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“The Power of Art to Break Despair”: The Impact of the Kohleausstieg on the German Imagination

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“The Power of Art to Break Despair”:
The Impact of the Kohleausstieg on the German Imagination

Anne Zong Schnitzer

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Prerequisite for Honors in German Studies under the advisement of Professors Anjeana Hans and Elizabeth DeSombre

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Introduction

In times of political upheaval and social turmoil, art is often a coping mechanism. Indeed “art transcends cultural boundaries,”¹ becoming a universal means of expression. Whether it was the emotional nostalgia that characterized the German Romantics or the grotesque anti-art of Berlin’s Dada, artists frequently respond to social and cultural stresses in their work. Germany’s history of coal mining and its subsequent exit from coal established spaces for people to address the changes imposed by times of social transition,² sparking new concepts of cultural regeneration and reclamation. My thesis considers the cultural impact of the Kohleausstieg (coal-exit) on former East Germany focusing on the Lausitz region. I examine how art engages with the complex results of both the coal industry and the coal-exit but provides a more comprehensive understanding of each.

The coal-exit refers to Germany’s policy of transitioning former mining towns into environmentally sustainable areas. This transformation was dramatic for many communities. For one, coal was key to the identity of the Lausitz, shaping its history as a region and its integral part in Germany’s industrialization. Mining was crucial to the local economy and had a prominent status in political discourse and narrative at one time. Thus, the Kohleausstieg represented more than a loss of economic livelihood, which was traumatic in and of itself; it also meant the disappearance from peoples’ lives of much that was familiar, certain, and secure - for many, the loss of a way of life.

While there are studies that examine the social, economic, and environmental impacts of the coal-exit process on communities (and that form a part of the larger context of this project), there is no systematic study of the cultural responses to the coal-exit process. I hope to articulate the role

and importance of cultural expression in coping with the overwhelming and fundamental socioeconomic change represented by the transition. There is a clear need to engage those people who were dispossessed of their economic, social, and cultural patrimony by coal mining and its subsequent elimination. Art offers the means not only to represent their losses but also to suggest a potential for renewal.

This kind of regeneration can assume a range of expressions. My first exposure to this concept (and the experience that ultimately led to this project) occurred during the summer of 2017, when I interned with the Liechtenstein Institute for Strategic Development (LISD), which is an environmental engineering and consulting organization with an office in Berlin. Although my work focused on researching the best examples of environmental restoration practices, it was there that I was first introduced to the idea of cultural reclamation. The International Bauausstellung (International Building Exhibit) (IBA) Emscher Park project in the Ruhr, which lasted from 1989 to 1999, was the prototype for finding ways to integrate the local landscape with its industrial heritage. This included rebuilding the natural environment (and the park in particular) while also attempting to commemorate the history of the area through the participation of cultural organizations.

The IBA Fürst-Pückler-Land project began work in the Lausitz in 2000. For 10 years, a team of planners, artists, economists, and architects worked together organizing workshops, seminars, and discussion groups to stimulate innovative thinking about how best to reclaim and restore the natural beauty of the Lausitz region. The IBA Fürst-Pückler aimed, among other things, to bring together and integrate a range of actors—neighbors, investors, mayors, politicians, administrators—into the transformation and regeneration of the region as a whole. Today, there are 30 different project sites
scattered throughout the Lausitz, each with their own unique relationship to the land. They range from floating houses and landscape parks to sculptures and artificial lakes.

Among the 30 projects that IBA conducted during its first 10 years, the IBA Terraces, an elegant cafe and restaurant that overlook the artificially-made Sedlitz lake, highlight the future and the identity of the region. The IBA Terraces have become a growing attraction, where people can take part in tours or visit the small museum exhibition about the IBA’s history. Furthermore the IBA, together with the Institute for New Industrial Research in Cottbus, put together a post-mining Competenz Center in Großräschen to share common ideas about regional development, hoping therefore to propel the area onto a stronger international footing.

The cultural attempts to reclaim environmentally-degraded sites in the Lausitz ranged widely. Two such locations offer interesting examples: the Rostiger Nagel (rusty nail) in Senftenberg and the A braumförderbrücke F60 (overburden conveyor bridge) in Lichterfeld. The former is a 30 meter-high landmark and observation tower and the latter is one of the GDR’s industrial machines (502 meters in length) that are now popular visitor destinations. These IBA projects offer examples of the creative ways people are addressing the coal-exit and are one of many platforms for discussion.

I returned to the Lausitz in January of 2018 as part of my fieldwork phase. I conducted interviews with a range of artists including photographers, painters, sculptors, and architects, as well as curators, journalists, church officials, and project managers. These individuals, coming from different parts of Germany, also ranged in their exposure to and experience with the coal-exit and mining industry. Interviews and site visits revealed an emphasis on the importance of helping people rebuild their lives in a way that is productive and meaningful and goes beyond mere welfare.

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3 Most of the interviews were in German, but a handful were in English, therefore all interview data reflect my own translations unless otherwise noted.
payments. Germany is a leader not only in formulating coal-exit strategies, but also—and perhaps more importantly—in developing policies and programs for assisting communities most impacted by this large-scale upending of a way of life. How these former coal mining communities deal with the fundamental and daunting changes in their lives is the question my research seeks to address.

