

53rd IAA SYMPOSIUM ON THE SEARCH FOR EXTRATERRESTRIAL INTELLIGENCE (SETI) –
The Next Steps (A4)
SETI 2: SETI and Society (2)

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PLURALITY IN POST DETECTION SCENARIOS

Abstract

A vital re-evaluation of SETI’s post-detection protocols is underway, accompanied by calls to transform research cultures through process-oriented and culturally diverse understandings and dramatic transformations in machine learning and artificial intelligence (AI) that radically alter the scale and scope of search capabilities. This paper introduces work on scenarios and futures research conducted by the newly established SETI Post-Detection Hub at the University of St. Andrews, deploying practice-based, dialogic, and creative strategies to address the complexities of post-detection in SETI.

The Hub’s Scenarios Working Group developed four distinct yet plausible future scenarios for the 2033 “post-detection ecosystem”, drawing on participatory input from all Hub members. This scenario development process followed a participatory strategic foresight approach aligned with the “Intuitive Logics” school of thought in scenario development.

These four alternative seed scenarios are developed by the Hub members as an invitation to creative groups in different countries to begin working with these alternative futures of 2033 to form their own fictional LARPs (Live Action Role Play). Structured improvisation invites trans-cultural, trans-disciplinary and trans-generational interplay, and devises ways to study community dynamics, offering unique ways to explore neglected human experiential dimensions of a post-detection event, and creative communication under pressure.

These process-oriented practices offer fresh paths for SETI research to involve plural imaginaries around the uncertainties of post-detection futures. Collaborative scenario work blends SETI research with trans-national science fictions and aesthetics, weaving together different perspectives across Place to expand speculation about societal response to Extraterrestrial detection. This creative methodology holds significant promise for creating novel insights into the societal impacts of confirmed detection, offering valuable contributions to the evolution of protocols.

The SETI Post-Detection Hub opened at the University of St Andrews in 2022. The Hub combines emerging scientific research and varied disciplines to explore issues around the detection of extraterrestrial life, including overlooked aspects of process and maintenance beyond detection. The Hub focuses on nurturing a sustainable and ongoing effort in vibrant scientific inquiry into post-detection, in a manner that keeps pace with societal developments.

The scenario work at the Hub aims to root SETI post-detection research in plural perspectives and More-than-Human approaches, towards strengthening an imaginative and engaged research culture able to listen deeply to diverse perspectives and to value a wide range of viewpoints. Research efforts emphasise

the necessity of working with post-detection scenarios in a way that both seriously - and playfully - engages with decolonising research approaches.