

## Jan Kellershohn (Hg.): Der Braunkohlenbergbau im 20. und 21. Jahrhundert

Ubiquitous public debates about climate change and energy transition in recent years have been accompanied by a growing number of scholarly monographs and edited collections examining historical mining practices across borders and regime ideologies, particularly in the Cold War context of divided Germany. Alongside case-study monographs on West or East German coal mines and installations [1], a range of collected expert analyses have compared recultivation practices, strategies for pollution mitigation, and the aesthetics of post-mining landscapes in differing contexts in each Bloc. [2] A stand-out effort is the Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung (BMBF)-funded project "Umweltpolitik, Bergbau und Rekultivierung im deutsch-deutschen Vergleich. Das Lausitzer Braunkohlenrevier, das Ruhrgebiet und die Wismut (1949-1989/2000)," hosted by the Bergakademie Freiberg, Bergische Universität Wuppertal, and Bergbaumuseum in Bochum, with findings from project researchers and accompanying conferences already in publication. [3] The volume under review builds on this preceding work. Based upon a December 2021 conference at Sachsen-Anhalt's Institut für Landesgeschichte am Landesamt für Denkmalpflege und Archäologie, its contributors explore cultural, political, economic, and ecological consequences of mining (chiefly open-cast pit mining of lignite) primarily in East and West Germany. Four themes stand out.

First, industrial heritage dominates from the outset with Jan Kellershohn's description of the dystopian 1996 film *Poison* (Gift) by British filmmaker Mike Stubbs and electronics composer Ulf Langheinrich, the latter from the long-contaminated town of Wolfen-Bitterfeld. It would behoove any reader to view this brief visual journey through open-cast pit-mine moonscapes amidst Langheinrich's grating aural textures. [4] More than ongoing excavation, however, most of this book's art-historical analysis concerns postindustrial remnants after the mammoth machines are largely scrapped. Industrial heritage was popularized by the Internationale Bauausstellung (IBA) Emscher Park in the Ruhr region (1989-99), Kellershohn observes. Helen Wagner's contribution directly engages with this historical event and its influence in consolidating historical memory. Sabine Breer, meanwhile, explores the fate of art produced during East German-era mining by the Mansfeld collective in the southern Harz region. After years of neglect and near loss, four hundred paintings, sketches, sculptures, and photos that had often adorned offices and hallways of the mining administration, dining areas, and similar venues have been preserved in a local archive, distant from public memory.

A second thematic strength concerns pollution and recultivation strategies from lignite pit mining. After examining prehistories up through the Nazi period, Martin Baumert offers highlights from his new book on East German recultivation experts who stemmed the tide of destruction. [5] Building on a "Landschaftsdiagnose" (1957) under Reinhold Lingner and Frank Erich Carl, East German experts were ahead in their methods for neutralizing acidity in overburden heaps and otherwise recrafting ruined spaces for agriculture or forestry. Baumert concludes by recounting the origins of the Senftenberger lake recreational prestige project, and he pleads that East Germany's mining heritage should be recalled (despite severe environmental degradation) as "the global leader" in the theory and practice of recultivation (142). Turning to the West German Rhineland lignite region, Christian Möller examines early postwar legal bases for recultivation and the operational structure of mining companies. Deeply enmeshed in political and industrial concerns, the Braunkohlenausschuss (BKA) brought interest groups together to find consensus over the extent of mining regions, saving numerous villages from destruction. Residents felt unheard in the corporatist BKA, however, and by the 1970s they founded numerous civic initiatives to ensure "democratic negotiation"; only in 1989 did environmental protection groups finally get a representative in the BKA (182). Looking to a less-known West German case, Benedikt Martin Ertl narrates the brief spike in lignite

production near Wackersdorf in Bavaria. Because the Iron Curtain cut Bavaria off from Saxon lignite imports, Wackersdorf became a way to "bridge over the 1940s and 1950s" as an "ad-hoc solution for Bavarian energy supplies until a new energy source could be tapped and developed" (161).

Felicitas Weiß identifies a third theme: boundaries, and the need to explore mining history across them. Such history is local, Felix Schiedlowski demonstrates in his oral history project in the deindustrializing mining areas south of Leipzig. And such conversations can expose trauma, Valeska Flor reminds us, not least among residents who were forcibly resettled to make way for coal and coped by cherishing rituals and tokens of memory. Jenny Hagemann crosses the cultural boundary by investigating Sorbian culture threatened by pit mining in East German Lusatia, notably efforts toward memorialization in recultivated spaces. Katharina Schuchardt takes the discussion across the international border to Poland's Turów lignite pit mine: historically part of Lusatia, as well as German Saxony. Featuring the onetime spa town of Opolno Zdrój (Bad Oppelsdorf), Schuchardt unpacks interviews about how years of neglect and indifference next to a pit that ruined the spa town's water table and portended its destruction suddenly gave way to hope for a few local activists when the Czech Republic momentarily demanded the pit's closure in 2021. Prospects of an alternate future spurred interest in historic preservation and even commemoration of the prewar German heritage. A clay model of the town was crafted and lit up with tea lights as a "shimmer of hope before the looming dark shadow of lignite" (214). Fantasizing about the past, they imagined a better future.

