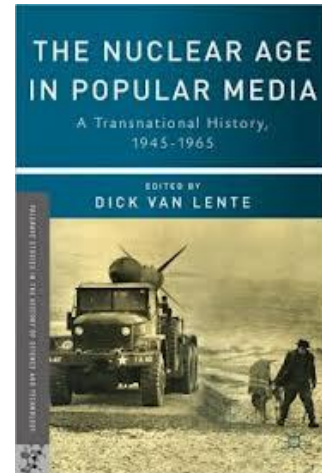


Dick van Lente (Ed.), **The Nuclear Age in Popular Media: A Transnational History, 1945–1965**, New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, 280 pp., \$85.00 (hardcover).

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Before and after the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster of March 2011, scholars of communication, media studies, and science, technology, and society (STS) have investigated the role of mass media and popular media in encoding and reinforcing particular concepts of nuclear technology and have shown how they have been viewed, discussed, and ultimately embraced around the globe (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; Hecht, 1998; Yoshimi, 2012). The images and discourses of nuclear power are indeed culturally, socially, politically, and historically constructed. However, comparative and transnational perspectives in analysis of popular images and narratives of nuclear technology are virtually absent. In **The Nuclear Age in Popular Media: A Transnational History, 1945-1965**, editor Dick van Lente fills that gap with this collection of works on the subject from a wide variety of scholars from different countries.



In Chapter 1, van Lente clearly states the main objective of the book: “The present book is the first attempt at a systematic transnational analysis of representations of nuclear power in several countries, based on a common source base and a common methodology.” He then adds, “Our goal is to compare representations of nuclear power in eight countries during the first two decades of the ‘nuclear age,’ and to trace and explain divergences, convergences, and exchanges” (p. 3). The purpose of this book, then, is to systematically analyze the dynamic nature of representations of nuclear power from 1945 to 1965 by showing “the interplay of national and international pressures in the creation of images and ideas about nuclear power” (p. 4). For van Lente, the time span that this book covers represents the period when “people around the world first attempted to come to terms with a new phenomenon that profoundly changed the prospects of the future” (p. 4). Further, he rightly emphasizes the need to analyze the transnational character of popular discourse about nuclear technology in terms of its content and diffusion. According to the author, decision makers about nuclear technology, as well as the general public, are likely to be exposed to similar discourses about nuclear power around the globe. Van Lente does not have the statistics to back up his claim, but as he convincingly points out, combining comparative and transnational approaches reveals common elements of discourses that were shared by all the countries under investigation as well as distinctive discourses for specific countries.

As for primary sources, this book focuses on analyzing illustrated magazines in addition to newspapers, television series, novels, films, comics, and exhibitions in eight countries: *Ogonyok* (The Soviet Union), *Life* and *Saturday Evening Post* (The United States), *Stern* (West Germany), *Neue Berliner Illustrierte* (East Germany), *Picture Post* (Britain), *Panorama* (The Netherlands), *Asahi Grafu* (Japan), and

Illustrated Weekly of India (India). As van Lente notes, these leading illustrated magazines are particularly useful for comparative and transnational analysis partly because they are similar in terms of their popularity, formats, and styles among others. With respect to the book's choice of systematic comparative and transnational analysis as its main method of analysis, the editor states that each chapter analyzes four general themes: commemorations of Hiroshima and Nagasaki; nuclear weapons; peaceful forms of nuclear technology; and the anti-nuclear movement. In addition, he maintains that after statistical scan of articles about nuclear issues, each chapter "loosely employ[s] the concepts of opposition, metaphor, and metonymy" (p. 10) to conduct a structural analysis of narratives of nuclear technology.