In a letter to Jane Alexander, then the Chair of the National Endowment for the Arts, Adrienne Rich wrote about the “power of art to break despair.” The theme informing my thesis research is just that: the power of art as an expression of culture that deals with disruptive and painful change, transforming it into something creative. In times of pain and insecurity, art acts as both personal and intellectual response. Cultural production—paintings, sculptures, films, photography, poems, sermons, prose, and books—that is created by individuals, groups, and communities is one way of coping with profound change that affects them, over which they have little or no control.

This project begins with an examination of Germany’s post-war division and reunification, the historical circumstances of which had a defining impact on the country’s coal-exit policies. In Chapter 2, I move to an overview of the history of coal in Germany, with an emphasis on East Germany and on the Lausitz region in particular. The subsequent chapters analyze three different approaches to cultural expression. Chapter 3 focuses on artists who address the visual aesthetics of the mining process; Chapter 4 turns to those who confront the future of former coal mining areas; and finally, Chapter 5 examines art that portrays a lost history of communities affected by both the coal industry and the coal-exit. Individually and as a group, the artists and professionals interviewed

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told a compelling and poignant story about the coal-exit and its human and environmental impact.

In the structure of this project, I hope to best reflect the narratives both of the artists and of their subjects.
Chapter 1 - Germany and the Coal-Exit

1.1 Coal and coal mining in Germany

Coal Districts

In order to fully contextualize the artistic output in connection with the coal-exit, it is essential to first consider the background of the industry in Germany. Worldwide, there is an estimated 1.1 trillion tons of available coal reserves; at current rates of extraction and production, these resources would last about 150 years. Germany alone has approximately 20 million tons of hard coal and 5 billion tons of lignite available in its reserves. Coal with high amounts of carbon, referred to in German as Steinkohle or hard coal, forms under high heat and high pressure and is generally found in western regions, whereas Braunkohle or lignite has the lowest amount of carbon and is found primarily in the central and eastern parts of the country.

In Germany, coal mining is concentrated in three regions: the Ruhrgebiet (Ruhr region) in western Germany and Mitteldeutschland (Central Germany) and the Lausitz (Lusatia) regions in eastern Germany.

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The Ruhr is in the present-day federal state of North Rhein-Westphalia and includes cities such as Bottrop, Duisburg, Dortmund, and Essen. Central Germany stretches across three states, Saxony, Thuringia, and Saxony-Anhalt, and includes the cities of Dresden, Leipzig, and Halle. The Lausitz is composed of southeastern Brandenburg as well as northeastern parts of Saxony and stretches into parts of western Poland.

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Mining in Germany began as early as the late Middle Ages and has continued until today. With advances in technology and equipment, German steel and coal production rose in prominence, particularly during the Age of Industrialization (late 1700s to early 1800s). Coal mining became widespread during the 19th century, especially in the Ruhr region and the Saarland of western Germany. The factories, mines, and power plants of the Ruhr were vital during World War I, as the area was responsible for arms and weapons manufacturing. The region suffered considerably after the 1919 Treaty of Versailles, with Ruhr cities such as Düsseldorf and Duisburg forced to pay reparations to France in the form of coal. During World War II, mining again became crucial for munition production.

Lignite deposits were found in the eastern parts of Germany in the late 18th century, but it was not until the 1930s that larger mining complexes became widespread. Although less industrially developed than its western counterpart, the Lausitz still played a significant role in energy production starting in the twentieth century. In fact, it was the supplies of coal briquettes in the Lausitz that helped save Berlin during coal shortages in the particularly cold winter of 1916/1917. While the Allies assumed control over the Ruhr and its valuable coal resources after World War II, the lignite reserves in eastern Germany were under control of the Union of Soviet Socialist

10 Section 4 Article 45 of the Treaty of Versaille states: “As compensation for the destruction of the coal-mines in the north of France and as part payment towards the total reparation due from Germany for the damage resulting from the war, Germany cedes to France in full and absolute possession, with exclusive rights of exploitation, unencumbered and free from all debts and charges of any kind, the coal-mines situated in the Saar Basin as defined in Article 48. From Treaty of Peace with Germany. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1919. (S. Doc. No. 70, 67th Cong., 1st Sess.)
Republics (USSR). The postwar division of Germany into two states and its eventual reunification are key factors influencing coal-exit policies since they have shaped the region in a defining way.

1.2 A brief background on German history

Division of Germany into Two States

East Germany’s economic policy broadly and its coal industry specifically were determined by a number of factors. After the Potsdam conference in the summer of 1945, the Four Powers (the United States, France, England, and the Soviet Union) had to resolve and plan the reconstruction of Germany’s war-torn society and economy. Under the control of the USSR, the eastern “Soviet Zone” was remodeled into a socialist republic, with a planned economy and nationalized industry. The immediate post-war years were targeted at rebuilding and restoring eastern Germany to a functioning state. The German Democratic Republic (GDR) was not officially established until October 7, 1949, and then largely in response to the creation of the western Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) in May of 1949.

The Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands (SED), the major ruling political party in East Germany, worked to formulate a basic governing system and laws that would regulate the economy and civil liberties. In 1948, “the people were given ownership of thirty-eight brown coal mines, smelting works, and other companies” under the SED’s Two-Year Plan, which nationalized industrial and agricultural resources. Historically, the heavy reliance on imports of raw materials

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(hard coal, iron ore, and steel) from West Germany was a glaring structural weakness. Furthermore, the USSR demanded reparations and dismantled around 3,400 East German factories and moved them to the Soviet Union, which was the equivalent of losing $14 billion in pre-war prices.

The asymmetric relationship between the USSR and the German Democratic Republic—between occupier and occupied—marked the postwar period. The Soviet administrators led the way in land redistribution, confiscated leftover assets from war profiteers, and expropriated remaining firms or large businesses. The SED and the Soviet Military Administration in Germany relied on propaganda tools to increase labor discipline. For example, on October 13, 1948, Adolf Hennecke, an East German miner, was said to have produced 387 percent of the normal mining quota for an individual laborer. While this statistic is difficult to believe, it provided the needed publicity in support of the socialist agenda and became part of their propaganda for other miners. In this way, the low level of education and relatively unskilled labor required in the mines “could be easily incorporated as political actions.” In the eyes of the SED, this exception was to become the standard to which all workers in the GDR would be held.

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15 Andre Steiner, “From the Soviet Occupation Zone to the “New Eastern States,”” 19.
16 Andre Steiner, “From the Soviet Occupation Zone to the “New Eastern States,”” 19.
Figure 1-2. A Propaganda poster from 1954 stating “The miner promotes in the year of the Great Initiative: More coal, ore and potash for peace and prosperity.” Originally from the Deutsches Historisches Museum.

The ideological commitment to production remained central to the GDR and its planned economy, as evident in the Five-Year Plan for the period between 1951-1955. The goal was to expand heavy industry and to double manufacturing by 1955; the government aimed to increase production levels in the mining sector by 194 percent and boost the electrical energy sector to 31.6


Potash was common in East Germany and is a potassium carbonate from wood ashes. German title: Plakat zum Bergbau von 1954. English translation (mine).
billion kilowatt hours.\textsuperscript{20} With the rise in food prices, transportation, and healthcare, the SED was forced to take action and increase work quotas. On June 17, 1953, a construction workers’ strike broke out in East Berlin, when people walked off the job and demanded that the government reinstate previous quotas.\textsuperscript{21} This action was soon followed by more widespread violent protests, as people called for freedom from the SED’s political oppression, which surprised and frightened the communist leaders. The East German government revisited its economic policy and created the “New Course,” which slowed down the massive expansion of industry that was originally planned. This slowing down did not, however, apply to a small number of key industries. Because of its pivotal role in the economy, the lignite industry was one of those exempted; the government stated: “investments to expand capacities in the energy, coal, transportation, and agricultural sectors must not be subject to restrictions.”\textsuperscript{22}

Although the first few years of the 1960s brought heightened political awareness and increasing social unrest in the East, the second half of the decade did enjoy some level of prosperity, particularly because industrial production had improved dramatically after 1958.\textsuperscript{23} Cold War politics pervaded every aspect of life in the 1960s, especially after the Berlin Wall was built in 1961. The East German government was forced to maintain a high export market to other Eastern Bloc countries. It was clear the GDR felt compelled to compete with its West German counterpart politically and economically.

\textsuperscript{20} Typically East German sources do not provide historical data that would allow for prices comparisons between time periods.
\textsuperscript{23} David Childs, The GDR: Moscow’s German ally (London: Routledge, 2016), 70.
The GDR’s key trade relationships were with Eastern Bloc countries, the Soviet Union and West Germany. The latter presented a problem because of conflicting political and economic ideologies. Hence, the East German government heavily industrialized its lignite extraction to reduce the need to purchase hard coal from its competitors in West Germany. This undertaking was both an economic strategy and, more importantly, a political statement. The resulting growth of the coal industry was characterized by an expanding network of machinery, equipment, and industrial complexes, which continued to increase in size throughout the 1970s and 1980s. East Germany’s high dependence on lignite production initially saved the GDR from the oil shortage that most Western nations faced during the 1970s. However, as the USSR pressured its Eastern Bloc customers to purchase crude oil from its own reserves, the GDR was forced into debt for most of the 1980s.

Compared to the Federal Republic of Germany, East Germany was far from being an international actor and was clearly at a global economic disadvantage, struggling to gain recognition from foreign powers, particularly the United States. In the GDR, during this decade, there was a tension between seeking recognition from and greater access to the West on the one hand, and a constant need to reaffirm its national identity as a socialist republic on the other. Thus, the access to lignite was essential. Miners took pride in being part of the country’s primary industry, without which it would be bankrupt. The importance of coal was woven into the political, social, and economic narratives at the time, which would change with Germany’s reunification.


