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# Anthropology Book Forum

Open Access Book Reviews

**Anne W. Johnson, 2026, *Mexico in Space: From La Raza C3smica to The Space Race*, Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, ISBN 978-0-8165-5483-6.**

Over the past three decades the space industry has experienced a surge of commercial space activity—much of which promises a “democratized” space landscape accessible to global citizens. Yet, not every nation has experienced the growth of the space industry in the same way. Access to space technologies and cosmological histories with outer space have varied dramatically between Western nations and those in the global South. In *Mexico in Space: From La Raza C3smica to The Space Race*, Anne Johnson explores a nation with a rich and complex history of space exploration and technological development. Over eight years, Johnson investigated Mexico’s historical and contemporary indigenous conceptualization of the cosmos. *Mexico in Space* examines a deep, diverse, and intimate history of Mexico’s relationship with space through art installations, technological histories, and contemporary practices. As Johnson explains—drawing on work by Lesley Byrd Simpson—there are many Mexicos, which have resulted in many outer spaces.<sup>1</sup>

Johnson’s research relies on two main frameworks. The first, focuses on working with “space people” outside the hegemonic centers of space activity. The second, emphasizes the indigenous concept *nepantla* which characterizes the potentials and limitations of those living at the intersection of borders.<sup>2</sup> Johnson also draws on the concept of milieu—originating from philosopher Georges Canguilhem—to think through the generative relationships between humans and the environment.<sup>3</sup> These frameworks produce an interpretation of Mexico’s relationship to space which emphasizes a story of globalization and “planetization.” The space

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<sup>1</sup> Anne W. Johnson, *Mexico in Space: From La Raza C3smica to The Space Race* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2026) 4.

<sup>2</sup> Anne W. Johnson, *Mexico in Space: From La Raza C3smica to The Space Race* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2026) 9-14.

<sup>3</sup> Georges Canguilhem, *Knowledge of Life* (New York City: Fordham University Press, 2008).

milieux invokes a multidimensional, situated understanding of outer space with blurred and shifting boundaries.

The case studies and examples used in *Mexico in Space* are rich and expansive. Johnson draws on a nuanced understanding of Mexico's environments, borders, and national identity to interpret Mexican cosmological histories. *Mexico in Space* is structured around historic space events such as the launch of Sputnik, the development of satellites, the moon landing, and current events such as space tourism and the Great North American Eclipse. In parallel, she demonstrates that Mexican cosmohistories are shaped by colonialism, community practices, Mesoamerican belief systems, and other complex entanglements.

*Mexico in Space* is significant for several reasons, but one particularly distinctive aspect of the book is its use of imagery and artistic reflection to interpret Mexican space history. Through “interludes” placed between each chapter, Johnson reflects on artistic and cultural exchanges between Mexico and outer space, such as *La NASA no es la raza*, an exhibit which focused on the waste generated by space technologies, and specifically how that waste impacted Mexico.

*Mexico in Space: From La Raza Cósmica to The Space Race* is timely and necessary. As the colonial intentions of space ventures come under increasing scrutiny, the cosmic histories of countries impacted by colonialism becomes evermore important. *Mexico in Space* is essential reading for anyone with an interest in Mexican history, technological development, and non-dominant space narratives.

**Author Bio:** Savannah Mandel is a Visiting Assistant Professor with the Academy of Transdisciplinary Studies at Virginia Tech. Most of her research has focused on the history and ethics of space technologies, specifically spaceports and space mining. She has published broadly in outlets such as Anthropology News, Room Magazine, Anthropolitan, the Geek Anthropologist, the CASTAC Platypus Blog, and Anthropology Now. In July 2024 her book *Ground Control: An Argument for the End of Human Space Exploration* released through Chicago Review Press.

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## References

Canguilhem, Georges. *Knowledge of Life*. New York City: Fordham University Press, 2008.

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