

20.10. —  
22.10.2016

THU, 20.10.16 | 2-4pm  
**Students' Workshop**  
Claudia Slanar and  
Ralo Mayer

THU, 20.10.16 | 6pm  
**Introduction and  
Filmscreening**  
Claudia Slanar

FRI, 21.10.16 | 2pm  
**E.T.E. —  
Extra-Terrestrial  
Ecologies,  
the Undergrowth**  
Ralo Mayer

FRI, 21.10.16 | 3pm  
**Giant Envelopes  
and the  
Total  
Interior**  
Douglas Murphy

FRI, 21.10.16 | 5pm  
**Haunted Houses  
at Hypervelocity:  
Orbital Futures**  
Alice Gorman

FRI, 21.10.16 | 7pm  
**Book Launch  
Humans  
Make Nature**  
Gabriele Mackert and  
Michael Wagreich

SAT, 22.10.16 | 1pm  
**Picturing  
the Universe:  
On Scale,  
Calculation,  
and Composites**  
Vera Tollmann

SAT, 22.10.16 | 3pm  
**The "Invasion"  
of Chaos Theory  
and Science  
Fiction in Space  
Law**  
Saskia Vermeylen

SAT, 22.10.16 | 5pm  
**Round Table**  
Concluding panel  
with participants

# Propulsion: On Changing Futures

## Site-Specific Art

University of Applied Arts Vienna  
Expositur Paulusplatz 5, 2nd Floor, 1030 Vienna  
[www.sitespecificart.at](http://www.sitespecificart.at)

After last year's first Round Table *Humans make Nature* about ideas of landscape in the Anthropocene, we invited Claudia Slanar to conceive the Round Table 2016 at the Department of Site-Specific Art. In close collaboration with Ralo Mayer she put together a programme addressing past and possible new futures.

## Propulsion: On Changing Futures

*November 2015:* Four decades after *The Limits to Growth*, US president Barack Obama signs a law permitting American citizens and companies to exploit the virtually unlimited resources of asteroids.

*August 2016:* Scientists announce the discovery of Proxima b, an Earth-like exoplanet orbiting the red dwarf star Proxima Centauri, 4.2 light-years from us. Liquid water may be present on its surface, and one day, robotic probes may be sent there at one-fifth the speed of light.

Meanwhile, on Earth we are facing economic, ecological, and social transformations whose intricacies and consequences are hard to grasp. Their media-hyped representations invoke emergency scenarios, impeding nuanced analysis, catalyzing neoliberal economic measures (Naomi Klein's "disaster capitalism"), and obscuring radical alternatives to a system at the point of its own dissolution.

Outer space was a pivotal point of reference throughout the twentieth century; today, it has again come into focus due to recent scientific, technological, and economic developments. Current discourses of discovery, expansion, and resource exploitation bear a striking resemblance to terrestrial ideologies of past centuries and raise many transdisciplinary issues: How can we investigate the future cultural heritage of space without repeating colonial patterns of conquest? What do designs for space settlements and the architecture of Earth have in common? Does the Anthropocene imply human interventions not only in the geology of Earth but also on other planets? Who owns celestial bodies, and what responsibilities arise from our interactions with extraterrestrial places, objects, and materials even in the absence of alien life?

We are interested in outer space as a narrative trope with a rich history of spawning future scenarios beyond Earth. How can we think about the future today while we are in the midst of a crisis of "futura" as a linear, progressive, Western concept? In the arts, the filmic essay allows for speculation as well as for ambivalent images and postrepresentative approaches. Multilayered, transdisciplinary artistic practices also offer an openness within an altered gravitational field where not only the complexities of our present can be addressed but also a "potential past futurity" beyond simplifications.

## ALICE GORMAN

### Haunted Houses at Hypervelocity: Orbital Futures

Space hardware of every era presents visions of a future based on degrees of gravity. In the early twentieth century, rocket scientist Konstantin Tsiolkovsky imagined that life in microgravity would create an idyllic, egalitarian society where people would bask in orbiting greenhouses, drinking in the limitless energy of the sun. Instead, today the wreckage of rockets and satellites orbits Earth, splintering into ever-smaller fragments that mirror the plastic granules proliferating in the oceans.

