

52nd IAA SYMPOSIUM ON THE SEARCH FOR EXTRATERRESTRIAL INTELLIGENCE (SETI) –
The Next Steps (A4)
SETI 2: SETI and Society (2)

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THE OCEAN CALLS - SETI, LUNAR ASTRONOMY AND SCENARIOS AT THE 21-CM HYDROGEN
LINE

Abstract

This paper considers the unique affordances of playful practice-based performance and LARP research (Live Action Role Play) for the search for extraterrestrial intelligence (SETI).

The discussion will focus on recent LARP performances with audiences, and the newly created SETI Post-Detection Research Hub at the University of St. Andrews. The Hub combines emerging scientific research with creative approaches to issues of post-detection, and creative scenarios andLARPs offer uniquely engaging paths to explore issues around post-detection with the broader public.

LARP narratives explore scientific predictions and projections in novel ways by opening scenarios up to a playing audience through structured improvisation. Audiences are invited to engage with future contact scenarios through participatory techniques of worlding, interaction and storytelling that set in motion durational shared experiences and open up varied and complex interactions and perspectives.

The LARPs presented explore the societal transformations opened up by technoscientific developments, lunar astronomy, lunar observatories, far side 21-cm interferometry and ideas about communicating with the More than Human. The authors will share how creative practice and semi-structured story-telling can bring collaborating researchers into connection, extend the scope of study and engage mutual learning, towards an experimental and engaged SETI research culture.

Interactive story-telling techniques provide imaginative ways to test expectations around SETI's protocols and approaches to media and communication and invite diverse groups of people to question and gauge their responses to scenarios. The opportunity to play and re-play performances, make it possible to create unusual and meaningful data about audience's "live" interactions.

Combining play with studying relational real-time interaction develops experimental research approaches across sound and media arts and Environmental Humanities. This presentation will share how we develop research methodologies from improvisation, as well as duty of care and ethical practices towards supporting audience members and ensuring permission from participants for interactions to be recorded.

Creative projects are particularly useful in discovering practical ways of including dimensions notoriously hard to model, such as spontaneous group behaviour, relational politics, and affect. We argue that playful approaches to outer space studies and first contact scenarios are vital to speculative study, and grant unique insights into potential collective dynamics, societal responses and impacts of cultural and scientific transformations. Drawing on a broad archive of science art projects that engage with SETI,

creative research - when practiced across disciplines - grounds and develops rich, complex and ecological understandings of communication across the wider SETI network.