Erik van der Vleuten and Arne Kaijser, eds., *Networking Europe: Transnational Infrastructures and the Shaping of Europe, 1850-2000.* (Sagamore Beach: Science History Publications, 2006. Pp. vii + 335. 30 figs 2 tabs. $47.50)

*Networking Europe* recasts European integration in the twentieth century while suggesting new approaches to economic and technological history. The volume argues that understanding European integration, usually conceptualized as a political process, requires understanding the technical infrastructures that often structured and shaped it. As well, the authors show that new views on Europe’s political and economic history can result from a careful reading of these evolving technical infrastructures—even those that persisted as compelling visions, sometime for many decades, such as the Channel Tunnel (first proposed nearly 250 years before it finally opened in 1994). The volume deals evenhandedly with grandiose continent-wide plans and visions, such as the Atlantropa scheme to dam up the Mediterranean at Gibraltar, as well as railway models in a local museum high in the Swiss Alps where visions of nations and borders were also performed and recorded.

One key insight of the book is that ‘Europe’ has long been a contested entity. The chapters resist tidy geographic definitions of Europe, say, Portugal to the Urals. They also problematize ‘cultural’ definitions of Europe that presume shared values, currently fashionable inside the European Commission. Instead, the chapters investigate Europe’s shifting internal structure and external boundaries. Geographically, the chapters range from Portugal’s role in Britain’s globe-spanning telegraph network, through Greece’s late-developing railway links to the European heartland, to the Baltic countries being re-connected between East and West during and after the Cold War. Material on Sweden, Germany, France, Switzerland and the Netherlands rounds out the book.

Overarching visions of Europe abounded. Alexander Gall recounts the breathtakingly utopian Atlantropa project, supported by technocratic engineers as well as idealistic elites within the Paneuropa Union. Publicity for the project in 1938 explicitly contrasted an ‘old’ Europe, divided into walled-off nation-states (‘a big cage with solitary cells’) with a futuristic view of a united Europe linked together by high-voltage power
On paper, the project promised enough hydroelectricity to supply all of Europe. The National Socialists coming to power in the 1930s had their own visions. Helmut Meier rather unflinchingly shows that Europe’s postwar integration rested in part on infrastructure schemes developed by the Nazis. Their vision of a *Grossraumtechnik*, or large-territory technology, sought to incorporate far-flung power stations and even entire countries into a single continent-wide network. The giant hydroelectric power plant Tauernwerk/Kaprun, constructed in the Austrian Alps using slave labor from Auschwitz, at once was ‘one of the most outstanding symbols’ of Nazi engineering as well as ‘a cornerstone of the European power grid of today.’ (p. 142)

‘Europe’ took form also through the daily practices of citizens, planners and engineers. Pär Blomkvist treats Europe’s transnational network of motorways, the E-roads. Here the International Road Federation, set up in 1948 by American automobile, rubber, and oil companies, was ‘heavily involved in the shaping of the European Road Plan’ (p. 162). European engineers went to the U.S. and learned how to design roads for maximum size and speed. Remarkably the plan in the 1950s had roads extending straight across the center of Europe, linking London, Budapest and Ankara; Rome and Warsaw; as well as Paris, Prague, and Moscow. ‘Avoiding all publicity’ was Gunnar Myrdal’s favored means for pushing though such a plan during the extreme political tensions of the early Cold War.

A second key insight of this volume is to problematize the chronology of European integration. Clearly, there were impressive transport and energy infrastructures in place by the 1930s, and they partly paved the way to the 1957 Treaty of Rome. Nonetheless, technology was not always an integrating force. As Léonard Laborie notes, repeated efforts to strengthen the European Conference of Post and Telecommunication Administrations, founded in 1959, had little success and remained largely a handmaiden for the national PTTs that emphasized sovereignty and monopoly rather than continental integration. Similarly, Geert Verbong suggests that national economics accounted for the changing postwar electricity flows between the Netherlands and its neighbors. And for the Baltic region, Per Högselius provides a vivid mapping of the contradictory linkages and reorientations between East and West. During the Cold War Soviet-built electric lines tied power stations in Estonia and Lithuania to the energy demands of Leningrad and other
Soviet cities. As late as 2006, the sole electricity link between former East and West was one line between Sweden and Poland. Lithuania, still tied to Russia, remained disconnected from the grid in neighboring Poland, while Estonia was (until January 2007) connected to Finland only via the historic tie to Russia.

This volume resulted from a six-year research effort, led by editors Erik van der Vleuten and Arne Kaijser. In his conclusion, Van der Vleuten summarizes the essays and helpfully relates their finding to the large-technological system research program. On balance, the volume points the way for new collaborations between economic, political, cultural, and technological historians.

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