Geppert, Alexander C.T. (Hrsg.): *Imagining Outer Space. European Astroculture in the Twentieth Century*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan 2012. ISBN: 978-0-230-23172-6; XVII, 393 S., 46 SW-Abb., 14 Farbtafeln

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„Imagining Outer Space" edited by Alexander C.T. Geppert, the director of the Emmy Noether Research Group „The Future in the Stars", sets a high standard for itself, proposing no less than to redraw the disciplinary boundaries of space history. Pointing out that past scholarly inquiries have tended to focus on the technological, scientific, and political dimensions of the exploration of outer space, Geppert in his well-written, ambitious introduction to the volume calls for an interdisciplinary approach that „examines the cultural significance and societal repercussions of outer space and space exploration" (p. 8). How, he asks, did the idea of space develop in the 20th century? How was outer space imagined and communicated? How did imaginaries of the cosmos and extraterrestrial life affect space exploration projects? He ultimately proposes to write the cultural and social history of the „space age" – a term deployed so often that it has lost much of its historical and cultural specificity – in order to understand the dialectical relationship between projections of outer space and material explorations of the worlds beyond Earth. One cannot, Geppert posits, study one without the other as together they form what he labels 'astroculture', a new and useful term. Focusing on the period between 1945 and the mid-1970s, the volume pursues three epistemological interests. It foregrounds the European perspective – a welcome shift – pondering the „European paradox" of a sustained space enthusiasm, the absence of manned European space-programs notwithstanding, and weighs the social, cultural, and political circumstances that triggered this enthusiasm, kept it alive, and eventually led to its abatement. The volume explores the connection between science fiction and science fact, re-conceptualizing this relationship as complimentary rather than contradictory. In so doing, it invites contributors to critically investigate the usefulness of „astrofuturism," a concept tying outer space to visions of the future, often connecting transcendental beliefs to utopian conceptions of other worlds.

The volume is organized into five sections – each comprising three essays – that follow a mostly chronological order but also offer different analytical perspectives on the historicization of outer space. Contributors represent a broad spectrum of disciplines from history to art history, anthropology, sociology, political science, and the history of religion. Their respective contributions draw our attention to a wide range of historical actors, specific sites, important moments, types of media, and forms of representation. What gives the volume coherence, however, is a willingness on the part of most authors to engage with the volume's stated agenda of conceptualizing and exploring the cultural and social history of the space age in Europe.

The first section, „Narrating Outer Space", (featuring contributions by Steven J. Dick, Claudia Schmölders and Thomas Brandstetter) deals with shifting meta-narratives on outer space and its imaginations. Dick reminds us that the long quest for making sense of human existence in the larger, largely unknown universe has for some time now been informed by the concept of cosmic evolution, which has not only expanded concepts of space but also concepts of time and the ways in which Western cultures have thought about alien life. Cross-fertilizations between scientists and popular culture, he argues moreover, expanded imaginations on both sides of the Atlantic and fueled space exploration during the space age to such a degree that Western world views became thoroughly infused with projections of a permanent human presence beyond Earth. Looking at fictional and nonfictional representations of one such form of alien life – crystalline aliens – Brandstetter shows how „imaginations about inorganic life forms led to fundamental questions concerning criteria for defining and recognizing life, as well as to an insight into the irreducible perspective-dependency of such questions" (p. 80). Biologists as much as science fiction writers were not only preoccupied with

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ontological concerns of what crystalline life forms were, he argues, but also applied (imagined) knowledge about these life forms to a self-reflective understanding of human social norms and cultural formations.

„Projecting Outer Space“ (Rainer Eisfeld, Thore Bjørnvig, and Michael J. Neufeld) explores projections of spaces and landscapes beyond Earth. The ways in which both scientists and science fiction writers theorized about and imaged Mars and other cosmic places, both Eisfeld and Bjørnvig remind us, reflected mostly their scientific interests and intellectual preoccupations rather than scientific facts. Eisfeld shows that Mars was appropriated as a projection screen for cold war expansionism. The cosmos, in Bjørnvig's analysis of Arthur C. Clarke's writing, appears as a space where scientific projects were bound up with religious ideas, metaphors and visions of the apocalypse. Humans' advance into space, Clarke envisioned, would enable them to transcend to their own existence on a metaphysical level and experience spiritual redemption. Neufeld's essay, the third contribution to the section, explores the unraveling of a grand projection of space exploration: It looks at East German Julius Mader's biography of Wernher von Braun and its film adaption, which established a revisionist reading of von Braun's career not only in Eastern bloc countries but was also critically received in the West.

