

Futuring the Stars: Europe in the Age of Space

Veranstalter: Emmy Noether Research Group „The Future in the Stars: European Astroculture and Extraterrestrial Life in the Twentieth Century,“ Friedrich-Meinecke-Institut, Freie Universität Berlin

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After more than half a century of human spaceflight, waves of anniversaries draw public attention to national and international milestones in space exploration and encourage debate about future expectations. It is worth considering that the search for new epoch-making enterprises and a shift in international spaceflight promotes a „New Space Age“, revealing a need for a joint future perspective and historical self-assurance at the same time. The present development demands a closer look at the history of the „Space Age“.

The Emmy Noether Research Group „The Future in the Stars: European Astroculture and Extraterrestrial Life in the Twentieth Century“ set out to investigate the cultural history of outer space from the 1920s to the 1970s as a new perspective on the history of twentieth-century Europe. Their final conference „Futuring the Stars: Europe in the Age of Space“¹ was a three-day event held as an interdisciplinary exchange by ALEXANDER GEPPERT (New York/Berlin), JANA BRUGGMANN (Berlin) and TILMANN SIEBENEICHNER (Berlin). Thirteen presentations organized in seven panels provided insight into the key questions of their research agenda on the cultural history of the European Space Age. The conveners also announced the publication of two forthcoming volumes: „Limiting Outer Space“ and „Military Outer Space“, which will complete an „unintended trilogy“ with the first volume „Imagining Outer Space“.² Half a decade of intense work created a community of interdisciplinary scholars who contributed to de-exoticizing the study of outer space and integrating it into mainstream historiography.

In his introduction, the director of the re-

search group, ALEXANDER GEPPERT specified the accomplishments of this venture, which started in fall 2010 and comprised a series of yearly events covering a variety of themes: After a comprehensive film retrospective entitled „Weltraumkino“ (2011), subsequent symposia examined topics such as „UFO-Geschichte“ (2011) and „Envisioning Limits“ (2012). With each conference, the group aimed to intervene in ongoing historiographical debates, including sound history with „Sounds of Space“ (2012) or „Berliner Welträume“ (2015) which focused on local urban history. The conference „Embattled Heavens“ (2014) addressed the so-called „dark side of global astroculture“ by examining the militarization of space.³ Geppert seized the opportunity to evaluate the group’s main findings and achievements, emphasizing the pursuit of different perspectives and periodizations concerning the „transatlantic century“ (Mary Nolan) and the „Space Age“. He suggested deconstructing the latter, Cold War-centric periodization by considering the first successful launch of an A-4 rocket in Peenemünde on 3 October 1942

¹ <www.geschkult.fu-berlin.de/futuring> (05.06.2016).

² Alexander C.T. Geppert (ed.), *Imagining Outer Space: European Astroculture in the Twentieth Century*, Basingstoke 2012; idem (ed.), *Limiting Outer Space: Astroculture After Apollo*, London 2017 (forthcoming); idem / Daniel Brandau / Tilmann Siebeneichner (eds.), *Militarizing Outer Space: Astroculture, Dystopia and the Cold War*, London 2017 (forthcoming).

³ *Weltraumkino. Eine Retrospektive*, 01.04.2011–08.05.2011 Berlin, in: H-Soz-Kult, 09.03.2011, <<http://www.hsozkult.de/event/id/termine-15935>> (14.07.2016); Conference reports: *Ufugeschichte*, 30.09.2011–01.10.2011 Berlin, in: H-Soz-Kult, 04.03.2012, <<http://www.hsozkult.de/conferencereport/id/tagungsberichte-4144>> (14.07.2016); *Envisioning Limits: Outer Space and the End of Utopia*, 19.04.2012–21.04.2012 Berlin, in: H-Soz-Kult, 09.07.2012, <<http://www.hsozkult.de/conferencereport/id/tagungsberichte-4303>> (14.07.2016); *Sounds of Space*, 30.11.2012–01.12.2012 Berlin, in: H-Soz-Kult, 26.04.2013, <<http://www.hsozkult.de/conferencereport/id/tagungsberichte-4777>> (14.07.2016); *Embattled Heavens: The Militarization of Space in Science, Fiction, and Politics*, 10.04.2014–12.04.2014 Berlin, in: H-Soz-Kult, 08.08.2014, <<http://www.hsozkult.de/conferencereport/id/tagungsberichte-5496>> (14.07.2016); *Berliner Welträume im 20. Jahrhundert*, 30.03.2015 Berlin, in: H-Soz-Kult, 14.10.2015, <<http://www.hsozkult.de/conferencereport/id/tagungsberichte-6204>> (14.07.2016).

