

23rd SYMPOSIUM ON SPACE ACTIVITY AND SOCIETY (E5)
Part 1: The Role of Art in Space Activities (5A)

Author: Ms. Joanna Griffin

University of Plymouth, Transtechnology Research Group, United Kingdom, jomagriff@gmail.com

ARTISTIC PRACTICE AND AUTONOMOUS SPACEFARING ACTIVITIES

Abstract

This paper will explore how artistic practice can be used as a means for recognising autonomous space faring agency: that is the agency or opportunity to pursue spacefaring activity independently of the more self-evident national or commercial producers of space technology.

Examples of autonomous spacefaring activity include families launching high altitude balloons, the work of diverse space-related workshops activity, such as Orbitando Satelites that took place at the arts centre Laboral in Asturias, Spain in 2011 and the Brazilian movement Movimiento Sem Satelites, which uses exclusion from the technological project as a position of advantage.

The research presented draws primarily on an artist-led project called Moon Vehicle, based out of Srishti School of Art, Design and Technology, which aimed to make evident the cultural dimensions of Chandrayaan-1's mission to the Moon. This project brought together the communities of Srishti and the Indian Space Research Organisation, ISRO, through education/art practice projects, which then filtered out into the city of Bangalore in a variety of unpredictable ways.

What was revealing in the Moon Vehicle project was how a space agency presents many images and many imaginaries, depending on the viewpoint of the observer. Using the example of the seen and unseen Chandrayaan spacecraft, this suggests that within the complexity and diversity of the mental and material phenomenon of the image of space technology found in and around Bangalore - lies the potential for new ways of thinking about the invitation to re-imagine cosmos that is offered via the spacecraft and its apparent materialism.

The currents of activity and meaning created through independently organised space faring activity, that take place without reference to space agency-initiated 'outreach', also permeate space agencies in unpredictable ways and thus offer a way out of the inclusion, exclusion and annexing problematics of current definitions. The experiences presented show the extent to which those working inside space agencies can also lack agency within their own projects and that autonomous spacefaring activity is developing through social networks that can disregard and challenge dominant discourses and the apparent state, commercial and military origination of space technologies.