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The Next Steps (A4)
SETI 2: SETI and Society (2)

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THE "TOULOUSE REBOOT": OPENING A NEW ERA IN THE STUDIES ON INTERSTELLAR
MESSAGES

Abstract

In 2001, on the occasion of the 52nd IAC of Toulouse, the SETI Institute organized the first of a series of international workshops on interstellar message composition (IMC), chaired by Doug Vakoch. It was an extraordinary seminal event, where some basic principles were defined. These principles became a point of reference for the studies on IMC in the years to come. Despite this, the original method used in Toulouse was abandoned in the following workshops and, finally, they were cancelled. The lack of a systematical reflection about this topic in recent years has caused some concerns, not only due to its intrinsic relevance, but also because it represents the main opportunity for both SETI scientists and humanists to work together. On 18 and 19 December 2023, the InCosmiCon Research Center at the University of Insubria (Italy) organized in Paris a new Workshop on IMC, hosted by the prestigious École Normale Supérieure, with the participation of all co-authors of this paper. We called it "The Toulouse Reboot", since its aim was to revive the original Toulouse method, but, at the same time, to improve it, creating something new, although in a context of substantial continuity. In this paper we present its main outcomes, their relevance for SETI, and the future developments of the project, which will be carried out by a stable team, but will be also open to any contribution coming from other investigators. However, please note that our work is exclusively theoretical. We are not planning to send any message towards the stars, but we would like to help clarify (and, hopefully, partially resolve) the challenges we might face if and when a real interstellar communication should take place.