The Reunification of Germany and Its Implications

Given the scope of this study and the focus of the research, the discussion of German reunification will only touch upon those aspects that are most relevant. By the end of the 1980s and well into the 1990s, it became clear that the GDR could not continue as a viable nation-state for much longer, given a weakening economy and increasingly unstable polity. The 40th anniversary of the German Democratic Republic ended in mass demonstrations, as political pressure rose steadily. By the end of October 1989, East German refugees fled across a recently opened border into Czechoslovakia and, on November 7, 1989 the prime minister and the government resigned en masse. Two days later, after party spokesman Günther Schabowski announced new regulations allowing immediate travel across the border into the West, East Germans swarmed the border crossings, paving the way for the collapse of the government and the fall of the Berlin Wall. These were the first few steps towards reuniting Germany.

West German chancellor Helmut Kohl oversaw reunification, a transition connoting social, economic, political, and psychological changes not just in the coal mining industry, but for the entire nation. Taking into consideration the extent of the transformation, Chancellor Kohl’s second point of the “Ten-Point Plan for German Unity” stated how his government would “cooperate with the GDR in all areas that directly benefit people on both sides. This applies particularly to economic, scientific-technological, and cultural cooperation. It is especially important to intensify cooperation in the field of environmental protection.”26 Reunification signified a fundamental change for both

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East and West. The German term *Die Wende* signifies “the turn” from being a socialist state with a centralized economy to being part of the West German democracy with free markets.

The transition extended well beyond the realm of economics. Reunification would bring free, equal, and open elections in the GDR and integration into the European community, and would foster “inter-German relations [that remain] embedded in the pan-European process.”

In Chancellor Kohl’s tenth point, he declared the following:

> Linking the German Question to the development of Europe as a whole and to West-East relations - as I have explained in these ten points - makes possible an organic development that takes into account the interests of everyone involved and - this is our goal - paves the way for a peaceful and free development in Europe.

Clearly the transition posed many challenges, with the national economy arguably the most formidable. As energy demands in the newly unified country focused on natural gas or oil, which was imported at lower costs from other countries, many former East German coal mining industries suffered from high unemployment and poor economic prospects.

Although West German coal mines were already being subsidized by the government in an effort to phase them out, the former East German mines introduced additional and burdensome complications.

The word *Energiewende* indicates succinctly why reunification presented such profound consequences for now former-East German miners. The term, first coined in the 1980s, refers to the “climate strategy that is based on developing renewable energy and improving energy efficiency….that involved a fundamental transformation of Germany’s power system, including a shift from coal and nuclear to renewable energy.”

> The *Energiewende* was born out of a West German...

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As early as the 1950s and early 1960s, many grassroots organizations in the Federal Republic opposed the use of nuclear energy as well as the presence of Allied nuclear weapons on their territory.\footnote{Daan Rutten, “The Energiewende and Germany’s Industrial Policy,” edited by Deborah Sherwood (The Netherlands: Clingendael International Energy Programme, 2014), 42.} In a complementary effort aimed at environmental security, the FRG began to slowly phase out its reliance on coal; between 1960 and 1980, the number of working mines in the West declined by a precipitous 73 percent, falling from 146 to 39.\footnote{“The Rise and Fall of Germany's Coal Mining Industry,” \textit{Deutsche Welle}, January 21, 2017, http://www.dw.com/en/the-rise-and-fall-of-germanys-coal-mining-industry/a-2331545.} Meanwhile, the East German government was largely silent regarding the use of nuclear energy and coal as a power source because of the GDR’s heavy economic reliance on the latter. While dependence on coal in the West was slowly declining, it continued to expand in the East.

1.3 German coal-exit policies

\textit{Government Intervention in the Energy Sector}

The Kohleausstieg in western Germany was facilitated by two factors: first, the region had more time for the transition (almost an additional 20 years) and second, hard coal mining was no longer economically advantageous because it was more expensive than alternative fuel sources available on international markets.\footnote{National regulations aim to close the three remaining hard coal mines in western Germany by 2018. Sabrina Schulz and Julian Schwartzkopff, “G7 Coal Phase-out: Germany a Review for Oxfam,” edited by Oxfam (London: Oxfam Germany and E3H, September 2015), 5.} After reunification, however, lignite—once available only in the
GDR—was suddenly introduced into the national market, further decreasing hard coal prices.\textsuperscript{35}

Government subsidies have played a crucial role in the phasing out of coal and have had both positive and negative consequences. Often, subsidies support employment in rural industries or help defray the expenses for small projects, which are covered instead by the government.\textsuperscript{36} In this way, financial assistance such as grants, loans, tax concessions, and state provision proved crucial in eastern Germany's adjustment to the coal-exit.

At the same time, however, government subsidies also present certain problems, particularly for the lignite industry. Although subsidies are intended to ease the repercussions of the coal phase-out, they inherently slow down the transition process, amplifying harmful environmental effects. For example, subsidizing the lignite companies exempts them from paying water extraction taxes.\textsuperscript{37} Not only does this exclusion enable water overconsumption, but it also makes it easier for the coal industry to function. Similarly, lignite mining does not pay the 10 percent production charge that is required under the \textit{Bundesberggesetz} (Federal Mining Law). Normally, this law demands 10 percent of the market price for non-mineral resources (such as lignite); in other words, the

\textsuperscript{35} Sabrina Schulz and Julian Schwartzkopff, “G7 Coal Phase-out: Germany a Review for Oxfam,” 8.