Among this debris — and farther afield in the solar system — are abandoned spacecraft that encapsulate the hopes and fears of those who remain in the bottom of the gravity well. Unlike archaeological artifacts on Earth that have to be raised into the light by excavation, they are ever-present, circulating among the live satellites. This is a stark manifestation of “the past haunting the present.” More interestingly, there are only two that have ever contained human life — the empty Tiangong-1 and the International Space Station, which is currently occupied but beset with uncertainty. Our place in the space beyond Earth is precarious, yet precious to many. What emerging technologies might provide new visions to propel us into a future space — and a future archaeology?

**Dr. Alice Gorman** is a pioneer in the emerging field of space archaeology. She is a senior lecturer in the Department of Archaeology at Flinders University (Adelaide, AUS), where she teaches the archaeology of modern society. She is a member of the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics, and the Space Industry Association of Australia. Since 2011, she has contributed to the International Space University’s Southern Hemisphere Program. Gorman tweets as @drspacejunk and blogs at Space Age Archaeology. Gorman is interested in how humans adapt to different environments and use material culture to make sense of new worlds. Her recent research has investigated orbital debris as part of the Anthropocene, performative aspects of lunar landing sites, and the entanglement of nature and culture at the subatomic level. She has also explored indigenous intersections with space exploration at launch sites in Australia and French Guiana to critique the colonialist attitudes commonly replicated in contemporary space narratives.

FRI, 21.10.16 | 5pm

## RALO MAYER

### E.T.E.—Extra-Terrestrial Ecologies, the Undergrowth

On September 26, 1991, eight crewmembers began their mission inside the closed ecosystem Biosphere 2 near Oracle, Arizona. Their goals: exploring global ecological relations and testing future life in space. Celebrating the experiment’s twenty-fifth anniversary, I present an illustrated story about ecology and space.

Unreliable synopsis: E.T., in drag as post-Soviet consultant and blaring Nirvana’s just-released *Nevermind*, arrives in the Sonoran Desert to help out the Biospherians with a staged reading of Kim Stanley Robinson’s Mars trilogy. Liberal Martian organic-potato farmer Matt Damon talks to Donald Trump’s campaign chief about his Biosphere 2 takeover. (Steve Jobs like 🍏(🍷)🍷, Joan Baez 🎸). William Burroughs and Bucky Fuller hack redwood and Allen Ginsberg’s “Howl,” and psychedelic microdosing becomes Silicon Valley’s hot new business trip. *In girum imus nocte et consumimur igni*, aka *De revolutionibus orbium coelestium* — now solar-powered!

**Ralo Mayer** is an artist based in Vienna. His artistic investigations delineate ecologies of contemporary history linking the past, future, and today’s science fiction. Based on a practice of extensive performative research, he creates multilayered storytelling settings in installations, videos, performances, and texts. From 2003 to 2008, Mayer was a founding fellow at the self-organized Manoa Free University and started the continuing project *HOW TO DO THINGS WITH WORLDS*. Since 2007, he has worked on transmedia translations of the imaginary novel *The Ninth Biospherian*. He has presented his work at international exhibitions, film festivals, and conferences, and he teaches in the Department of Site-Specific Art. His PhD-in-Practice project *Space UnSettlements* traces the interrelations of real and speculative scenarios of life in space and on Earth.

FRI, 21.10.16 | 2pm

## DOUGLAS MURPHY

### Giant Envelopes and the Total Interior

In the 1960s and ’70s, advanced architecture was in thrall to the idea that industrialized urban society could be reconciled with the natural world through high technology. This was a generation with its eye

on apocalypse, with a growing environmentalism arguing that the modern world was destroying the planet, but it was also an era of unprecedented technical and social optimism. The spatial figure that most caught the imagination at this time was the dome. Inspired by space capsules, new structural technologies, and new forms of environmental control, the dome—at the scale of the personal bubble or of entire cities encased within glass—promised that the natural world could be brought inside, controlled, made regular. But the “expanded interior” also promised to create a landscape of pure comfort, of leisure free from conflict, both to political radicals and to the heart of the Western establishment.

