

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

14:10 John C. Wood, Thorsten Wübbena: Technological Optimism in 1970s and 1980s Popular Culture – an Introduction

Session I: Optimistic visions (chair: Constanze Buyken)

14:35 Introduction (chair)

14:45 Gloria Maritza Gómez Revuelta: “Orbital Ambitions. Techno-Optimism meets Public Skepticism in the 1970s U.S. Solar Power Satellite Program”

15:05 Discussion

15:20 Martin Schmitt: “Defying the pessimism: How visions of progress hibernated in digital technology after the boom”

15:40 Discussion

15:55 Sandra Meireis: “The Unprecedented Promises of High Tech Architecture”

16:15 Discussion

16:30 Coffee break

16:50 Steven Logan: “Technological Optimism in the life and work of Alvin Toffler”

17:10 Discussion

17:25 Constanze Buyken: Comment and session discussion

18:05 End of day 1

Day 2, 16.04.2026

Session II: Computers and machines (chair: Cindarella Petz)

09:30 Introduction (chair)

09:40 Michael Piotrowski: "Neither Utopia nor Dystopia – The Everyday Reality of West German Home Computing in the 1980s"

10:00 Discussion

10:15 Margarete Pratschke: "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: "Just Kids at Play: Exporting Silicon Valley Design as Common Sense through 1980s Toys and Media"

11:30 Discussion

11:45 Lionel Obadia: "The thrill of technological wonder: Marvelous machines or dangerous robots?"

12:05 Discussion

12:20 Cindarella Petz: Comment and session discussion

12:40 - 14:00 Lunch break

14:00 Introduction (chair: Bernhard Gißibl)

14:10 Johann Meyer: "'Computer Pastors in the Technophobic Church': The West German 'Pastor & PC Association' as an Example of Clerical Enthusiasm for Technology"

14:30 Discussion

14:45 Joel Abah: "Postcolonial Futures and Sovereign Machines: Nigeria's Techno-Optimism and the Global Imagination, 1970–1990"

15:05 Discussion

15:20 Bernhard Gißibl: Comment and session discussion

15:40 Coffee break

Keynote lecture

16:15 Welcome and Introduction

16:30 Henry Keazor: "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)

09:00 Introduction (chair)

09:10 Ivan Sablin: "Explaining Cybercommunism: The Scientific-Technical Revolution in Soviet Popular Science Magazines"

09:30 Discussion

09:45 Vedran Duančić: "Techno-Optimism in Late Socialist Yugoslavia"

10:05 Discussion

10:20 Coffee break

10:40 Olha Norba: „Ambivalent Futures: Technological Optimism and its Discontents in Czechoslovak Science Fiction“

11:00 Discussion

11:15 Johann Pibert / Grigorii Golubev: „*The Adventures of Elektronik*: Soviet Techno-Optimism of the Late 1970s“

11:35 Discussion

11:50 Jared Warren: Comment and session discussion

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

12:30 End of the conference