

IAF SPACE EDUCATION AND OUTREACH SYMPOSIUM (E1)  
Space Culture: New Processes of Public Engagement in Space through Culture and Art (9)

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THINKING ON SCREEN: THE VIDEO ESSAY AS A CRITICAL PRACTICE FOR EXPLORING  
OUTER SPACE FUTURES

**Abstract**

This paper explores the potential of the video essay for contributing to outer space cultures and interdisciplinary discourses about Earth-Space futures. It does so in presenting short essays including *Clear Ideas* (Popper 2019) and *The Lonely Ones* (Popper 2023), which address the problematic "aesthetic and rhetorical framings" (Valentine 2016) of a powerful Euro-American vision of outer space settlement that mobilises influential actors in the space industry. *Clear Ideas* was recently presented in the exhibition "Terra. Designing our planet" at the Museum of Contemporary Design and Applied Arts in Lausanne, part of a wider programme titled "Space is the Place" (July 2023–February 2024). Video essays are often described as audiovisual research objects. They can be broadly defined by their open-ended exploration of ideas, a pronounced subjectivity of the maker, and an emphatic articulation of their thinking process. These aspects can combine in dialogical, discursive and poetic gestures made in montage: the recombining of images, sounds, and words to "produce new meanings" (Vidolke 2024). My interest in the video essay responds to a need, stressed by the Social Studies of Outer Space among other artistic and scientific research fields, "for an urgent reimagination of humanity's place—and humanity's time—in outer space" and to "intervene critically and productively in ongoing political debates" about Earth-Space relations (Salazar and Gorman 2023). Thinking with and through images, the video essay can be a critical and transformative practice which "opens up gaps" (Binotto 2023) in heteronormative outer space imaginaries and counters the "narrow" set of socioeconomic values they are based on. Moreover, by focusing on the imaginative and performative dimensions of techno-scientific projects, the video essay can offer a means to contest the social and cultural construction of outer space futures, which are not closed or "given" but always subject to change (Beery 2016).