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intend to be—a new point of departure for those interested in the topic, but it certainly contains essential reading for scholars of Cartesianism.

Despite its merits, the book has one major drawback. Although the title suggests otherwise, not one of the contributions to this volume deals with the genesis of Descartes's text or with the context—intellectual, but also social—in which *L'Homme* was written around 1630. It is all about the reception of the text, not about its origin. Some of the authors touch on what Descartes originally intended to do with his text and what role it had to play in the grand scheme of his philosophy, but only indirectly. Furthermore, pertinent biographical information on major players such as Clerselier and Schuyt is to be found only in footnotes (p. 5). Does this reflect—perhaps unintentionally—a view of the history of science and philosophy in which “Descartes” is just shorthand for a complex of ideas that float freely in intellectual space, without any connection to the real world?

Klaas van Berkel

Klaas van Berkel is Rudolf Agricola Professor of History at the University of Groningen in the Netherlands. His research focuses on the cultural and intellectual history of the early modern and modern periods, with special emphasis on the history of the (Dutch) academies and universities. He is the author of Isaac Beeckman on Matter and Motion: Mechanical Philosophy in the Making (Johns Hopkins, 2013).

Mi Gyung Kim. *The Imagined Empire: Balloon Enlightenments in Revolutionary Europe.* xxv + 427 pp., figs., illus., bibl., index. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2017. \$54.95 (cloth).

Hot air and hydrogen balloons arrived on the European scene with an almighty splash of spectacle that led variously to exaltation, dreams of utility, unreasonable expectations, and, on occasion, riots. Lauded by nobles, savants, and the learned, looked at in awe by many, and looked at askance by others who foretold the possibility of accidents, fires, and even death, aeronautics dominated European thought in the years prior to the French Revolution and continued to hold a significant place in the European cultural imagination thereafter. Knowledge of ballooning brought with it cultural capital. However, a balloon launch remained a highly liminal moment, as Mi Gyung Kim attests in her new book, *The Imagined Empire: Balloon Enlightenments in Revolutionary Europe*.

Precisely because balloons attracted such enormous crowds and perhaps especially because of their inherent danger, an analysis of ballooning provides access to a type of large and diverse public sphere of which other cultural forms could only dream. Kim wants to understand this “empire” and explore how and why ballooning, balloonists, and their audiences got embroiled in the politics of the day. Kim’s archaeology of this technological wonder shows that the promise of a more peaceful aerial empire proved highly tenuous. Using sources penned by the aeronauts as well as by commentators, along with offerings from the periodical press, literary works, prints, and government documents, Kim delves into the competitive world of Enlightenment science, always with one analytic eye turned toward the looming French Revolution. She has thoroughly perused the available literature and has made excellent use of the relevant aeronautics special collections.

After a brief introduction laying out the argument, engaging with the historiography, and introducing some of the forthcoming theoretical frameworks, Kim divides the book into three main sections. The first, “Invention in Theatrical Polity,” includes an analysis of the aeronautical public sphere. Kim situates the Montgolfier brothers within late eighteenth-century scientific culture, both inside and outside the French Académie Royale des Sciences. The savvy Montgolfier brothers chose to demonstrate their invention before a regional administrative body and made sure news of their success reached Paris and Versailles quickly. Kim follows this, in the second chapter, with an exploration of the complex webs of public support, subscriptions, public opinion, and rivalries, especially between those favoring hot-air versus hydrogen

balloons. The battles between rival patronage networks reveal the complicated power relationships among those who struggled to utilize ballooning for personal and political ends. The third chapter tackles the new Argonauts, those people who—in actuality as well as in literature—took to the skies and the battles they fought for honor and glory.

The second section, “Philosophical Nation,” turns to examine the vast audiences that congregated to view aeronautic spectacles. Chapter 4 provides a genealogy of balloon spectators in the imagined empire, while the fifth chapter focuses on how the state attempted to exert control. The monarchy wanted to limit crowds, especially since riots broke out when launches failed. The sixth chapter examines launches in Dijon and Lyon and demonstrates the manner in which balloonists negotiated between provincial elites, found the necessary resources, and dealt with other roadblocks. Kim delves into a failed launch in Bordeaux in Chapter 7. As a prime example of a liminal moment—with savants, the state, and a mass audience all converging on a single launch, but with radically different hopes and expectations—the Bordeaux kerfuffle provides an excellent example of the best and worst of ballooning. Here, Kim argues, the balloon begins to fail as a symbol.

The third section focuses on the “Material Empire.” British ballooning provides the focus of Chapter 8. Here Kim uses differences in the manufacturing of balloons and the methods of garnering financial support as a counterpoint to France. The ninth chapter concentrates on the work of Jean-Pierre Blanchard to cross the English Channel and on Jean-François Pilâtre de Rozier’s ill-fated attempt to duplicate that feat traveling north from France to England. The last chapter follows Blanchard on his travels throughout Europe as the first professional itinerant balloonist. Kim explores the economics of such work as well as the technological and scientific know-how of the different areas where Blanchard performed. A brief epilogue pushes the story into the French Revolution, where, Kim suggests, the guillotine replaced the balloon as the symbol of France.

Kim’s analysis provides a welcome integration of ballooning more directly into the culture and politics of the day. Instead of viewing aeronautics as a novelty displaced from everything else, Kim deftly analyzes it within the complicated cultural milieu of the state, academicians, amateurs, and audience. Despite the title, Kim focuses mostly on France and the first two years of aeronautics. Nonetheless, this book provides a sophisticated exploration of the interconnections between balloons, balloonists, and society.

Michael R. Lynn

Michael R. Lynn is Professor of History at Purdue University Northwest. He has written on popular science during the French Enlightenment and on ballooning in Europe. He is now researching the history of chiromancy in early modern France.

Al Coppola. *The Theater of Experiment: Staging Natural Philosophy in Eighteenth-Century Britain.* x + 265 pp., figs., bibl., index. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016. £47.99 (cloth).

The Theater of Experiment explores the relations between science, spectacular display, and theatrical performance in Britain during the long eighteenth century. Drawing on work from theater studies and history of science, Al Coppola moves beyond generalizing or analogical connections between science and performance to show the rich imbrications between a culture of natural philosophy and a view of theatrical performance that saw it as acting to reform its audience’s political opinions and moral outlook through mocking laughter.

The first chapter discusses the “virtuoso tradition” of mocking the pretensions of pompous natural philosophers, showing how two different plays—Thomas Shadwell’s *The Virtuoso* and *Madam Fickle* by Tomas D’Urfey—could turn remarkably similar mockery to opposed political ends. Both the Whig Shadwell and the Tory D’Urfey condemn the virtuosi in their plays for failing to pay attention to the right