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Catherine Jolivette (ed.), *British Art in the Nuclear Age*. Farnham: Ashgate, 2014. Pp. xv + 275. ISBN 978-1-4724-1276-8. £70.00 (hardback).

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The British Journal for the History of Science / Volume 48 / Issue 04 / December 2015, pp 713 - 714

DOI: 10.1017/S0007087415000886, Published online: 02 December 2015

Link to this article: http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract_S0007087415000886

How to cite this article:

Camilla Mørk Røstvik (2015). The British Journal for the History of Science, 48, pp 713-714
doi:10.1017/S0007087415000886

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momentum: radioisotopes were heralded as lifesaving tools, only to be quietly forgotten a few years later. Medical research also involved one of the most controversial issues touched on in the book: the series of experiments conducted on human subjects, well beyond the ethical boundaries established in Nuremberg. These studies included administering radioactive elements to pregnant women in order to investigate iron metabolism, as well as heavy total-body irradiation of veterans, so that information about the harmful effects of atomic warfare on soldiers could be gathered. Only in the 1990s were these experiments made public and investigated by an advisory committee to US president Bill Clinton, who made a public apology in 1995. The secrecy of these experiments was not only due to military reasons; worries about possible negative publicity were also involved.

Public attitudes toward atomic energy are also a theme of the tenth chapter, devoted to ecology. The fears elicited by atomic energy – from nuclear waste to fallout – shaped the discourse and the practices of environment studies: managing the consequences of the new power source became a constant concern for the public and for governmental agencies such as the AEC. Again, the ‘tracer’ approach proves to be crucial in highlighting the complex webs of interaction within ecosystems. It became clear that various organisms could concentrate pollutants up to a thousand times with respect to the surrounding environment, so that even a small but constant release of radioactivity in the air or in water bodies could pose a threat. In this sense, radioactive contamination became the model for any other kind of pollution.

Relying on a solid base of archival sources, Creager manages to picture in full the growth of a whole technology and the several developments it allowed. The network of people, concepts and practices in the US is accurately portrayed, showing how science is not limited to the laboratory. The book, which for obvious reasons is limited to one country, is definitely a foundational piece of scholarship, hopefully opening the way for comparative and critical studies. A global history of radioisotopes, tracing the tracers around the world and mapping the relations among scientists and their research, would further enlighten issues that are only hinted at in the book, such as the international circulation of technologies and scientists, the role of scientific relations within the hot climate of the Cold War, and industrial innovation in the sensitive domain of atomic energy. With its richness and density, this book is a stimulating gateway to new historical research.

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Artists can tell radically different narratives about the world. In the edited volume *British Art in the Nuclear Age* their stories create landscapes and links that are not readily exposed by scientists or mainstream media. Part of Ashgate’s Histories and Interpretations since 1700 series, the volume offers us a new angle to the often revisited history of the nuclear Cold War. In nine chapters, historians of art, curators, gallery directors and PhD candidates share insights into the nuclear world by way of art. This is a new way of looking at this particular history, and one that comes at a time when artists are yet again asking, “Who killed the world?” (*Mad Max: Fury Road*, 2015). The book is a timely reminder of the power of representation and the role of the artist in times of political anxiety and nuclear tension.

British Art in the Nuclear Age will be of equal interest to historians of science and art, artists and scientists. The varied, visual responses of the many British artists discussed here create an insight into the ambivalent feelings of the time. Straddling the boundaries of hope and despair, beauty and horror, their artworks negotiate the realities of places such as Hiroshima and the potential of nuclear energy. The artists in the book respond to real places and imagined threats. They work

with and against science, both defying and defining such terms as the 'Cold War' and 'nuclear aesthetics'. Although the volume necessarily repeats some Cold War scholarship, it is unique in its focus on the visual and its insistence on the importance of documenting the era through a cultural lens.

The nine chapters are all individual aspects of the story that editor Catherine Jolivet introduces us to: the ambivalent feelings of artists, scientists and the public towards the 'nuclear'. Carol Jacobi presents the close links between French and Anglo-American artists, and shows familiar artists such as Eduardo Paolozzi and Alberto Giacometti in a new, nuclear light. Robert Burstow follows with the fascinating links between artist Barbara Hepworth and scientists such as J.D. Bernal. In the third chapter, Christoph Laucht presents a close reading of the *Picture Post*'s reportage of the nuclear age and shows us how the magazine had an ambivalent, yet generally negative, view of the nuclear. Laucht's chapter is an example of the book at its strongest; a close reading of a few examples tells a gripping story. Jolivet's chapter about the Festival of Britain, the Glasgow exhibition on Industrial Power and the Growth and Form exhibition brings together familiar events in a new context. Arguing for the involved artist's interest in presenting a complex representation of the nuclear, the chapter is concerned with the role of the artist as critical interpreter. In Chapter 5 Fiona Gaskin presents strong evidence of the role of the nuclear in landscape art with a focus on Graham Sutherland, Peter Lanyon and Alan Reynolds. Gaskin argues that these examples can be read as metaphors for the danger posed by the nuclear threat. Her independent scholarship is followed up with very interesting footnotes, a detail that all the authors have taken care to perfect. Gregory Salter, in Chapter 6, investigates artist John Brateby's nuclear anxiety through close readings of his portraits. His reading of *Jean at the Basin* (1955) is especially moving, drawing on contemporary psychoanalysis with the help of Melanie Klein and D.W. Winnicott. He asks if it is possible that the post-nuclear threat undermined the masculine self and the nuclear family, an important question carefully pursued and debated throughout the chapter. Catherine Spencer presents another close reading of an artist in Chapter 7. Prunella Clough's 'urbscapes' are described and discussed beautifully. Spencer has a real gift for engaging with this artist, and the connections she makes between Clough's presumed 'feminine' art and her real concern for the nuclear, wrapped in both celebration and anxiety, reappraise the artist who unfortunately is still not a mainstream name. In the penultimate chapter Kate Aspinall discusses another scientist-artist collaboration. Creator of *The Ascent of Man* television series Jacob Bronowski's use of artist Feliks Topolski is presented as instructive rather than aesthetic. It is an interesting discussion of the role of the artist as illustrator and independent creator, and is relevant to contemporary discussions of the role of artists in science. Simon Martin rounds up the book with the broadest discussion of the volume. Responding to *Time* magazine's question from 1952, 'How should a modern artist react to the atomic age?' (p. 14), he discusses the art history of the period up until 1970, summarizing and making links between and beyond the individual chapters.

This is a collection of voices that we are perhaps not used to meeting in this guise. The reactions of the artists, emerging as illustrators, political actors and horrified spectators, span the human spectrum, and closely mirror the feelings of awe, horror and more felt in the British public at large. Jolivet has succeeded in creating a new subsection of 'nuclear art history', collecting in nine chapters voices and narratives unheard and uncomfortable. These are important discussions also today, and the book reminds us of what artists can bring to conversations and decisions about science.

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