

Le Démon Moderne: La Pollution dans les sociétés urbaines et industrielles d'Europe [The Modern Demon: Pollution in Urban and Industrial European Societies]. Edited by Christoph Bernhardt and Geneviève Massard-Guilbaud. Clermont-Ferrand: Presses Universitaires Blaise-Pascal, 2002. 465 pp. Figures, illustration, maps, tables. Cloth, €29. ISBN 2-84516-180-8.

Reviewed by Christopher Hamlin

*Le Démon Moderne/The Modern Demon* is a collection of twenty-three chapters drawn from presentations at a symposium of European urban environmental historians who assembled at Clermont-Ferrand in May 2000 to consider the history of pollution and the attempts in European cities to respond to it. The book is an important one. Not only does it represent the state of research among European urban environmental historians, but the international character of the volume, featuring essays in French as well as English, reveals that the problem can be framed in various ways and shows the difficulty of transferring concepts—the term “pollution” for example—across time, space, language, and culture. It also exhibits a richness of research methods and archives that have not figured much in Anglo-American environmental history.

Of the chapters, seven deal with France, two with Italy, two with Belgium, five with Germany, one with the Netherlands, three with Great Britain, and one, despite the book's stated scope, with California. Most of the authors write about the long nineteenth century or parts of it; three, about recent history; and one, the medieval and early modern periods. A dozen are in French, the rest in English.

Franz-Josef Brüggemeier's study of damage to the forests of southwestern Germany by urban industrial air pollution raises the issue of the rise and fall of environmental problems—as imperatives for action, items of public memory, and even objectively measurable states of the environment. In the 1980s this damage was seen as a new and formidable crisis—a veritable “Hiroshima ecologique”—and yet the same crisis had been recognized periodically since 1800, always in a different context, invoked to mandate a different political reform, and without any recognition of the previous incarnations. Is the forest not then really dying? It all depends, notes Brüggemeier, on how one defines an abstract condition (“health”) of an abstract entity—“forest.”

Several of the issues Brüggemeier raises are addressed in other chapters. Jean-Pierre Willot, for example, gives a good review of the first forty years of gas production in Paris and the growing impact of that industry's residuum on the city. The matter of what is considered “pollution” is the subject of chapters by Myriam Daru (“The Dialectics of Dirt”) and Patrick Fournier, who notes the term's religious roots and its inappropriateness to matters of

environmental regulation prior to the nineteenth century. The temporality of environmental concern is explored by Bill Luckin, who notes that publics have a hard time attending to more than a single environmental issue at a time. The smoke fogs of London could hardly be recognized, much less reckoned with, until the water problem had been resolved. Lucie Paquy, writing about late-nineteenth-century Grenoble, and Brendan Prendiville, writing about motorway protests in late-twentieth-century England, also detail the multiple and complicated constituencies and contexts both for environmental concern and of environmental regulation.

Taking another line of inquiry, Isabelle Parmentier reminds us that the relation of finance to public regulation remains understudied. Historians of public health and the environment have often written about the law, she notes, but they have neglected means of enforcement. She examines the public health efforts of late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century Belgian towns in the light of their budgets for regulation, which came from levying fines, selling concessions for such matters as latrine cleaning, and licensing manufacture.

With regard to method, the most remarkable contribution is Sabine Barles's study of "urban metabolism," specifically the water and nitrogen budgets of Paris during the century and a half between the Revolution and the Second World War. On the one hand, such painstaking work is vital for understanding the physical state of urban spaces, including the effects on, and of, industrial production; on the other, this kind of exploration suggest the importance of seeing cities as centers of physical and chemical transformation quite as much as places of economic, cultural, or political transactions.

In terms of novel sources, several of the authors writing on France (and on areas under French administration during part of the nineteenth century) utilize the *de commodo et incommodo* files. These inquiries into the impact of proposed urban industrial facilities were undertaken according to provisions of Napoleonic administrative code. They record opinions, sometimes solicited, sometimes volunteered, of the locals who would be affected. Power to permit new works usually lay at a higher administrative level than the municipality, but even if such inquiries were only pro forma (and it is not clear that they were), they do give us a rare window into the sensibilities of ordinary burghers. Christoph Verbruggen tracks 250 such inquiries for chemical manufacture in nineteenth-century Ghent. He finds that environmental quality often was a public idiom for private ends: an appeal by landlords attempting to uphold property values or by manufacturers hoping to prevent pollution by others so that they might continue their own polluting enterprises.

