

Mass Media and the Forging of New Astronomy: Unveiling the Scientific and Cultural Revolution of 1860-1910

The Transformative Power of Mass Media

Throughout history, mass media has played a crucial role in shaping public opinion, disseminating knowledge, and driving scientific progress. The period from 1860 to 1910 witnessed a remarkable fusion of art, science, and culture, particularly in the field of astronomy. Join us on an awe-inspiring journey through time as we unravel the captivating story of how mass media propelled the newfound understanding of our universe.

The Era of Discovery



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Revolutionizing Science Communication

Prior to this era, scientific knowledge was largely confined to scholarly circles. However, mass media brought about a revolution in science communication by enabling astronomers to share their findings with a broader audience. Newspapers, magazines, books, and public lectures became key vehicles for disseminating the wonders of the universe.

Illustrations that Ignite the Imagination

NEWS FROM MARS

Mass Media and the Forging of a New Astronomy, 1860-1910

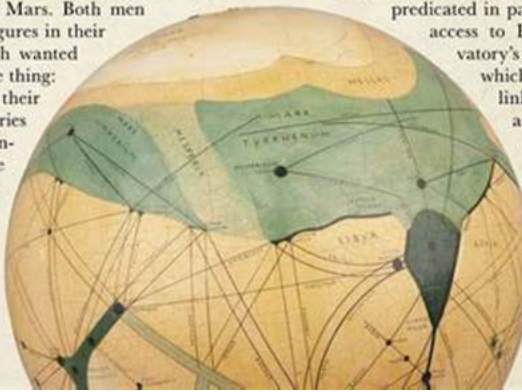
JOSHUA NALL

In the autumn of 1909, as the planet Mars swung away from its closest approach to Earth in seventeen years, two astronomers got into a fight. It was over the control of news from Mars. Both men were senior figures in their field, and both wanted the exact same thing: to secure for their own observatories exclusive control over the distribution of telegraphic bulletins reporting breaking astronomical news. With victory in this battle came the

to collect observers' reports, adjudicate what counted as newsworthy, and then broadcast this selected information around the world, transmitting it to all subscribing observatories and news agencies, sometimes within hours of its receipt. Since 1882 Harvard College Observatory had performed this task in North America, partnering with the Royal Observatory in Kiel, Germany, to collect and rapidly redistribute announcements of planetary, asteroid, satellite, and nova discoveries.¹ But after a quarter century of uninterrupted broadcasts, Harvard College Observatory's director, Edward Charles Pickering, found himself and his institution facing down a coup. Two and a half thousand miles away, high on the desolate Colorado Plateau, Percival Lowell plotted a takeover.

At the heart of this battle was a disagreement over a single fundamental question: was there evidence of life on Mars? Lowell thought that the answer was yes, and in 1894 he had built a state-of-the-art observatory in Flagstaff, Arizona, with the express intention of proving it. Pickering disagreed, and his frustration with Lowell's bold claims about intelligent Martian life was soon exacerbated by their growing popular appeal.

Lowell's success, Pickering realized, was predicated in part on his rival's access to Harvard Observatory's bulletin service, which simultaneously linked the Flagstaff astronomer to his colleagues and to the world's mass media. So Pickering wrote to Lowell to inform him of a change of service. Harvard Observatory would no



One of the most influential mediums during this era was the effective use of illustrations. Intricate drawings and paintings depicted celestial objects, providing a glimpse into the mysteries of the cosmos. These visual representations ignited the imagination of the general public and nurtured an interest in astronomy like never before.

Popularization of Scientific Concepts

Mass media played a pivotal role in popularizing complex scientific concepts. Newspapers and magazines published articles explaining astronomical phenomena such as the theory of relativity, the existence of black holes, and the expansion of the universe. Through engaging narratives, the public became invested in cosmic wonders that once seemed unimaginable.

Encouraging Citizen Science

Mass media not only acted as a source of information but also inspired active participation in scientific endeavors. Citizen science projects encouraged individuals to contribute to astronomical research by making observations, reporting discoveries, and collaborating with professionals. The power of mass media and collective intelligence propelled astronomical knowledge forward.

Astronomy in Popular Culture



The fascination with astronomy permeated popular culture during the 1860-1910 period. From literature to music, references to the cosmos became prevalent. Science fiction novels like Jules Verne's "From the Earth to the Moon" captured the public's imagination, while orchestral compositions like Gustav Holst's "The Planets" evoked the grandeur of space. Astronomy became a source of inspiration and wonderment.