as the beginning, and the end of the Apollo program in 1972 as the decline of the Space Age.⁴ Having previously coined the conceptual tool „astroculture“ as an umbrella term to analyze and mark interconnections between space-related products and their cultural significance, the research group’s final conference „Futuring the Stars“ featured presentations that paid specific attention to the ways in which outer space became implemented in different and competing visions of the future.

Addressing outer space as both an emotional encounter and mythological extension, the first panel approached astrocultural *lieux de memoires* and two sites of space enthusiasm in Germany. Focusing on Berlin and Jena before and after the Second World War, KATHERINE BOYCE-JACINO (Baltimore, MD) analyzed the astrocultural history of planetaria and located them at the intersection of science, education and entertainment. As a means to escape from the city, planetaria created a cosmic experience and attracted millions of visitors throughout Europe. By contrast, PHILIPP AUMANN (Peenemünde) addressed „miracle weapons“ of the National Socialist regime, which expressed its belief in cultural superiority through technological progress and innovation. Disregarding the exploitation of forced laborers, former engineers and museum founders alike promoted the „Heeresversuchsanstalt Peenemünde“ as the birthplace of space travel, thereby claiming a place for Peenemünde within the Space Age. Since 2001, the museum’s permanent exhibition has encouraged critical reflection about the ambivalence of rocket technology and is currently preparing a social and cultural history of the armament center.

The conference also identified contradictions concerning the belief in technological progress and the future of rocketry. DANIEL BRANDAU (Berlin) provided insight into the institutionalization of space research in the Federal Republic of Germany and the distrust in rocketry as a dual-use technology. He analyzed the work of various interest groups after 1945, such as the „Gesellschaft für Weltraumforschung“ (GfW), the „Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Raketentechnik“ (AFRA) and later the „Deutsches Zentrum für Luft- und Raumfahrt“ (DLR). Interested in changing techno-

logical visions, Brandau showed how rocketry lost its utopian characteristics by 1960 due to the new democratic culture in Western Germany, the process of integration in Western Europe and the professionalization of networks. The panel also demonstrated the impact of space lobbyists and publicists on research and image-making. Drawing on new material from the Kubrick archive in London and the „Clarkive“ in Washington, DC, ROBERT POOLE (Preston) read the work of the British science fiction writer Arthur C. Clarke (1917–2008) as a project of a visionary „techno-prophet“ and space advocate with missionary ambitions. Clarke became an international celebrity after his breakthrough book „The Exploration of Space“ (1951) and the joint film project „2001: A Space Odyssey“ with American film director Stanley Kubrick in 1968.

Bringing the first day to a close, two presentations focused on the visual history of space exploration and the so-called „overview effect“ (Frank White). Astronomical images of Earth have a long tradition in the Western imagination, dating back to the nineteenth century. These imaginations, such as cartographic images by the French astronomer Camille Flammarion in 1880, were replaced by the renowned photographs „Earthrise“ (Apollo 8, 1968) and „Blue Marble“ (Apollo 17, 1972). JANA BRUGGMANN (Berlin) investigated major shifts in how the „whole-Earth“ motif was re-envisioned from the 1880s through the 1970s. Bruggmann argued that the perception of earth and space influenced the rise of global self-awareness, environmentalism and visions of the future in their time. A second presentation on „iconic“ space imagery after 1961 connected their production contexts and public receptions with ideas about space travel by European philosophers, like Günther Anders, Hannah Arendt and Jacques Lacan. NATALIJA MAJSOVA (Ljubljana) drew attention to the technical re-