Finally, to examine some of the book's themes: several authors implicitly take issue with a common model of urban environmentalism, in which awareness of industrial contamination

comes only as an outgrowth of a prior sanitarian sensibility, which in turn is a response to epidemics, chiefly cholera, and is founded on a discourse of the moral disciplining of the poor. There is little sense here that concern about industrial nuisances was closely or necessarily tied to dependence on public health or moralism. Indeed, Simone Neri Serneri suggests that the incoherence of Italian water policy, viewed from an ecological perspective, stemmed from the undue influence of the hygienists. It was not that industrial nuisances were seen as innocuous; it was more that environmental amenity (and policy) was seen as an issue in its own right. In part, this may reflect the long heritage of the regulation of commerce and industry (and particularly of offensive trades) in European towns.

A second theme is the focus on public good by national, regional, and local bureaucrats and governors, rather than on environmental rights, a theme superbly developed by Estelle Baret-Bourgoin in her chapter on control of pollution in nineteenth-century Grenoble. Likewise, titling his chapter “Un Siècle de Cohabitation Habitat-Industrie,” Gérard Jigaudon examines industrial and residential development along the great bends in the Seine downstream from Paris from 1860 to 1960. To a historian examining such issues in an Anglo-American context, matters of law — riparian common law or the rights of easement—would likely loom large, but here the administrative state, embodying notions of public good and prudence, was the more powerful factor, and its activities, as these authors show, led de facto to a practice, if not a policy, of zoning.

Third, and last, most authors do not assume or impose a model of stark dualism and inherent conflict between private and public, technology and nature, dirt and jobs, paleotechnic cash nexus or eotechnic pastoral utopia (to use Mumford’s classic terms). Frank Uekoetter, who subtitles his chapter “Why Air Pollution Control Was Undisputed in Interwar Germany,” takes on the issue of dualism explicitly, noting, for example, that German industrialists did take an interest in air quality (though not to the exclusion of other concerns): “[A]ny interpretation that presupposes an apathetic attitude on the part of industry is based on a false premise” (p. 243). Nor do the conflicting groups line up in a dichotomy of reform or reaction. The women who were such important figures in the long antinuclear protest at Wyhl (1975) were not politically or philosophically sophisticated ecofeminists but principally played traditional roles, notes Jens Ivo Engels. I do not suggest that these historians are blind to conflicts between production and amenity (or labor and capital), or that such conflicts are not regular features of their narratives. Yet they do, in general, avoid reifying them. This even extends to Anglo-American topics: Harold Platt notes that one of the most important contributors to antismoke campaigns in

Manchester was Peter Spence, the alkali manufacturer. Spence, one senses, saw himself as applying science to public goods: the making of alkali *and* the abatement of smoke.

This orientation reflects not only a bureaucratic heritage toward public good but also the perspective of the postindustrial city. Conflicts may have existed during the terrible transitory stage of industrialization, some authors suggest, but these have been resolved, often by the elimination of heavy industry: such was the case with the chemical industry in Bagnoli, south of Naples, note Salvo Ascione and Gabriella Corona, and with starch manufacture in the Netherlands, according to Jan Oosthoek. Cities, these historians remind us, are not inherently agglomerations of smokestack industries and the proletarians who serve them, but places of human conviviality—as markets and as centers of law, culture, learning, and, perhaps, of light industry. Such visions of the city are, of course, long standing and were important in the shaping of Mannheim and Darmstadt, even in the period leading up to the First World War, when German industrialization was launched, observes Dieter Schott. These considerations did not always privilege the environmental. Allotment gardens were enormously popular among early-twentieth-century German urbanites, Tomomi Hotaka points out, but as sites for socialization rather than for regenerative agriculture.

This is a surface-scratching volume. Though the proceedings of a second symposium are in publication, it will be a long time before historians are able to synthesize these materials. The fine introduction by Christoph Bernhardt and Geneviève Massard-Guilbaud maps the foundations of the field but points also to the many areas needing further study. The cities represented in this volume are few, and not the largest, most important, or most typical; nineteenth century Grenoble actually gets the fullest treatment in two excellent chapters.

Published by a French university press, *Le Démon Moderne* will not likely achieve the international visibility it deserves, but urban environmental historians and historians of industry and environment would be well advised to examine its contents and reflect on its themes.

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