

SPACE EDUCATION AND OUTREACH SYMPOSIUM (E1)
 Water from Space: Societal, Educational and Cultural Aspects (6.-E5.4)

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WATER FROM SPACE: ART AS A POWERFUL BRIDGE BETWEEN FANTASY AND FACT

Abstract

The international scientific community has recognized over a century ago that water loss and desertification are major economic, social and environmental problems and of concern to many countries in all regions of the planet. Therefore it is not surprising that one speculates the significance of finding traces of water in space.

Writers and artists have for centuries hypothesized on scientific predictions such as planetary environments (1). Recently it has been questioned whether certain concepts belong to the practice of science fiction or science. This is substantiated by homage paid to Jules Verne by National Aeronautics and Space Administration NASA (2) and the Clarke Bradbury science fiction competitions by the European Space Agency, ESA (3). It is important to note that science fiction often set the stage for public acceptance and accessibility of abstract scientific pursuits. Today that role of science fiction (in its various forms) is complimented by contemporary art practice. Art works that utilize currently available technologies for creative expression critically address culture and public perception of scientific activities.

The art projects referenced here reflect on the societal, educational and cultural features of water and space. Much like science fiction, artistic hypotheses that had a societal impact were subsequently legitimized by scientific findings (4, 5, 6, 7). While the art projects cited are mainly designed for audiences in developed societies, the question arises that whom shall the water crisis affect most? When considering Societal, Educational and Cultural aspects relating to water from space we should keep in mind a place such as Sutherland, the closest little town in South Africa to the South African Astronomical Observatory in the Karoo desert, where the majority of the population is disempowered and unaware of the significance of scientific developments practiced on their doorstep. Especially in that context a participatory art project currently researched and planned in Sutherland contributes to a better personal understanding of scientific pursuits.

Reference and case studies

1. Francis Godwin. The Man in the Moone (1638) <http://uoncc.wordpress.com/2009/07/17/the-first-journey-to-the-moon/>
2. Jules Verne, ATV prepares for le voyage extraordinaire http://www.nasa.gov/mission_pages/station/structure/atv_ex
3. Clarke Bradbury science fiction competitions <http://www.esa.int/SPECIALS/SMART-1/SEM3JQXO4HD0.html>
4. Andrea Polli. Listening to the Poles <http://www.rethinkclimate.org/?show=buw>
5. Nele Azavedo. Melting Men <http://unurth.com/79699/Nele-Azevedo-Melting-Man-Berlin>
6. William Kentridge. Journey to the Moon. <http://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/kentridge/> <http://www.orbit.zkm.de/?q=node/95>
7. Radioqualia. Radio Astronomy The Space Station <http://www.radio-astronomy.net/>