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THE UNCOMMON CONVERSATION: A GRASSROOTS APPROACH TO DECOLONIAL
PRACTICES IN SPACE

Abstract

Upon entering the space sector, the colonial roots driving this industry were quickly recognised. As advocates of decolonial theory and activism, we swiftly fell into conversation, acknowledging the imperative to decolonise space practices for a safer future, on Earth and beyond.

Western colonialism actively perpetuates harmful practices, enforcing notions of cultural supremacy detrimental to people and environments. Dismantling colonial legacies, internally and externally, is crucial. As an industry riddled in exploitative narratives, Space is no exception.

Combining our backgrounds in astrophysics (Casey, Australian/Filipino) and anthropology (Harriet, Australian), we embarked on developing the (Un)Common Cosmos project. Our aim is to amplify marginalised perspectives on space exploration and connection to Space. By creating a platform for First Nations voices and decolonial movements that are uncommon to that of the space industry. To create a common conversation that focuses on decolonising space and enhancing the industry's cultural competency.

The project presently prioritises outreach and education, employing interactive workshops, film screenings, and artistic expressions. These initiatives cater to both industry and public audiences, offering immersive experiences that delve into the influence of cultural narratives on space endeavours. By fostering critical inquiry, we can reframe and improve the most concerning elements of space-related activities. This is achieved in two parts:

Part One: Unveiling Colonial Narratives in The Space Industry This workshop delves into the colonial roots underlying the space industry, emphasising its constructed nature and the potential for deconstruction. Through reflexive discussions and activities, we confront challenges spanning environmental, political, social, and philosophical realms. Our aim is to equip participants with the awareness and tools to address these issues, whilst highlighting realities and perspectives that are widely overlooked and unaccounted for.

Part Two: Imaginative Space Futures This workshop revolves around space futurism and collectively envisioning the future of human exploration in space. Drawing inspiration from futurist movements like Afrofuturism and solar-punk, participants utilise imaginative methods to craft collective future projections, challenging existing paradigms and fostering innovative thinking.

Our approach is distinctively grassroots, with practices and theories co-created and validated by the community—a bottom-up methodology. We prioritise tools and empowered learning. By informing the public and industry, we equip individuals to hold industry accountable, fostering a culture of transparency and responsibility for all of Space.