„Visualizing Outer Space“ explores representations of space flight and outer space in various forms of media: newspapers, TV science programs, comic strips, and television series. The contributors to this section – Bernd Mütter, Guillaume de Syon and Henry Keazor – share the understanding that for most members of the public in Europe and the United States, space flight was virtually inaccessible unless it was thoroughly mediated. Media narratives, Mütter argues, shaped and reflected what the public perceived as the realities of space flight. For lack of original footage those realities included simulations of the Apollo 11 moon landing in the ZDF studio where the station's science program „Aus Forschung und Technik“ was produced. But while (visual) media have shaped the public's perception of space flight and outer space these media have also visualized projections and imaginations of outer space both optimistic and pessimistic in outlook. The British television series „Space: 1999“, as Keazor shows, is but one expression of one of the volume's key tenants: that during the early 1970s, a crisis-induced gloom contributed to a growing skepticism regarding technology and human progress, which in turn led to an abating interest in space flight around this time.

„Encountering Outer Space“ (Debbora Battaglia, Pierre Lagrange and James Miller) investigates real and imagined human encounters with outer space and its representatives. The most interesting piece in this section is Miller's analysis of an account by Marius Dewilde, a young metalworker from Northern France, who claimed to have encountered a UFO in the Fall of 1954. Reading Dewilde's evolving narrative – his story received extensive media coverage and he later wrote a book about his experience – against the backdrop of historical developments such as decolonization, economic modernization, and European integration, Miller argues that Dewilde's story and the way contemporaries reacted to it is important because rather than reveal tenable information about alien life it offers insights into the „prevailing perceptions of, and concerns about, the remaking of political boundaries in France during the 1950s and 1960s“ (p. 249). Leaving the authenticity of Dewilde's experience unquestioned, Miller posits that the French interest in UFOs, especially among left-leaning ufologists, „was shaped by an acute concern about the asymmetrical and often violent social arrangements and civilizational contacts“ in recent history (p. 257). Above this critical perspective hovered the projection, he suggests, that an advanced alien civilization existed somewhere, which could assist humanity in redeeming itself. Rather than read it as proof of a material encounter, Miller suggests we interpret Dewilde's story as an astrofuturist tale of redemption.

The last section „Inscribing Outer Space“ deals with the possibilities of knowledge production and dissemination in outer space. Gonzalo Munévar, William R. Macauley, and Tristan Weddigen ponder the challenges of

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developing technologies for planetary research and designing meaningful systems of interstellar communication. Are self-producing automata useful tools in the exploration of the far corners of the universe? Will alien civilizations be able to decipher interstellar messages such as the information provided on NASA's Pioneer plaque? Are mathematical relationships and numbers timeless entities that will be easily understood by any technologically advanced civilization? Or do the laws of nature have to be conceptualized as socially embedded and contingent? What is the place of art in outer space or, as Philipp Pocock wonders in the volume's epilogue, in 'the age of orbitization'? Posing these questions, which by their very nature preclude definite answers, the volume closes on raising important issues and prepares the ground for further explorations of astroculture.

„Imagining Outer Space" offers an interdisciplinary and transnational approach to the cultural and social history of the space age in Europe. While it offers fascinating insights into the European context, it is its redrawing of the disciplinary boundaries of space history that should be most applauded. Although the quality of the contributions is a bit uneven and one could have focused more on race, class, gender, and ethnicity as categories of analysis, the volume is to be highly recommended not only to readers interested in the history of outer space and the space age.

HistLit 2012-3-084 / Anke Ortlepp über Geppert, Alexander C.T. (Hrsg.): *Imagining Outer Space. European Astroculture in the Twentieth Century*. Basingstoke 2012, in: H-Soz-Kult 03.08.2012.

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