

29th IAA SYMPOSIUM ON SPACE AND SOCIETY (E5)
Contemporary Arts Practice and Outer Space: A Multi-Disciplinary Approach (3)

Author: Dr. Heiko Schmid
Switzerland

NEW MODES OF ADDRESSING OUTER SPACE

Abstract

The recent Tesla marketing event, in which the company did send a car to outer space illustrates, that our vision of space travel has changed during the past decades. Elron Musks intervention has no other purpose than to promote a strictly earthbound car business. The new outer space enthusiasm displayed by entrepreneurs like Musk so is not giving any idea of possible new “existential perspectives” beyond earth, but is using outer space as a gigantic display for product placement. If we compare this approach to early positions in the development of space travel, like the one of Frank Malina (one of the founders of Caltechs “Jet Propulsion Laboratory”), it is more than obvious, that we are confronted with a historical shift. Frank Malina was not only incessantly working to provide the technological means to leave the earth atmosphere. He was also part of the US American communist party, was campaigning against racial segregation and raising money for the republicans in the Spanish Civil War. This engagement forced Malina in the McCarthy era to migrate to France, what also meant, that he had to change his profession. It is thereby striking that Malina decided to become an artist in France instead of an engineer. As an artist Malina focused on kinetic art pieces, moving tableaus, which display abstract space scenarios, translucent surfaces, which seem to evoke the cosmos from a techno-imaginative perspective. One could claim, that Malina was now “depicting” all those spaces, he was never able to reach an engineer - or the other way around, that he found in his art, what he wasn’t able to approximate with his technological skills. Malina was, as I want to claim from this perspective, working as an artist engineer from the beginning. He was using his rocket concepts to open up new horizons for mankind. Actual players like Elron Musk are completely lacking this artistic drive and, as I want to claim in my proposed paper, that’s the reason for their inability to address outer space as a new frontier for human existence. To specify this statement – the entrepreneur Musk understands outer space as a tool to use for achieving his earthly goals. As I want to show in this perspective, we are still in need for artistic players, who are able to help the people from earth to envision new modes of addressing outer space.