



Ethnographies of Outer Space

Methodological Opportunities and Experiments

Trento, 1-2 September 2022



**UNIVERSITÀ
DI TRENTO**

Department of
Sociology and Social Research



HANS SCHADEE
Research Methods Center

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An Anthropologist on Mars (1995) is a well-known book by the neurophysiologist Oliver Sacks. Contrary to what its title suggests, the book is neither about anthropology nor about the Red Planet. It is, in fact, a collection of seven essays on the paradoxical circumstances in which those affected by particular neurological conditions find themselves. Still, the juxtaposition of the words “anthropology” and “Mars” conveys a sense of inaccessibility that – for a long time – was familiar to the ethnographer approaching fields of inquiry related to space science and technology: rather like the protagonists in Sacks seven tales, the social sciences and the humanities were (often implicitly) deemed unfit to travel to such unimaginable lands, purportedly devoid of any sociality or humanness. Only in the early 2000s a number of seminal studies broke through the glass ceiling. Turning their gaze toward the skies, ethnographers showed how scientific and technological practices related to outer space cannot help but be imbued with the very terrestrial logics of power and knowledge-making.

Today we witness a flourishing of sociological, anthropological, historical, philosophical, and geographical studies on outer space. Time is ripe to reflect on how this multifaceted field has challenged and enriched different research practices and methodologies. On the one hand, space exploration is an inherently human enterprise, and as such it lends itself to social and anthropological inquiry. On the other hand, this domain presents unique features: the sites in which social action is articulated are at once remote, imagined, global and/or exquisitely local, manipulated through analogies, physically experienced, technologically mediated, out of reach, and collectively constructed. This intrinsically plural character presents a methodological challenge for the social sciences and the humanities. How to approach space within different theoretical and methodological frameworks? How does this field of inquiry engender interdisciplinary “contaminations”? How does it redefine the ethnographic encounter? Ultimately, this conference seeks to explore how the sense of impossibility, inaccessibility and paradox that has long been a hallmark of social studies of outer space is becoming fertile soil for novel, far-reaching and critically engaged earthly ethnographies.



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Day 1 – September 1st, 2022

8.45 Registration

9.00 Welcome

9.30 **Keynote 1: Zara Mirmalek, Bay Area Environmental Research Institute, NASA**
Complicating counterparts in outer space

10.30 Coffee Break

11.00 **Session 1**

Juan-Francisco Salazar, Western Sydney University;
Cosmographies: experiments in speculative space ethnographies

Luis Campos, Rice University
Homo universalis: Queering “Habitability”

Dana Burton, George Washington University
Diving into the Search for Evidence of Life on Enceladus

Anna Szolucha, Jagiellonian University
Doing planetary ethnography in Boca Chica-Starbase-Kopernik Shores in Texas: Mapping the terrain

Davide Chinigò, University for foreigners of Perugia and Hanna Nieber, Max Plank Institute for Social Anthropology
Where African Studies and Outer Space meet. Astronomy infrastructure in South Africa and Madagascar

13.00 Lunch

14.00 **Session 2**

David Jeeva, UCL
How to do an ethnography of Earth, yeah all of it!

Joffrey Becker, Käte Hamburger Kolleg c:o/re / RWTH Aachen University
Meeting the Alien. Experimenting with Post-Biological forms of Life

Eleanor Armstrong, Stockholm University
Cosmic Queeries: Queer Theory in Studies of Outer Space

Denis Sivkov, University of Tyumen
Animism in the orbit: ethnographic reading of cosmonaut diaries

15.30 Coffee Break

16.00 **Session 3**

Anne Dippel, Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena
“From here to eternity”. On cosmosovereignty | cosmography of the humanwise in outer space

Ilenia Picardi, Marco Serino and Chiara Vassillo, University of Naples Federico II
Translating ecosystems from Earth to outer space. Epistemic living spaces and narrative infrastructures in research on space farming

Anne Johnson, Universidad Iberoamericana
Mexico’s Satellite Dreams: Nationalism and Cosmopolitanism in Space Industry and Art

17.00 **Keynote 2: Stefan Helmreich, MIT**
Space Virus 2020

18.00 Aperitivo

Day 2 – September 2nd, 2022

9.00 **Session 1**

Aaron Parkhurst, UCL

It's all in Newtons head: fieldwork and methods in Gravity and balance

Dong Ju Kim, KAIST, Daejeon, South Korea

Rocket Fumes and Satellite Debris: Bringing the Anthropocene to Outer Space

Ersi Ioannidou, Kingston School of Art

Cosmic Heterotopias

Istvan Praet, Durham University

The Cosmos and Its Cosmetics. A Brief Guide to the Investigation of Planetary Scientists and Their Metaphysical Habits

10.30 Coffee Break

11.00 **Session 2**

Olga Dubrovina, University of Padova

Between doubts and enthusiasm: ESA-USSR/Russia at the turn of the 80-90s

Angelika Schweimnitz, University of Cologne

African Voices on the Construction of the Outer Space and the United Nations Space For Sustainable Development Goals (Space4SDGs)

Peter Timko and Karlijn Korpershoek, Jagiellonian University

Planning a planetary PhD: Research challenges of emerging space ethnographies

Matijaz Vidmar, University of Edinburgh

Close Encounters of the Fourth Kind: Action Research and the PERIpatetic Approach

12.30 Lunch

14.00 **Session 3**

Savannah Mandel, Virginia Polytechnic Institute

The Elysium Effect or How Asteroid Mining Might Divide the World into Paradise and Purgatory

Kate Genevieve

"The readiness is all" Post-detection through practice-based research

Alicja Ostrowska, Chalmers University of Technology

Categorizing Life with Artificial Intelligence. Which lives? Whose intelligence?"

15.00 Coffee Break

15.30 **Session 4**

Brad Tabas, ENSTA Bretagne

Les mots et les choses in Outer Space. How do words relate to things?

Phillip Brooker, University of Liverpool and Effie Le Moignan, Newcastle University

"Skylab 2049": Exploring the Mundane Realities of Living and Working on a Space Station

David Valentine, University of Minnesota

A Nice, Concise Fit: Science Fiction as Genre and Evidence in Stories about the Human Settlement of Space

16.30 **Final discussion**

17.00 **Keynote 3: Valerie Olson, University of California, Irvine**

Refielding in More-Than-Terran Spaces