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GERMANS IN SPACE. THE TV SERIES *RAUMPATROUILLE* (1966) AS WEST GERMAN COLD WAR UTOPIA

Facing the less than bright and promising political developments of our time – the return of the Cold War between East and West, new nationalistic movements, and new borders in and around Europe – the look back on yesterday's utopian visions of a possible future could be quite telling and intriguing.

In 1966, three years before the first man actually landed on the moon, a fictional spaceship launched from Earth to explore space and battle extraterrestrial enemies in a TV show that became a worldwide cultural phenomenon: the *U.S.S. Enterprise* in Gene Roddenberry's *Star Trek*. In the same year another ship took off „to boldly go where no man has gone before“ and to defend our home planet against alien threats: the *Orion VII* in the West German TV series *Raumpatrouille – Die phantastischen Abenteuer des Raumschiffs Orion („Space Patrol“)*, written by Rolf Honold and W. G. Larsen, and directed by Michael Braun and Theo Mezger. The German series – one of the most expensive TV productions of its time – consists of only seven episodes and never became as famous and popular as *Star Trek*, but despite of its short run, it still managed to inspire the audience and retains today a loyal cult following in Germany.

With an international crew, representing a united mankind without national states, the *Orion* travels through outer space and faces several dangerous situations, including the encounter with a hostile alien species called Frogs. Thus the series features a mix of fictional approaches to spaceflight and space technology with heroic adventure and futuristic warfare. *Raumpatrouille* is in many ways similar to *Star Trek* and its echoes of the political reality of the Cold War and the Space Race in the 1960s, but on the other hand it is quite distinctive. In particular, the adventures of the *Orion* are characterized by a less tolerant and optimistic attitude towards contact with extraterrestrials and a more aggressive reaction in situations of conflict. As a specific West German vision of the future, informed by an American tradition of science fiction narratives, *Raumpatrouille* is firmly rooted in the cultural tension between progressive hope for peaceful global relations, structures and alliances after the devastating experiences of two world wars and the willingness to military action against a powerful ideological enemy, including the use of weapons of mass destruction („*Overkill*“), capable of destroying whole planets; it is a science fiction series that reflects both utopian ideas and a political-ideological reality which is dominated by fear of an subversive enemy, by nuclear armament and strategies of deterrent, a European link, as it were, between NASA and NATO.