



# NASA/TREK: Popular Science and Sex in America

By Constance Penley

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This wry and highly readable investigation of the role of space travel in popular imagination looks at the way NASA has openly borrowed from the TV show *Star Trek* to reinforce its public standing. It also celebrates the work of a group of the show's fans who rewrite its storylines in porno-romance fanzines. Constance Penley advocates that scientific experimentation be accompanied by social and sexual experimentation, and devoted to exploring inner as well as outer space.

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## **NASA/TREK: Popular Science and Sex in America** By Constance Penley **Bibliography**

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### Editorial Review

From Kirkus Reviews

A clever and iconoclastic dual portrait of the NASA space program and Star Trek fandom from a feminist perspective. Penley (Film and Women's Studies/Univ. of Calif., Santa Barbara) grew up near Cape Canaveral, and her childhood was shaped in large part by predawn dashes with her father to watch rockets being launched. These unusual excursions, mixed with a heavy dose of Kennedy-era liberalism, led to Penley's lifelong love of NASA and of the whole notion of space exploration. But her vision of the program, while positive overall, is hardly idealized. Using the Christa McAuliffe/Challenger tragedy as a base for her extensive criticisms in the first half of the book, Penley shows persuasively that women in the space program have consistently been held to a different--usually higher--standard; that the choice of McAuliffe and the publicity surrounding her training were sexist and demeaning; and that NASA covered up the full extent of the disaster and then memorialized the event poorly. The second half of the book deals mostly with the homoerotic cottage porn industry that has grown up around Star Trek. Penley is sufficiently insightful and persuasive to make this leap in the narrative entirely convincing. Captain Kirk and Mr. Spock are seen in these fantasies (which are largely invented by heterosexual women, according to Penley) as gay lovers. NASA/Trek offers a witty illumination of the strong relationship between the cultures of NASA and Star Trek, arguing that it exists not just in each co-opting the other's symbols and characters (Nichelle Nichols, Lt. Uhura on the original show, was a successful recruiter of women and minorities for NASA), but in their sharing of themes and goals for the future. Boldly--and successfully--goes where no one has gone before. (20 b&w photos, not seen) -- *Copyright ©1997, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.*

### Review

“Going into space with *NASA/TREK* is a good read and a good ride into uncharted regions of technoculture. In Penley’s hands, popular science is a place to launch an inquiry into moral, cultural and political stakes in a world ‘where no man has gone before.’”—Donna Haraway

“*NASA/TREK* is happily both enjoyable and insightful, and explores some intricate correspondences between science and sex. Among other things it offers a new and persuasive analysis of a populist subgenre: ‘slash’ fiction.”—Samuel R. Delany

### About the Author

**Constance Penley** is Professor of Film and Media Studies and Co-Director of the Carsey-Wolf Center for Film, Television and New Media at the University of California, Santa Barbara. She is a founding editor of *Camera Obscura* and the author of *The Future of an Illusion: Film, Feminism and Psychoanalysis*.

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