Archeology and musealization represent a final theme, as two contributions survey the findings from digs in the Geiseltal since the nineteenth century. An historical conjuncture like the end of coal can be an opportunity to exhibit and narrate the importance of such relics, Danny Könnicke observes. Alrun Berger concludes by surveying how four North Rhine-Westphalia associations have banded together as the "geSCHICHTEN Rheinisches Revier" to preserve and exhibit layers of history and memory over the centuries that speak to rich facets of Rhenish industrial history.

Although each individual article reads well on its own, they do not always cohere as an overall volume, and readers may find that selections of greatest interest speak more directly to contributions in other volumes that have recently appeared. Additionally, ongoing crises are seldom mentioned, even though this would have increased the book's stakes. Möller well positions his own piece - and I think many in this book - when he remarks that the global dimensions of contemporary fights over Hambacher Wald or Lützerath by the Rhenish lignite pits have a prehistory during the Cold War that demands attention (163). Unlike today, earlier protesters did not occupy forests and streets or build climate camps; they were generally less radical and more eager to engage in negotiation and compromise. Learning from and commemorating diverse, unwieldy stories surrounding pollution, recultivation, and negotiation under competing Cold War ideologies can offer context and perhaps methods for dealing with the climate and energy crises today.

#### Notes:

[1] Martin Baumert: Autarkiepolitik in der Braunkohlenindustrie. Ein diachroner Systemvergleich anhand des Braunkohlenindustriekomplexes Böhlen-Espenhain, 1933 bis 1965, Berlin 2022; Hendrik Ehrhardt: Stromkonflikte. Selbstverständnis und strategisches Handeln der Stromwirtschaft zwischen Politik, Industrie, Umwelt und Öffentlichkeit (1970-1989), Stuttgart 2017.

[2] For a cross-country analysis of ecological policy and opposition across the East and West blocs, see Astrid Kirchhof / John R. McNeill (eds.): Nature and the Iron Curtain: Environmental Policy and Social Movements in Communist and Capitalist Countries, 1945-90. For contextualization of environmental damage in East Germany compared to capitalist countries, see Sabine Mödersheim / Scott Moranda / Eli Rubin (eds.): Ecologies of Socialisms: Germany, Nature, and the Left in History, Politics, and Culture, Berlin 2019.

[3] Michael Farrenkopf / Torsten Meyer (eds.): Authentizität und industriekulturelles Erbe, Berlin 2020; Lars Bluma / Michael Farrenkopf / Torsten Meyer (eds.): Boom - Crisis - Heritage: King Coal and the Energy Revolutions after 1945, Berlin 2021; Helmuth Albrecht / Michael Farrenkopf / Helmut Maier / Torsten Meyer (eds.): Bergbau und Umwelt in der DDR und BRD. Praktiken der Umweltpolitik und Rekultivierung, Berlin 2022; Michael Farrenkopf / Regina Göschl (eds.): Gras drüber. Bergbau und Umwelt im deutsch-deutschen Vergleich, Berlin 2022.

[4] As of January 4, 2024, *Gift* is free to access at <https://vimeo.com/15704885> & <https://www.mikestubbbsart.com/gift>.

[5] Martin Baumert: Das Beste nach oben. Forschung und Wiedernutzbarmachung von Braunkohlenfolgelandschaften in der DDR, Berlin 2023.

**Rezension über:**

Jan Kellershohn (Hg.): Der Braunkohlenbergbau im 20. und 21. Jahrhundert. Geschichte - Kultur - Erinnerung (= Landesgeschichtliche Beiträge; 1), Halle/S.: Landesamt für Denkmalpflege und Archäologie Sachsen-Anhalt 2023, 304 S., 42 Farb-, 9 s/w-Abb., ISBN 978-3-948618-52-0, EUR 45,00

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**Empfohlene Zitierweise:**

Andrew Demshuk: Rezension von: Jan Kellershohn (Hg.): Der Braunkohlenbergbau im 20. und 21. Jahrhundert. Geschichte - Kultur - Erinnerung, Halle/S.: Landesamt für Denkmalpflege und Archäologie Sachsen-Anhalt 2023, in: *sehepunkte* 24 (2024), Nr. 2 [15.02.2024], URL: <https://www.sehepunkte.de/2024/02/38825.html>

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