Though not explicitly grouped as such in the book, the following chapters might be grouped into three subcategories: two primary opponents during the Cold War (Chapters 2 and 3); European countries (Chapters 4, 5, and 6); Asian countries (Chapters 7 and 8). Sonja D. Schmid, in Chapter 2, examines *Ogonyok* in the context of the Soviet media system where newsworthiness was determined in terms of the Soviet Union's educational purposes: ". . . only nuclear events that could be related to the construction of communism were considered 'interesting'" (p. 23). Schmid ably shows that *Ogonyok* consistently emphasized "the strong association of peaceful nuclear technologies with the government's disarmament proposals and the might of the Soviet science, technology, and progress" (p. 33) by distinguishing warmongering capitalist countries from the peace-loving Soviet Union. In Chapter 3, Scott C. Zeman investigates American leading illustrated magazine *Life* in conjunction with such other illustrated magazines as *Saturday Evening Post*, *Collier's*, and *Look* and maintains that *Life* and other magazines presented both military and peaceful elements of nuclear technologies as "swords and plowshares" (p. 55). Despite the growing concerns over the dangers of nuclear fallout by the late 1950s, Zeman suggests that *Life* never positioned itself against nuclear technology.

In Chapter 4, Dolores L. Augustine analyzes both West Germany's *Stern* and East Germany's *Neue Berliner Illustrierte (NBI)*, along with comics, films, and exhibitions. She indicates that *NBI*, like the Soviet's *Ogonyok*, tended to promote utopian visions of nuclear power as civilian nuclear technologies by equating technological advancements of nuclear power with the spread of socialism around the globe. In contrast, Augustine shows that *Stern* focused on military aspects of nuclear technology, including the danger of nuclear war. Christoph Laucht's Chapter 5 probes Britain's *Picture Post* in a broader sociocultural context from 1945 until the time the illustrated magazine folded in 1957 and argues that it provided ambiguous narratives of nuclear power, between atomic utopia and dystopia: Even articles that highlighted positive aspects of nuclear power often discussed the danger of nuclear technology. In Chapter 6, van Lente investigates the Dutch *Panorama*, along with a theatre play, literary works, exhibitions, and popular comics. Notably, van Lente describes how *Panorama* used materials from foreign illustrated magazines such as *Life*, *Picture Post*, *Stern*, and the American *This Week Magazine* and demonstrates that, particularly after the late 1950s, *Panorama* tended to provide strikingly pessimistic narratives of nuclear technology, including the health effects of nuclear radiation, by blurring the distinction between peaceful and military applications of nuclear technology.

Hirofumi Utsumi, in Chapter 7, explores the Japanese *Asahi Gurafu* in a broader historical and cultural context and suggests that its representations of nuclear technology reflected the public's positive attitudes toward the peaceful use of nuclear power, as well as scientific and technological progress in

postwar Japan. In Chapter 8, Hans-Joachim Bieber analyzes *Illustrated Weekly India (IWI)* in conjunction with the leading daily newspaper, *Times of India*, as well as with protocols of the Indian Parliament. He argues that by borrowing symbolic resources from American and British magazines such as *Life* and *Monthly Science News*, *IWI* tended to propagate strikingly optimistic views of nuclear technology immediately after the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Bieber indicates that *IWI*'s positive view of nuclear technology reflected the consensus of the Indian elites toward the future of Indian nuclear policy.

In the final chapter, Augustine and van Lente summarize the findings of each chapter from comparative perspectives and indicate that transnational flows of discourses about nuclear power ultimately contributed to the ending of the Cold War. The book's appendices present visual images of nuclear power discussed in each chapter and show the results of statistical analysis of the magazines.

Each chapter systematically analyzes how illustrated magazines constructed discourses on nuclear power from comparative and transnational perspectives and highlights the transnational contents and flows of discourses about nuclear technology. While an admirable task, this systematic comparative and transnational analysis, the book's best quality, could have been improved by clarifying the methodology that was used in selecting articles about nuclear issues as units of analysis.

With that said, *The Nuclear Age in Popular Media* successfully shows the need to think critically about the contents and flows of discourses on nuclear technology from comparative and transnational perspectives that are often overlooked. This book should become required reading for scholars in the fields of rhetoric, media studies, and history as well as science, technology, and society.

References

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