

International conference
“Technological Optimism in 1970s and 1980s Popular Culture: Innovation, Creativity, Prosperity, and Freedom”
Mainz, 15-17 April 2026

Leibniz Institute of European History (IEG), Mainz
Concept and organisation: John C. Wood, Thorsten Wübbena

Day 1, 15.04.2026

13:30 *Arrival, Registration*

14:00 Johannes Paulmann: Welcoming words

14:15 John C. Wood, Thorsten Wübbena: Technological Optimism in 1970s and 1980s Popular Culture – an Introduction

Session I: Optimistic visions (chair: Constanze Buyken, IEG Mainz)

14:30 Introduction (chair)

14:40 Gloria Maritza Gómez Revuelta (Universidad de la Guadalajara): “Orbital Ambitions. Techno-Optimism meets Public Skepticism in the 1970s U.S. Solar Power Satellite Program”

15:00 Discussion

15:15 Martin Schmitt (Paderborn University): “Defying the pessimism: How visions of progress hibernated in digital technology after the boom”

15:35 Discussion

15:50 Sandra Meireis (Technical University of Darmstadt): “The Unprecedented Promises of High Tech Architecture”

16:10 Discussion

16:25 *Coffee break*

16:45 Steven Logan (University of Toronto): “Technological Optimism in the life and work of Alvin Toffler”

17:05 Discussion

17:20 Lionel Obadia (Université de Lumière Lyon 2): “The thrill of technological wonder: Marvelous machines or dangerous robots?”

17:40 Discussion

17:55 Constanze Buyken: Comment and session discussion

18:15 End of day 1

Day 2, 16.04.2026

Session II: Computers and digitalisation (chair: Cindarella Petz, IEG Mainz)

09:30 Introduction (chair)

09:40 Michael Piotrowsk (Université de Lausanne): “Neither Utopia nor Dystopia – The Everyday Reality of West German Home Computing in the 1980s”

10:00 Discussion

10:15 Margarete Pratschke (Passau University): “Annie Leibovitz's photographic interpretation of the personal computer revolution between utopia and dystopia”

10:35 Discussion

10:50 Coffee break

11:10 Sarah A. Bell (Michigan Technological University): “Just Kids at Play: Exporting Silicon Valley Design as Common Sense through 1980s Toys and Media”

11:30 Discussion

11:45 Johann Meyer (Leipzig University): “Computer Pastors in the Technophobic Church’: The West German ‘Pastor & PC Association’ as an Example of Clerical Enthusiasm for Technology”

12:05 Discussion

12:20 Cindarella Petz: Comment and session discussion

12:40 - 14:00 Lunch break

Session III: Optimism beyond East and West (chair: Bernhard Gißbl, IEG Mainz)

14:00 Introduction (chair)

14:10 Soumya Ranjan Gahir (Ravenshaw University): „Transistor Zen: Post-Imperial Cosmotechnics and the Ethics of Technological Restraint in 1980s Japan“

14:30 Discussion

14:45 Joel Abah (Kogi State University/University of Ibadan): “Postcolonial Futures and Sovereign Machines: Nigeria’s Techno-Optimism and the Global Imagination, 1970–1990”

15:05 Discussion

15:20 Bernhard Gißbl: Comment and session discussion

15:40 Coffee break

Keynote lecture

16:15 Welcome and Introduction

16:30 Henry Keazor (Heidelberg University): "A (real) odyssey in space. The 1970s Italian-British science fiction series 'Space': 1999" [working title]

17:30 Reception

19:00 End of day 2

3 Day, 17.04.2026

Session IV: Socialist optimism(s) (chair: Jared Warren, IEG Mainz)

09:00 Introduction (chair)

09:10 Ivan Sablin (Institute of Contemporary History Ljubljana/Heidelberg University): "Explaining Cybercommunism: The Scientific-Technical Revolution in Soviet Popular Science Magazines"

09:30 Discussion

09:45 Vedran Duančić (Klagenfurt University): "Techno-Optimism in Late Socialist Yugoslavia"

10:05 Discussion

10:20 Coffee break

10:40 Olha Norba (Slovak Academy of Sciences): „Ambivalent Futures: Technological Optimism and its Discontents in Czechoslovak Science Fiction“

11:00 Discussion

11:15 Johann Pibert (Bonn University/Free University of Berlin)/Grigorii Golubev: „*The Adventures of Elektronik*: Soviet Techno-Optimism of the Late 1970s“

11:35 Discussion

11:50 Jarred Warren: Comment and session discussion

12:10 John C. Wood, Thorsten Wübbena: Closing remarks

12:30 End of the conference

Speaker	Title	PhD	Country	Female
Joel Abah	Postcolonial Futures and Sovereign Machines: Nigeria's Techno-Optimism and the Global Imagination, 1970–1990	n	Nigeria	n
Johann Pibert	The Adventures of Elektronik: Soviet Techno-Optimism of the Late 1970s	n	Germany	n
Grigorii Golubev	The Adventures of Elektronik: Soviet Techno-Optimism of the Late 1970s	n	Germany	n
Soumya R. Gahir	Transistor Zen: Post-Imperial Cosmotechnics and the Ethics of Technological Restraint in 1980s Japan	n	India	n
Michael Piotrowski	Neither Utopia nor Dystopia – The Everyday Reality of West German Home Computing in the 1980s	y	Switzerland	n
Gloria M. Revuelta	Orbital Ambitions: Techno Optimism meets Public Skepticism in the 1970s U. S. Solar Power Satellite Program	y	Mexico	y
Olha Norba	Ambivalent Futures: Technological Optimism and its Discontents in the Czechoslovak Science Fiction	n	Slovakia	y
Ivan Sablin	Explaining Cybercommunism: The Scientific-Technical Revolution in Soviet Popular Science Magazines	y	Germany / Slovenia	n
Vedran Duančić	Techno-Optimism in Late Socialist Yugoslavia	y	Austria	n
Lionel Obadia	The thrill of technological wonder: Marvelous machines or dangerous robots?	y	France	n
Steven Logan	Technological Optimism in the life and work of Alvin Toffler	y	Canada	n
	Computer Pastors in the Technophobic Church: The West German "Pastor & PC Association" as an Example of			
Johann Meyer	Clerical Enthusiasm for Technology	n	Germany	n
	Just Kids at Play: Exporting Silicon Valley Design as Common Sense through 1980s Toys and Media	y	USA	y
Sarah A. Bell	The Unprecedented Promises of High Tech Architecture	y	Germany	y
Sandra Meireis	Defying the pessimism: How visions of progress hibernated in digital technology after the boom	y	Germany	n
Martin Schmitt	Annie Leibovitz's photographic interpretation of the personal computer revolution between utopia and dystopia	y	Germany	y
Margarete Pratschke	Introduction/closing remarks	n	Germany	n
Thorsten Wübbena	Introduction/closing remarks	y	Germany	n
John Carter Wood	Session chair	y	Germany	n
Constanze Buyken	Session chair	y	Germany	y
Cindarella Petz	Session chair	y	Germany	y
Bernhard Gißbl	Session chair	y	Germany	n
Henry Keazor	Keynote presentation	y	Germany	n
Jared Warren	Session chair	y	Germany	n
Johannes Paulmann	Welcoming words	y	Germany	n

Total **24**

Total with PhD	17
Total with PhD, not from Germany	6
Total with PhD, females	6