Coal industry-related subsidies in Germany must be understood within a European Union (EU) context. Membership in the EU grants countries privileges as well as obligations. Germany's \textit{Energiekonzept} of 2010 promised reductions in carbon dioxide emissions by 2050 that were according to EU regulation (to read more see Section 4 from the Bundesministerium für Wirtschaft und Energie, “Energy Concept for an Environmentally Sound, Reliable and Affordable Energy Supply.” Berlin: Bundesministerium für Wirtschaft und Energie, 2010, 21). Member States are required to meet both amount and deadline requirements but are not necessarily told how. In this case, subsidies allow countries to phase-out coal in the manner they see fit. From 1995 to 2001, the EU contributed an estimated 125 billion euros to member states but particularly Germany, France, and the United Kingdom. To support this goal in 2001, Germany spent over 4 billion euros for on-budget subsidies (expenses that appear on government expenditures) and an estimated 3.5 billion euros for off-budget support (expenses not directly on national accounts). See European Environment Agency. “Energy Subsidies in the European Union: A Brief Overview.” In EEA Technical report, (Copenhagen: European Environment Agency, January 2004).

government lost an estimated €259 million in 2010. In 2014, the royalty exemptions for hard coal were the equivalent of 70 million dollars; for lignite they were 351 million dollars. Thus, in an attempt to help the lignite industry’s phase-out, the subsidies have in reality provided companies with the economically cheaper option of continuing reliance on coal. In fact, since 2000, energy generation decreased by 17.5 percent for hard coal, while it increased by 4.5 percent for lignite.

Key Policy Tools

In addition to subsidies, the newly united German government also implemented several tax reforms. Starting in 1999, the government introduced the Ecological Tax Reform, which aimed to slowly increase the tariff on oil over time: “starting in 1999, an energy tax of 1,02 Cent per kWh was introduced. The tax rate increased until 2003 by 0,26 Cent per kWh yearly to reach a current 2,05 Cent per kWh.” The incremental tax was designed to encourage businesses and industries to use resources more sparingly and consider transitioning to other, renewable, forms.

Likewise, the Renewable Energy Act (EEG), which was passed during the early 2000s, supports renewable energy technologies such as photovoltaics, biomass, offshore wind, and geothermal energy. This first of many EEGs “facilitated a sustainable development of energy supply in the interest of managing global warming and protecting the environment and to achieve a

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39 Laurie van der Burg and Sam Pickard, “G20 Subsidies to Oil, Gas and Coal Production: Germany,” edited by Overseas Development Institute and Oil Change international (UK: Overseas Development Institute and Oil Change International, November 2015), 3.
substantial increase in the percentage contribution made by renewable energy sources.”42 Tax incentives and subsidy programs were both key to the EEG and aided the transition. The nuclear meltdown at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant in 2011 only increased the urgency of governmental support for eco-friendly energy sources.

Figure 1-3. Comparison of use of primary energy sources and the share of domestic production and imports 2003 and 2013 for Germany.43

In another major policy initiative, the federal government implemented a *Sicherheitsbereitschaft* (coal reserve) in 2016, which deactivated certain coal-fired power plants but continued to maintain them in case of a sudden energy demand.44 While the government actively supported the transition

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from traditional to renewable energies, it was also met with opposition, which came primarily from large coal companies as well as from miners and their families - understandable given that their livelihood depended on coal extraction. Although popular consensus continues to support a nuclear phase-out, the question of a coal-exit is more ambivalent and presents many challenges. Despite resistance, the government moved forward with the coal-exit, which has had far-reaching effects on the regions so heavily dependent on the industry.

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Chapter 2 - Regional Development of the Lausitz

2.1 The Lausitz in eastern Germany

*Background Information and Demographics*

Within the context of coal mining in Germany, the Lausitz occupies a key position and, thus, faces specific challenges due to the coal-exit. In the Slavic language, Lausitz (or Lusatia in English) means ‘swampland’ and aptly so. The region is composed of two sections: the Lower Lausitz and Upper Lausitz. The former is part of the federal state of Brandenburg and includes Cottbus, *Landkreis* (LK) Dahme-Spreewald, LK Spree-Neiße, LK Elbe-Elster, and LK Oberspreewald-Lausitz. The Upper Lausitz extends over the federal state Saxony and includes LK Görlitz and LK Bautzen. Part of the Lausitz continues into western Poland but, for the purpose of this paper, all data reflect only those areas in Germany.

