

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

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VOICES FROM EARTH: ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF SPACE

Abstract

At the 2019 International Astronautical Congress [IAC] in Washington DC, designers Joseph Popper and Sitraka Rakotoniaina conducted a series of recorded conversations with fellow congress attendees, later curated and published as an audio essay. The essay introduces artists, designers, engineers and anthropologists - each present at the congress via different and unexpected backgrounds. As a group, Popper, Rakotoniaina and their interlocutors can arguably identify as a particular space public - operating on the fringes of a congress and industry reaching beyond the Earth. The essay discusses their experiences in Washington and examples of their practice - from Angelo Vermeulen's "co-creation" projects based on emergent systems and collective intelligence, to Prathima Muniyappa's "soft" interventions for rethinking our relationship with the cosmos. Finding overlaps and knots in collected concerns, the conversations reflect upon the social, cultural and political complexities of the space industry today and what they pose for human futures. Complementary to the audio essay, this paper expands upon particular threads and considers the role arts and humanities can play in the development of space exploration. Many of the group encountered a congress in need of change, starting with the predominant spaceflight narratives of progress, profit and survival that orient the movement of an entire industry. Though they represent a shift in demographic at the congress, they also share observations of a problematic lack of diversity and accessibility. By reflecting upon what it means to be acting from the fringes, this paper explores potential ways of making critical and meaningful interventions through cultural productions.