In recent years, with technological advance and natural collapse prominent in the public imagination again, “dome thinking” has returned. Perhaps most significant is Peter Sloterdijk’s use of the architectural metaphor of the “Crystal Palace” or the greenhouse to describe the stifling cultural conditions of the globalized capitalist world. His conservative vision explicitly rejects work, such as Walter Benjamin’s on “great interiors,” which argues that new forms of capitalist space hold traces of future emancipation. At a time when all-dominating technology companies are drawing on the idealistic visions of the architectural counterculture to prepare their new headquarters, what work needs to be done to properly understand the resonance of such images in the spatial imagination?

**Douglas Murphy** is a writer and architect based in London. He is the author of the books *Last Futures* (Verso, 2016), a cultural history of the radical architecture of the 1960s and '70s, and *The Architecture of Failure* (Zero, 2012), which tells the story of iron and glass architecture and its long influence on modernism. He is currently working on *Nincompoopolis*, on the architecture of London under mayor Boris Johnson, due to be published in 2017. He studied at the Glasgow School of Art and the Royal College of Art, and is currently architecture correspondent at *Icon* magazine. He writes for a wide range of publications on architecture, fine art, and photography, and lectures widely.

FRI, 21.10.16 | 3pm

**VERA TOLLMANN**

### **Picturing the Universe: On Scale, Calculation, and Composites**

The universe has always been mediated; it has always been an image, a virtual universe. How are images and conceptions of outer space transformed by the use of high-performance computers? What remains invisible? The presentation will trace technology’s determining influence on the image of the universe, its agency, and its creation of artifacts. The composite images of Charles and Ray Eames’s film *Powers of Ten* (1977), like current images of the universe, depict space without time. While *Powers of Ten* is informed by photography, today’s images of the universe require the pixels of digital sensors and high computer performance. Digital applications have normalized the manipulation and manipulability of data and enabled the handling of it in bulk.

Whereas Charles and Ray Eames organized the “world” in two dimensions, partitioned in structures and grids, Google Earth is based on networks and algorithms. *Powers of Ten*’s showstopper was its isomorphic depiction of celestial bodies in space and atoms within the human body. Within the universe, there’s once more a macro- and a microcosm. *Powers of Ten* depicts forty steps from  $10^{24}$  to  $10^{-16}$  meters. Amounts of data like “petabyte” and “exabyte” express powers of ten as well. And physicists can count backward until  $10^{-43}$  seconds after the Big Bang. These are unimaginable magnitudes.

**Vera Tollmann** studied Applied Cultural Studies and Aesthetic Practice at Hildesheim and Cultural Studies in Liverpool. Since 2015, she is a PhD-candidate in the graduate program “Aesthetics of the Virtual” of the University of Fine Arts of Hamburg where she writes her dissertation on the meaning of the vertical perspective for image politics. Tollmann is also a researcher at the Berlin University of the Arts where she co-directs the Research Center for Proxy Politics together with Hito Steyerl and Boaz Levin. Recently published essays: “The Body of The Web,” (with Boaz Levin), in: *Out of Body, Skulptur Projekte Münster 2017*, frieze d/e, No. 23, Spring 2016; “Watching ‘Powers of Ten’ in: 2014: A Blueprint for Same Old Power Structures?” online at *Regarding Spectatorship: Revolt and Distant Observer* (Berlin 2015); “The Uncanny Polar Bear. Activists Visually Attack an Overly Emotionalized Image Clone” in: *Image Politics of Climate Change. Visualizations, Imaginations, Documentations*. (Birgit Schneider, Thomas Nocke (eds.), transcript 2014).

SAT, 22.10.16 | 1pm

**SASKIA VERMEYLEN**

## The “Invasion” of Chaos Theory and Science Fiction in Space Law

The influence of science-fiction literature can be detected in the advancements of space law during the first space race of the 1950s and '60s. Space law was inherently science fictional in that it legislated practices in advance of their technical feasibility; at the time, the main concern was to prevent the use of outer space for military purposes. Hence the 1967 Outer Space Treaty established that the moon and other celestial bodies are not subject to national appropriation.