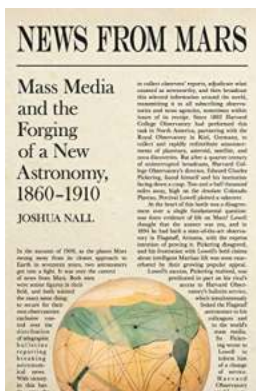
Legacy of the Mass Media Revolution

The impact of mass media on astronomy during this crucial period cannot be overstated. It not only democratically disseminated scientific knowledge but also fostered curiosity and scientific literacy. The groundwork laid during 1860-1910

propelled humanity towards unprecedented advancements in space exploration and our understanding of the universe.

Inspiring Future Generations

As we reflect on the pivotal role mass media played in forging new astronomy during the 1860-1910 period, we recognize its immense potential to inspire future generations. Let us celebrate the power of mass media in igniting curiosity, driving scientific progress, and shaping our collective understanding of the cosmos.



News from Mars: Mass Media and the Forging of a New Astronomy, 1860-1910 (Sci & Culture in the Nineteenth Century) by Ervin Laszlo (Kindle Edition)

★★★★★ 5 out of 5

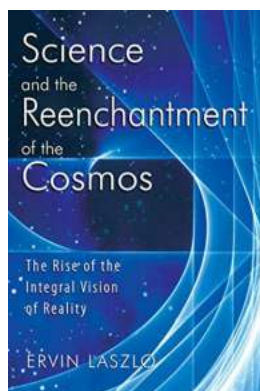
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Mass media in the late nineteenth century was full of news from Mars. In the wake of Giovanni Schiaparelli's 1877 discovery of enigmatic dark, straight lines on the red planet, astronomers and the public at large vigorously debated the possibility that it might be inhabited. As rivalling scientific practitioners looked to marshal allies and sway public opinion—through newspapers, periodicals,

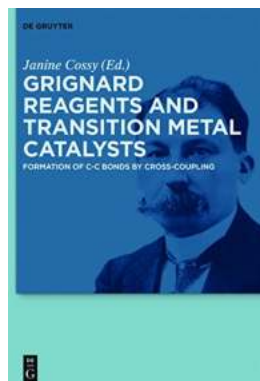
popular books, exhibitions, and encyclopaedias—they exposed disagreements over how the discipline of astronomy should be organized and how it should establish acceptable conventions of discourse.

News from Mars provides a new account of this extraordinary episode in the history of astronomy, revealing how major transformations in astronomical practice across Britain and America were inextricably tied up with popular scientific culture and a transatlantic news economy that enabled knowledge to travel. As Joshua Nall argues, astronomers were journalists, too, eliding practice with communication in consequential ways. As writers and editors, they played a pivotal role in the emergence of a “new astronomy” dedicated to the study of the physical constitution and life history of celestial objects, blurring harsh distinctions between those who produced esoteric knowledge and those who disseminated it.



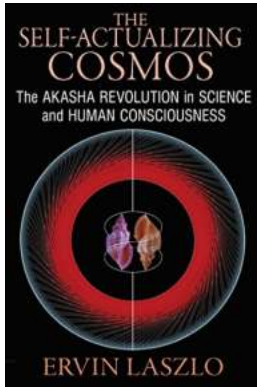
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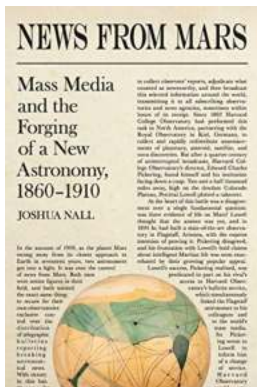
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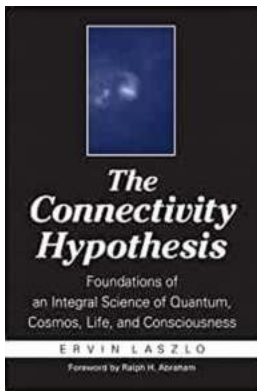
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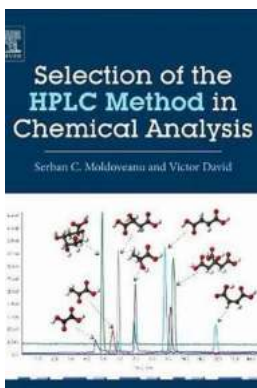
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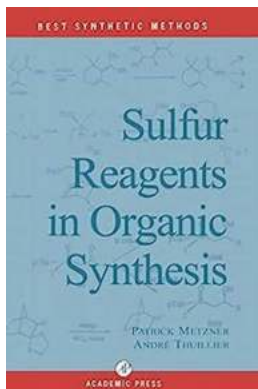
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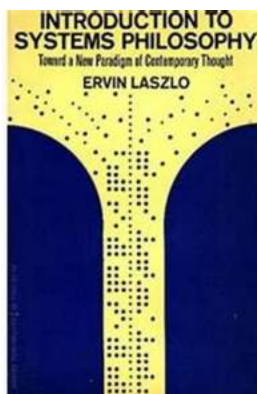
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