

Progress Report for
IAA Study Group S 6.3
Interstellar Message Construction

History of the Study Group

At the IAA SETI Permanent Study Group's annual business meeting held just prior to the Houston IAC in 2002, that study group recommended the formation of a separate study group to examine issues related to interstellar message construction. Because the new study group would include a significant focus on methodologies derived from the social sciences, humanities, and the arts, it was decided to present this proposal to the IAA through Commission 6.

An initial proposal was presented to Commission 6 early in the course of the Houston Congress, and upon receiving feedback from Commission 6, a complete proposal was developed and submitted to that commission during the Houston Congress. This proposal was approved by Commission 6 and the proposal was submitted to the IAA Secretariat and to Dr. Ed Stone.

Progress to Date

Meetings

A series of meetings have been held on interstellar message composition, with each of them including formal or informal discussion on possible future directions for research on interstellar message design. Recommendations for issues that should be addressed have been solicited from participants either during or after the meetings.

Paris, March 2003:

Workshop on "Encoding Altruism: The Art and Science of Interstellar Message Composition"

Zagreb, March 2003:

Satellite workshop to the 2003 Paris workshop

Washington, DC, June 2003:

World Archaeological Congress; Session on Archaeological Contributions to Interstellar Message Composition

Bremen, October 2003

IAC; Day-long workshop with in-depth discussion of 4 papers that had previously been circulated

Publications

Two publications that highlight contributions of selected participants in the above meetings are in progress:

Special section of *Leonardo*: Extended abstracts primarily from the 2003 Paris meeting, “Encoding Altruism: The Art and Science of Interstellar Message Composition,” supplemented by abstracts of papers from Croatia (presented at the Zagreb meeting) and India (from an international conference held in Chennai in November 2003).

Special section of *Leonardo*: Three articles from authors providing diverse disciplinary perspectives on interstellar message construction: engineering/art, cognitive science, and experimental music, with authors from Italy, the UK, and the USA, respectively.

Plans for Future

Additional diversity of perspectives will be sought. There has been significant improvement in increasing the diversity of participants since the first Paris workshop on interstellar message construction in 2002. The 2003 Paris workshop noted above had participants representing 10 countries, which was a significant improvement over the 2002 Paris workshop, which included a disproportionate number of participants from the USA. Nevertheless, even at the 2003 workshop, all but one of the participants were from North America or Europe.

Plans for the next year are focused around two meetings that will significantly increase representation of scholars from two disciplines not previously well-represented: semiotics and anthropology.

Lyon, July 2004

Eighth Congress of the International Association for Semiotic Studies (IASS); Two sessions on interstellar message construction were held. Participants in these sessions will come from Canada, Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, Norway, Sweden, the UK, the United Arab Emirates, and the USA. This is the first international semiotics conference that has included in-depth discussion of interstellar message construction. These congresses occur infrequently, with the Seventh Congress of the IASS being held in 1999, so this meeting may be the only time in the near future for such a broad-based discussion within the semiotics community.

San Francisco, November 2004

American Anthropological Association; A double session on anthropological perspectives on interstellar message construction is being proposed.

Additional opportunities for holding meetings outside of North America and Western Europe will also be explored. One cost-effective method of encouraging participation from previously underrepresented areas is to hold meetings in these underrepresented regions, with the majority of the participants from that locale. This strategy was used effectively in Zagreb by holding a separate workshop immediately after the 2003 Paris workshop, yielding insights from a number of Croatian scholars whose views would not otherwise have been included due to travel expenses to Paris and limitations on the number of participants that could be accommodated at the Paris meeting. Opportunities for increased involvement from participants in Russia and India are being actively pursued and should begin within the next year, pending outside financial support.

A final goal for the coming year is to increase discussion within the study group. Much of the work of the study group to date has been conducted by a subset of members most centrally associated with organizing the sessions during which discussions occur. Increasing the involvement of other members will be especially useful as the group seeks to expand the disciplinary and regional diversity of perspectives included in discussions. Increased communication by email and face-to-face meetings at IACs and IPC meetings will be encouraged, with an annual meeting of the study group to be scheduled for the Vancouver IAC.