices of prefiguration, experimentation or improvisation that aim at a multiplicity of “possible better worlds” (Goldman 2024), but also in political outrage and the search for radical alternatives. Ultimately, hope is proposed as a way of thinking critique in the Anthropocene, serving as a “situated, critical disposition that lays the foundation for becoming otherwise and for a different kind of politics” (Bargués et al. 2023).

In this conference, we want to revisit the social and political lives of hope, and its counterparts — e.g. despair, dread, fear — in times of multiple catastrophes. We invite papers that take us to current scenes of hopeful attachments, practices, and orientations and engage us in empirical, theoretical, and speculative debates.

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**We welcome contributions from a variety of disciplines**, e.g. Sociology, Anthropology, Cultural Geography, Environmental Humanities, Affect Theory, Political Science, IR, Philosophy, Socio-Legal Studies, History, Literary Studies, Social Psychology, Religious Studies, and Cultural Studies.

**Please send your 250-word abstract  
and a short bio-note to:**

[futures.of.sustainability@uni-hamburg.de](mailto:futures.of.sustainability@uni-hamburg.de)

**by April 30, 2024** [subject: Hope Abstract]

Support for travel and accommodation costs  
will be offered for successful applicants.



## We are particularly interested in:

- Empirically grounded analyses of how hope 'works', what collectivizing and (a)politicizing effects it has and what infrastructures, spaces, institutions and networks facilitate its emergence.
- The situatedness of hope, i.e. power-, inequality- and justice-sensitive perspectives on hope: How do gender, coloniality, race and class shape practices of hope and ways of engaging with the future?
- Temporalities of hope: urgency, emergency, "slow hope" (Mauch 2019) but also 'backward-oriented' or non-teleological forms of hope. Hope's involvement in temporal logics of addressing future threats, such as anticipation, promises, preparedness, prediction, or resilience, as well as in the recognition of loss, e.g. in post-apocalyptic thinking.
- The role of hope in contemporary activism and transformative collective action; how to do critique with hope? But also, the biopolitics of green hope and its side effects: How does hope enter the register of governmentality and facilitate policies and programs encouraging forms of life that emphasize hope as a tool for autonomy and self-reliance, as well as a coping strategy for the consequences of climate catastrophe?
- Affective and moral logics of hope and their counterparts (e.g. despair, rage, fear, hopelessness, but also denialism and indifference). Expanding on radical hope and its 'relatives': the promise, aspiration, or utopia in a broader conceptualization of the Anthropocene; as well as the moral, spiritual, or transcendent charges of hope.
- Cruel hope, right-wing utopias, and apocalyptic populism in our entangled planetary crises. How is hope linked to aggressive and violent methods of caring for the planet? How do authoritarian and populist regimes in certain regions of the world use hope to diagnose and enforce solutions to the climate emergency?

## Literature:

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- Bargués, Pol, David Chandler, Sebastian Schindler, and Valerie Waldow. 2023. "Hope after 'the End of the World': Rethinking Critique in the Anthropocene." *Contemporary Political Theory*. doi:10.1057/s41296-023-00649-x.
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- Dries, Christian (2024). "... in Hoffnung, dass wir hoffen dürfen? Günther Anders und die Heuristik der Hoffnungslosigkeit." In Konrad Paul Liessmann (ed.), *Alles wird gut. Zur Dialektik der Hoffnung* (Philosophicum Lech 26) Wien: Zsolnay.
- Goldman, Loren (2024). Experimentation and the future(s) of political hope. *European Journal of Social Theory*, 0(0). <https://doi.org/10.1177/13684310241229653>
- Huber, Jakob (2023). Hope from Despair. *The Journal of Political Philosophy* 31(1): 80–101. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jopp.12283>.
- Lear, Jonathan (2006). *Radical Hope: Ethics in the Face of Cultural Devastation*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Mauch, Christoph (2019). *Slow Hope. Rethinking Ecologies of Crisis and Fear. RCC Perspectives: Transformations in Environment and Society 2019/1*. <https://doi.org/10.5282/rcc/8556>.
- Simone, AbdouMaliq (2020). "Securing 'Standby' and Urban Space Making in Jakarta. Intensities in Search of Forms." In D. Asher Ghertner, Hudson McFann, and Daniel M. Goldstein (eds.) *Futureproof: Security Aesthetics and the Management of Life*, Durham: Duke University Press, 225–44.
- Thaler, Mathias (2023). "Eco-Miserabilism and Radical Hope: On the Utopian Vision of Post-Apocalyptic Environmentalism." *American Political Science Review* 118(1). <https://doi.org/10.1017/S000305542300031X>.
- Zaliwska, Zofia, and Megan Boler (2019). "Troubling Hope: Performing Inventive Connections in Discomforting Times." *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 38(1). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11217-018-9630-7>.