

IAF SPACE EDUCATION AND OUTREACH SYMPOSIUM (E1)
Space Culture – Public Engagement in Space through Culture (9)

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RE-IMAGINING OUTER SPACE

Abstract

In 2019, only 12 men have ever stood on the Moon and around 540 people have ever been to space. For the rest of us, reaching outer space perspectives depends on imagery and fiction, poetic leaps and artistic choices. However, outer space is in need of re-imagining. Fifty years after the first Moon landings, mid-20th century “master narratives” continue to shape popular outer space imaginaries - based on colonial rhetoric, exploration imperatives and belief in technological progress.

Far from “for all Mankind”, the dominant imaginations of outer space lack contemporaneity or diversity, and are thus only relatable for the few. With this in mind, public engagement creates important platforms for discourse and exchange between different publics and cultures, toward developing more diverse ideas for shaping outer space futures and Earth-space relations.

This paper discusses the ideas, approaches and outcomes of an educational workshop entitled “Re-imagining Outer Space” - a collaboration between artists and designers Joseph Popper, Sitraka Rakotoniaina and design students from HEAD University in Geneva. With guidance from Popper and Rakotoniaina, the students accomplished a range of design processes to imagine, prototype and produce their personal visions of human futures in outer space. The final results were short science fiction films describing speculative scenarios - from a Moon colony to a crewed spacecraft traveling toward Alpha Centauri. The films center on future space characters developed by the students, each interpreting possible motivations to go to space: such as survival, progress, profit or environmental concerns.

The imagined scenarios were materialised in different media, from building sets to making props at 1:1 scale. Each step enabled the students to practice different design and filmmaking methods while developing their ideas individually and collectively. By producing their personal visions of outer space futures, the students were able to explore historic themes and contemporary motivations of spaceflight and present ideas in contrast to more “normative” narratives populating space exploration today. Through rapid prototyping and playful storytelling, they created engaging and meaningful reimaginings of outer space.