⁴ Alexander C. T. Geppert, „Die Zeit des Weltraumzeitalters, 1942–1972“, in: *Geschichte und Gesellschaft. Sonderheft 25* (2015), pp. 218–250; Catherine Radtka, *L’astroculture européenne, terrain de recherche. Entretien avec Alexander Geppert*, in: *Humanités Spatiales*, 13.05.2016, <<http://humanites-spatiales.fr/lastroculture-europeenne-terrain-de-recherche/>> (05.06.2016).

quirements and emotionally-charged expectations behind space photography, like the first images of the Martian surface (Mariner 4, 1965) or „Pale Blue Dot“ (Voyager 1, 1990), an icon of hypermodernity.

Further analysis of public perceptions of European and American space programs were presented on the conference's second day, revealing major shifts from the 1960s to the 1980s and demonstrating how political contexts determined space policy and its reception during the Cold War. Exploring the spirit of the Space Age in West German television, RALF BÜLOW (Berlin) recalled the first German space documentaries by television journalist Rüdiger Proske (1916–2010) who became famous with the documentary series „Auf der Suche nach der Welt von morgen“ (1961–1986) as well as „Zum Mond und weiter“ (1966). Another big television hit was the seven-part „Raumpatrouille - Die phantastischen Abenteuer des Raumschiffes Orion“ (1966), which aired before „Star Trek“ in September 1966. In contrast to this „golden age“ of spaceflight, TILMANN SIEBENEICHNER (Berlin) addressed the overlap of peaceful and military ambitions within the Post-Apollo Program. Analyzing the media coverage of the first Spacelab flights – a reusable space laboratory between 1983 and 1998 –, Siebeneichner discussed its role as a political prestige project in establishing European space power and entry into manned spaceflight.⁵ He showed how contemporary hopes of international cooperation collided with the American Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) in 1983, stressing the dual-use character of space technology and its ambivalent political instrumentalization.

THORE BJØRNVIG (Copenhagen) occupied a special position in the final conference. As an historian of religion inspired by the concept of „dark green religion“ (Bron Taylor), he introduced the concept of „outer space religion“ as an interpretative tool for studying astroculture. In providing an analytical framework, he introduced different ways of extraterrestrial encountering through spaceflight, SETI, UFOs and psycho-occult religion. Bjørnvig discussed the idea of a mythological complex behind religious imaginations of outer space. To reinforce his argument, he

addressed the impact of colonial and Judeo-Christian apocalyptic thinking and accentuated the experiences of astronauts.

The final panel revisited astroculture as an intellectual concept and historical category. The participants determined astroculture to be a useful label and „floating signifier“ to de-exoticize and integrate the cultural history of outer space into mainstream historiography. In his commentary, MARTIN COLLINS (Washington, DC), suggested framing astroculture in relation to modernity and undertaking a more spatial and temporal demarcation of astroculture. DIRK VAN LAAK (Gießen) discussed similarities between European astroculture and colonial and imperial endeavors. In his opinion, astroculture originated in Europe but failed to garner public support and lasting enthusiasm as it could not prove its necessity to everyday life. In contrast, MICHAEL J. NEUFELD (Washington, DC) called attention to the ongoing expansion of space infrastructure and argued for a „New Space Age“. He suggested specifying astroculture as a cultural phenomenon by drawing boundaries with other concepts.