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Coal, an organic substance made of mostly carbon and some mineral materials, forms after millions of years of decomposing vegetation and swampland, called peat.
47 Although counterintuitive, the Upper Lausitz is the southern part while the Lower Lausitz is the northern part.
48 LK, or *Landkreis* in German, translates roughly as ‘rural district.’
While Lower Lausitz was historically known for its agricultural and farming production, Upper Lausitz, with its stronger urban roots, began in mining. Lignite was found as early as 1789 in the town of Lauchhammer (part of Landkreis Oberspreewald-Lausitz), which led to the creation of briquette, glass, and iron industries in the nineteenth century. These industries continued to thrive during the GDR period. As mentioned earlier, the reunification process presented social, cultural, and economic challenges to the Lausitz region, the consequences of which remain until today. In particular, the increase in East to West migration and the resulting decline in population has deeply

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affected the region, a trend that has not abated. This migration is closely tied to the increase in available jobs elsewhere in the country.

Prior to reunification, there were 17 operational open-cast mines that produced an estimated 200 million tons of lignite each year and contributed to the region’s economic security and job accessibility. The fall of the Berlin Wall opened up employment opportunities in the western part of Germany outside the coal mining sector.

![Figure 2-2. Chart listing the number of coal mines in the Central Germany and the Lausitz area from 1963 to 2001.](image)

Between 1989 and 1990, almost 400,000 people migrated West, a number that only decreased in 1996 to approximately 14,000 people; between 1989 and 2005 the net emigration from eastern Germany was estimated at 1.6 million people, leading to an overall population decrease in former East Germany of 10 percent. Such a dramatic drop created a number of long-term repercussions:

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labor shortages, decreased economic activity, lower birth rates, diminished infrastructure and services, and reduced innovation.

Changes in fertility rate, age of childbirth, and the growing scarcity of younger generations were particularly damaging to the region. More recent declines are indicated by the graph below:

![Population Trend of the Lausitz](image)

Figure 2-3. Population estimations in 1995, 2001 and 2015.\(^{54}\)

Declining birth rates meant fewer children attending school, gaining an education, joining the workforce, and paying taxes. Whereas the GDR had structural systems in place to help mothers, such as free daycare, West Germany lacked this kind of supporting infrastructure. In 1989, the fertility rate in eastern Germany was 1.6 children per mother while in the west it was only 1.3; reunification strikingly decreased the combined fertility rate to 0.77 children per mother.\(^{55}\) Likewise, the age at which most women in the GDR had their first child increased from 22.9 years in 1989 to

\(^{54}\) Data from Statistisches Bundesamt Deutschland, “Brandenburg,” Citypopulation.de, last modified January 3, 2018. The data for each district of the Lausitz were individually added together (Cottbus, Landkreis (LK) Dahme-Spreewald, LK Spree-Neiße, LK Elbe-Elster, and LK Oberspreewald-Lausitz).

\(^{55}\) Steffen Kröhnert and Samuel Skipper, “East Germany,” 2.
26.8 in 1996. The drop in birth rate led to a rapidly aging population. In 1989, 25.5 percent of eastern Germany’s population was under 20 years of age, which decreased to 15.5 percent a decade later.

Thus, the demography of the Lausitz became characterized by a growing elderly population and a declining younger one. With more spending going towards pensions and retirement plans, coupled with an eroding tax base due to the loss of young laborers, the question of who will provide for the retired workforce is a key problem now facing the region.

![Age Division Lausitz](image)

**Figure 2-4.** Demographic division by age in the Lausitz; people over 40 years of age make up 64% of the region’s population.

Not surprisingly, the level of education in the Lausitz is also quite low, given the shrinking population of young people. In 2011, only 5.8 percent of the population in the Lausitz had a

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56 Steffen Kröhnert and Samuel Skipper, “East Germany,” 2.
university degree, 0.06 percent had a doctoral degree, and nearly 16 percent had no professional qualifications. Yet, in that same year, 55.3 percent had received “apprenticeship [and vocational training] in the dual system.” In Germany, a Berufsausbildung (vocational training) allows students to receive practical training at a company while also taking classes at a vocational school.59 The Lausitz has thus continued to be a primarily blue-collar region.

Figure 2-5. No professional qualification (15.7%); apprenticeship, vocational training (55.3%); certificate from specialised technical college (14.1%); qualification from specialised academy (0.9%); qualification from a university of applied sciences (7.6%); university degree (5.8%); doctorate (0.6%).60

The level of education is one way of measuring labor force skill. It often correlates with employment or lack thereof, contributing to one’s ability to access resources while also securing

alternatives to coal-related jobs. In 1990, the lignite industry employed 80,000 - 86,000 workers. Ten years later, there were approximately 7,000 in lignite production and manufacturing - a decline of 90 percent. It remains at this level today.\textsuperscript{61}

The unemployment rate in the Lausitz (9.0 percent) is higher than the national average (6.7 percent), yet lower than the eastern German average (9.8 percent). However, it is estimated that by 2030 the economic output of the Lausitz will decrease by an additional 0.9 percent, which will likely further affect unemployment.\textsuperscript{62} The Lausitz has had to rely on other forms of industry—such as tourism and alternative energy—for economic revenue. Yet the region has greater manufacturing diversity than most former East German areas and maintains a relatively strong energy and water sector, adding an estimated 15 percent gross value (whereas the national average for these two industries is only about 4 percent).\textsuperscript{63} This variety has, in part, allowed the Lausitz to deal with other structural changes that result from the coal-exit.

