

Imagining outer space, 1900-2000 (Bielefeld)

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Deadline for Proposals: May 15, 2007

IMAGINING OUTER SPACE, 1900-2000

- Call for Papers -

This conference on the cultural history of outer space, space travel and space exploration suggests looking at Europe via its ways of imagining the spatial beyond. It proceeds from the observation that the currently thriving interest in space as both explanans and explanandum can be traced back to early attempts at exploring outer space, and that the contemporary predominance of the visual must be understood as, implicitly, preparing for existence in the space capsule.

If, as historian Walter McDougall has argued, three structural forces were required to launch the American space program - namely an economy prosperous enough to finance the endeavor, the availability of appropriate technological means, and the necessary imagination - this conference will focus exclusively on the latter. Unlike most of the existing historiography, it is less interested in the political, diplomatic and technological aspects of European space programs per se, but rather in the socio-cultural rationale behind the investment of enormous resources. How was outer space represented and perceived over the course of the twentieth century? In what way were changing conceptions in turn affected by the continuous and ongoing exploration of outer space? How did the idea of spaceflight develop into such a central element of the project of Western modernity? In what form did changing images and conceptions of outer space, 'other worlds' and the entire cosmos impinge on religion, transcendental beliefs and competing versions of the future? And what was the cultural and societal impact of space exploration and space travel in Europe at large?

Thus, contributions to the conference will analyze the cultural significance and imaginative repercussions of outer space, space

travel and space exploration rather than the actual scientific findings in a variety of instances. Analyzing contact points between science and fiction from a comparative European perspective, it will pay special attention to sites and situations where technologies and images have contributed to the omnipresence of fantasmatic thought.

Themes of possible contributions include but are not limited to:

1. Outer Space and the Spatial Turn
2. Futurist Technologies and Past Utopias
3. Science Fiction as History
4. Space Personae
5. Aliens and the Plurality of Worlds-Debate in the Twentieth Century
6. UFOs, SETI and the Quest for Radical Alterity
7. Space Technology's Places on the Ground
8. Space and the Beyond in the History of Religion and Western Esotericism
9. Outer Space and Nuclear Power
10. Historicizing the Overview Effect
11. The Frontier-Myth in the Orbital Age
12. European Astrofuturisms in Comparative Perspective

Speakers include Profs. Steven J. Dick (NASA), Roger D. Launius (National Air and Space Museum), Michael J. Neufeld (National Air and Space Museum), Claudia Schmölders (Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin) and Helmuth Trischler (Deutsches Museum). The conference will also feature a special screening of historical films compiled and commented on by Jürgen Ast (Berlin).

Proposals for papers are invited from those working in history, history of science and technology, aeronautics, astrophysics, geography, archaeology, art history, literary criticism or related disciplines. All papers will be circulated before the conference to leave ample room for discussion among its 20-25 participants. Conference language will be English. Travel funding is available for all speakers. Please submit an abstract of no more than 300 words together with a short CV before May 15, 2007 for consideration to Alexander Geppert at alexander.geppert@fu-berlin.de.

Convener

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Venue

Zentrum für interdisziplinäre Forschung

ArtHist.net

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