This presentation analyzes the semiotic content of space law and compares it with golden-age science fiction. While space law might have its origins in the Sputnik crisis, repeated stories of invasion from outer space and of planetary colonialism have influenced space law and give insights into the triangular relationship between science fiction, law, and technology. So far, there has been little academic effort to understand why science-fiction literature became encoded in space law as a constitution for cornucopia; haunted, though, by a dystopian future. I will engage with the work of Stanisław Lem and his interpretation and use of chaos theory to analyze the lack of the imaginative and the speculative in both science fiction and space law. Particularly, Lem's ideas about how writing should create “a mediating space in which openness and closure, chaos and order, creation and ratiocination engage each other” (Katherine Hayles) can be used to critique science fiction's failure to act as a creator of the future and of civilization.

**Dr. Saskia Vermeylen** is a critical legal scholar working in the area of property theory and resource frontiers. Her empirical research has focused on alternative property regimes of indigenous communities, and she's currently finishing a monograph on critical property theory drawing on the work of Jacques Derrida and Emmanuel Levinas. Vermeylen is also embarking on a new research project on the legal and ethical meaning of “common heritage of ‘mankind,’” a concept that is currently much debated in the context of deep-seabed and outer-space mining. This links to a wider ongoing research project on the meaning of an ontological turn in critical legal thinking. Inspired by Karen Barad's and Donna Haraway's diffraction methodology and Rosi Braidotti's nomadic thinking, Vermeylen is exploring the meaning of ontological revisions in critical environmental law and ecofem-

inist philosophy in the Anthropocene. Vermeylen recently joined the law school at the University of Strathclyde (Glasgow) as a chancellor's fellow and senior lecturer.

SAT, 22.10.16 / 3pm

## INTRODUCTION AND MODERATION

**Claudia Slanar** is an art historian, curator, and writer who works at the intersection of critical theory and artistic practice, focusing on the performativity of historical narratives. She is a coeditor of a monograph on experimental filmmaker James Benning (Austrian Film Museum, 2007), and her texts have been published in international books and exhibition catalogues including *Matrix: Gender / Relations / Revisions* (Springer, 2008), *Narcissism* (Cirrus Gallery, 2012), and *Interactive Contemporary Art* (I. B. Tauris, 2014). In 2012–13, she curated, together with Georgia Holz, a series of shows on artistic authorship, desubjectivization, and realism, which were exhibited at the Contemporary Arts Center Gallery of the University of Irvine, California, at the artists' association in Innsbruck, and at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna. Slanar is currently based in Vienna, where she is the curator of the Ursula Blickle Video Archive at the 21er Haus—Museum of Contemporary Art and teaches in the Department of Site-Specific Art.

**Propulsion: On Changing Futures** is a series of lectures with a Round Table at the Department of Site-Specific Art

**Book Launch** Presentation of the Round Table 2015 book: *Humans Make Nature. Landscapes of the Anthropocene*; Gabriele Mackert, Co-editor; Michael Wagreich, Head, Department of Geodynamics and Sedimentology, University of Vienna

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THU, 20.10.16	2-4pm	<b>RALO MAYER CLAUDIA SLANAR</b>	Students' Workshop
	6pm	<b>PAUL PETRITSCH CLAUDIA SLANAR</b>	Welcome Introduction
	6.30pm	<b>THEMATIC SCREENING</b>	Details at: <a href="http://www.sitespecificart.at">www.sitespecificart.at</a>
FRI, 21.10.16	2pm	<b>GERALD BAST RALO MAYER</b>	Welcome E.T.E.—Extra-Terrestrial Ecologies, the Undergrowth
	3pm	<b>DOUGLAS MURPHY</b>	Giant Envelopes and the Total Interior
	5pm	<b>ALICE GORMAN</b>	Haunted Houses at Hypervelocity: Orbital Futures
	7pm	<b>GABRIELE MACKERT MICHAEL WAGREICH</b>	Presentation of the Round Table 2015 publication: <i>Humans Make Nature</i>
SAT, 22.10.16	1pm	<b>VERA TOLLMANN</b>	Picturing the Universe: On Scale, Calculation, and Composites
	3pm	<b>SASKIA VERMEYLEN</b>	The "Invasion" of Chaos Theory and Science Fiction in Space Law
	5pm	<b>ROUND TABLE</b>	Concluding panel with participants

University of Applied Arts Vienna, Expositur Paulusplatz 5, 1030 Vienna, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor  
Lectures, discussion, and screening in English.