2.2 Changes in environmental quality

While economic and demographic changes reveal the challenges the coal-exit posed to the region, the environmental changes reflect the impact of the industry itself. Marxist ideology professes the right to natural resources, which can often create a poor relationship between communist states and the environment.\textsuperscript{64} The degradation of the Lausitz and East Germany as a whole were caused by a number of factors: geographical location, governmental policy prioritizing

economic growth over environmental health, excessive energy consumption, industrial exploitation of natural resources, inefficient extraction and production methods, and the unregulated use of agrochemicals. Understanding the relationship between the GDR political system and its policy toward the environment is key in analyzing the present-day degradation of the Lausitz.

There are two main methods of coal extraction: surface mining and underground mining. The former was commonly used in eastern Germany, the latter was more characteristic of the West. Also called strip mining, surface mining is used when the coal reserves are close to the surface, usually less than 50 meters underground. Heavy machinery and explosives are used to break up and remove the topsoil and rocks along with any trees and vegetation. Bulldozers and excavators continue removing the subsoil until they reach the coal seam, leaving behind what is called an “open-cast mine.” The exposed coal layers are drilled, fractured, and mined into strips before being loaded onto trucks to be processed in power plants. This kind of mining is especially detrimental to the landscape, causing harm on the local, regional, and global levels. Strip mining in the Lausitz necessitated the removal of forests, wildlife habitats, local flora and fauna, and even some villages. The land is often left barren and restoration is a lengthy process.

Environmental damage also results from burning coal. Lignite is especially harmful, as it produces sulphur dioxide, a key factor in forming acid rain. The black smoke that is released from the power plant chimneys is a mixture of dust, soot, and smoke, which, when inhaled, can cause respiratory problems. Lignite mining, which provided 70 percent of East Germany’s electricity, was a major source of air pollution for two reasons: first, because operating the power plants and burning the coal released carbon dioxide; second, because lignite combustion tends to yield higher

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65 Mike Dennis, Social and Economic Modernization in Eastern Germany from Honecker to Kohl (London: Pinter, 1993), 46-47.
amounts of sulphur dioxide and particulate matter (PM) emission.\textsuperscript{66} Even as late as 1994, when coal mining had already significantly decreased, the Lausitz still suffered heavily from the terrible air quality. Scientists measured sulphur dioxide molecules and followed smoke plumes that originated from the nearby operating power plants, Trattendorf and Schwarze Pumpe.\textsuperscript{67} The chart below concludes some of their findings, which measured the amount of nitrogen oxide, sulfur dioxide, dust, and carbon monoxide released by the Boxberg, Jänschwalde, and the Schwarze Pumpe power plants.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{chart}
\caption{Emissions from power plants in the Lausitz and Central German region in 1994; (Note the high amounts of emissions from the Boxberg, Jänschwalde, and Schwarze Pumpe power plants).\textsuperscript{68}}
\end{figure}

The widespread health problems related to polluted air were correlated with the region’s high output of particulate matter and gases from coal industry activities. Respiratory issues were 20 percent more prevalent in the Lausitz than in northern Germany.\textsuperscript{69} According to some statistical

\textsuperscript{68} Chart from M. Krautstrunk et al., “An experimental study on the planetary boundary layer transport of air pollutants over east germany,” 1251.
\textsuperscript{69} Mike Dennis, \textit{Social and Economic Modernization in Eastern Germany from Honecker to Kohl} (London: Pinter, 1993), 46.
estimations, if the emission amounts of sulfur dioxide, dust, and ash had been reduced by half, life expectancy would have increased by four years. In 2012, the Jänschwalde, Schwarze Pumpe, and Boxberg power plants were ranked among the top 20 industrial air polluters in Europe. The health and safety hazards posed by power plants in many industrial towns in the Lausitz were so substandard that “[i]f the criteria devised by the UNO [United Nations Organization] had been applied, they [the industrial towns] would have been deemed unfit for habitation.” The GDR not only endangered its own citizens but ‘exported’ 20 percent of its sulphur dioxide (SO₂) emissions to nearby countries such as Poland, Sweden, and Norway.

Public health is closely tied to socioeconomic standing, as the ability to access medical care and treatment depends on a number of factors. There are costs associated with treating the actual respiratory problems as well as with purchasing medication, reduced work days, and hospital admission. Those who possess the financial resources are able to relocate and leave behind the degraded landscape without any obligations to repair it. As such, the Lausitz was confronted by particularly burdensome challenges in repairing the ecological damage caused by coal mining.

