

The Great Chernobyl Acceleration

In April 1986, the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant exploded and sent upwards of 50 million curies into the surrounding environment. Brown argues that to call this event an “accident” is to sweep aside radioactive incidents in the region that occurred before and after the accident. In the 1960s, Soviet researchers learned that the people living in the Pripyat Marshes surrounding the Chernobyl Plant had 30 times more radioactive cesium in their bodies due to fallout from nuclear testing. In the decades after the 1986, the KGB recorded over a dozen nuclear accidents at Ukrainian nuclear power plants, while fires in the Chernobyl Zone volatilized radioactivity stored in trees and the leaf litter and resurrected it. Instead of a one-off accident, Brown argues that Chernobyl was a point of acceleration on a timeline of radioactive contamination that continues to this day.