The final conference, „Futuring the Stars: Europe in the Age of Space“, was an extraordinary end to an exciting project. The panel discussion revealed new research directions. The audience suggested a more gendered view on female protagonists and space personae, more close readings from other geopolitical areas, movements and private initiatives, as well as further studies pursuing the rise of space powers in Asia. Seeing our planetized present as a direct consequence of the Space Age, Alexander Geppert argued for a more global view of astroculture, space thought and spaceflight. Indeed, the planetization of Earth and the making of a globally-imagined community are inextricably intertwined. Further research on a global astroculture should discuss historical dynamics of conflict and cooperation across regions and regimes beyond an emphasis on the Cold War.

In summary, the results of this final conference highlighted ongoing questions and chal-

⁵Tilmann Siebeneichner, Europas Griff nach den Sternen. Das Weltraumlabor Spacelab, 1973–1998, in: Themenportal Europäische Geschichte (2015), <<http://www.europa.clio-online.de/2015/Article=739>> (05.06.16).

lenges behind the conceptualization and periodization of astroculture and the Space Age. The final discussion drew much attention to the „New Space Age“ and startup rocketry companies such as SpaceX, and how astroculture became a part of our everyday world. This conference successfully continued the interdisciplinary dialogue, adding new regional and thematic case studies and methodological approaches. Certainly, the work of the Emmy Noether Research Group, „The Future in the Stars: European Astroculture and Extraterrestrial Life in the Twentieth Century“, has led to the creation of a new research field in Germany and Europe, whose questions have become more global over time. Its symposia represent a transnational and global perspective and contributed to the interpretation of the twentieth century and crisis phenomena since the 1970s. There was an atmosphere of gratitude and strong support amongst the participants, a result of their six-year commitment to this endeavor. By giving different kinds of studies and interdisciplinary approaches the opportunity to engage in this topic, the group ensured further individual and collective work on astroculture, promising, „It’s the final countdown, but we will be back“ (Alexander Geppert).

Conference Overview:

Panel I: Introducing Space

Chair: Michael J. Neufeld

Alexander C.T. Geppert (New York University, USA/Freie Universität Berlin, DE): The Final Countdown: Europe’s Extraterrestrial Futures in the Twentieth Century

Panel II: Localizing Space

Chair: Paul E. Ceruzzi

Katherine Boyce-Jacino (Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, MD, USA): Spaces of Knowledge and Experience: Planetaria and Cities, 1925–1950

Philipp Aumann (Historisch-Technisches Museum Peenemünde, DE): Belief in Progress as Leitmotif: The Place of Peenemünde in European Astroculture

Panel III: Engineering Space

Chair: Martina Heßler

Daniel Brandau (Freie Universität Berlin, DE): Distrusted Futures: Rocket Technology in Post-War Germany, 1948–1963

Robert Poole (University of Central Lancashire, Preston, UK): An Englishman in Orbit: Arthur C. Clarke, Techno-Prophet

Panel IV: Imaging Space

Chair: Robert Poole

Jana Bruggmann (Freie Universität Berlin, DE): Re-Envisioning Earth in the Age of Globalization

Natalija Majsova (University of Ljubljana/Erudio Business School, SI): Post-1961 Space Imagery and Meta-Reflections on the Dawn of the Space Age

Panel V: Realizing Space

Chair: Regina Peldszus

Ralf Bülow (Independent Scholar, Berlin, DE): To the Moon and Beyond: Outer Space in West-German Television in 1966

Tilmann Siebeneichner (Freie Universität Berlin, DE): Europeans in Orbit: Spacelab as lieu de l’avenir, 1973–1985

Panel VI: Exalting Space

Chair: Helmut Zander

Thore Bjørnvig (Independent Scholar, Copenhagen, DK): Is There a Common Mythology of the Twentieth-Century European Space Age?

Panel VII: Revisiting Space

Chair: Alexander C.T. Geppert

Martin Collins (Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum, Washington, DC, USA): Astroculture and Historiographies of the Modern

Panel Discussion with Dirk van Laak (Justus-Liebig-Universität Gießen, DE) and Michael J. Neufeld (Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum, Washington, DC, USA): European Astroculture and the Making of a Global Age

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