



Individual Submission Summary

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Outer Space Utopias in Silicon Valley

In Event: *Science, Technology and Society in Outer Space - III*

Fri, September 6, 4:30 to 6:00pm, Sheraton New Orleans Hotel, Floor: Fifth Floor, Grand Chenier

Abstract

Silicon Valley entrepreneurs are investing in outer space technologies on the promise of a future in which human beings become a "multiplanetary species". I examine how entrepreneurs such as Elon Musk and Jeff Bezos and their supporters talk about their investment in human spaceflight technologies, the visions of the future they are advancing, and how they have sought to garner support for these visions. Based on analysis of media texts, I critically analyse the key claims and promises made by these groups about how their initiatives will enable a new phase of human development. I assess how these claims are characterized by an optimism both about the benefits of technology and the future of humanity, and how critical voices are also contesting such claims, challenging the legitimacy of such investment in relation to current global challenges. I draw on Shelia Jasanoff's (2015) work on sociotechnical imaginaries to inform my discussion of what I call 'multiplanetary imaginaries' (Tutton 2018) that refers not only to projections of a future in which human beings establish life on another planet, but also contestations over how to live on this one. I explore the utopian aspect of these imaginaries and how they are characterized by optimistic and pessimistic repertoires. My paper therefore shows how STS can contribute to sustained critical engagement with elite visions of sociotechnical futures and their contestations.

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