The Impact of Reunification on the Environment

With reunification, the German government imposed regulations that led to better environmental and health standards. Lower demand for lignite post-reunification sharply decreased

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70 Mike Dennis, *Social and Economic Modernization in Eastern Germany from Honecker to Kohl* (London: Pinter, 1993), 46.
72 Mike Dennis, *Social and Economic Modernization in Eastern Germany from Honecker to Kohl*, 46.
73 Mike Dennis, *Social and Economic Modernization in Eastern Germany from Honecker to Kohl*, 47.
carbon dioxide emissions in East Germany between 1989 and 1991,\(^75\) despite continuing problems with air pollution. The transition to natural gas and oil, as well as the addition of flue gas desulphurization, also helped reduce SO\(_2\) and PM\(_{2.5}\) emissions.\(^76\) Consequently, the Lausitz’s post-GDR landscape underwent a number of different regeneration practices. According to German Federal Mining law, companies have an obligation to rehabilitate the areas in which they were digging:

> If requested by the parties affected by the premature possession, the assignee of the real property shall restore the land to the previous condition instead of paying compensation in money, unless restoration would entail unreasonable expense or the competent authority has ordered restoration of the surface that diverges from the previous condition.\(^77\)

Instead of merely providing financial assistance to the towns, companies are now held accountable and responsible for repairing the land. For example, soil regeneration (the practice of returning the land to a fertile and usable condition),\(^78\) was already customary in the Lausitz, although it was not widespread. The process of adding fertilizers and certain types of bacteria—known as chemical amelioration—helps neutralize the acidic soil.\(^79\) The GDR employed some of these land restoration practices, yet was unable to keep up with the rate at which the environment was degrading. In 1984, the GDR boasted that approximately 40 percent of 50,000 hectares of land were re-cultivated for


agricultural purposes; yet the destruction of vegetation and changes to geological composition had long-term consequences even after the government’s collapse.\textsuperscript{80}

Transferring to healthier environments is closely tied to improving quality-of-life standards for individuals and communities. After the fall of the GDR, many factories, power plants, and coking ovens were simply left to disintegrate; today, there is a movement to remove the remaining debris and rebuild the natural landscape. The government estimates that it will cost approximately 3.1 billion euros to repair the mining landscape in the Lausitz.\textsuperscript{81} Rehabilitation would include decommissioning buildings, machinery, equipment, and power plants; re-cultivating the land and soil; restoring water quality; and securing open pit mines to ensure land stability.\textsuperscript{82}

A particular environmental concern in the Lausitz is water quality and quantity. A common regeneration practice involves filling abandoned open-cast mines with water, yet this poses risks on multiple levels. When water is added to the mines, the pyrite and other high-sulphur-content materials found in coal strata are exposed to oxygen and water, forming sulphuric acid and iron hydroxide, two hazardous chemical compounds.\textsuperscript{83} Drainage from the open-cast mines is unusable unless treated; some untreated lakes with especially high amounts of particulates and sedimentary minerals can have a pH value as low as 2.6.\textsuperscript{84} In order to be usable, the water must have a pH value between 6 and 8, with an iron concentration of no more than 5 mg/L.\textsuperscript{85} Such levels of acidity raise multiple safety concerns for regional water consumers.

\textsuperscript{80} Dr. K. Werner and Dr. W. Einhorn, “Technical and Biological Recultivation and Development of Exhausted Open-cast Mines in the German Democratic Republic,” \textit{GeoJournal} 8. No. 1 (1984): 76.
\textsuperscript{82} Gerard Wynn and Javier Julve, “A Foundation-Based Framework for Phasing out German Lignite in Lausitz,” 15.
\textsuperscript{83} Gökay Karakas et al., “Physical Characteristics of Acidic Mining Lake 111,” \textit{Aquatic Sciences}, no. 65 (2003): 297.
\textsuperscript{85} Dr. K. Werner and Dr. W. Einhorn, “Technical and Biological Recultivation and Development of Exhausted Open-cast Mines in the German Democratic Republic,” 78.
Drainage practices also affect local water balance and often pollute the groundwater.\(^86\) In order to transform the open-cast mines into artificial lakes, companies extract water from deep underground or from nearby sources, such as the rivers Spree or Schwarze Elster.\(^87\) One reason for using river water is that the high amounts of algae and other plants mitigate lake acidity.\(^88\) This action results in conflicts between “traditional water users” and mining companies that use the water for mine restoration.\(^89\)

In the Lausitz, the water deficit (stress on water availability) is an estimated 13 billion m\(^3\) and even though many (though not all) mines have been closed, groundwater pumping continues, increasing lake acidity.\(^90\) Filling the abandoned open-cast pits is beneficial in the short-term, but creates a catch-22. On the one hand, the lakes raise clear ecological and health concerns. On the other hand, they attract a fair number of tourists each year - 331,429 arrived in 2014 (a 7.8 percent increase from the previous year).\(^91\) In fact, because the Lausitz is a low income region, the tourism economy that these artificial lakes attract is important, so their absence would arguably incur financial and social costs. Although the lakes are scientifically controversial,\(^92\) they have become a key part of the region’s identity and have helped to re-establish some of its lost natural beauty.

\(^{86}\) Dr. K. Werner and Dr. W. Einhorn, “Technical and Biological Recultivation and Development of Exhausted Open-cast Mines in the German Democratic Republic,” 76.
\(^{88}\) Brigitte Nixdorf, “Mining Lakes in East Germany. The Problem of Acidification and Chances for Ecosystem Development,” 560.
\(^{89}\) Nele Lienhoop and Frank Messner, “The Economics of Mine Pit Restoration: The Case of Pit Lakes in Lusatia, Germany,” 423.
\(^{90}\) Brigitte Nixdorf, “Mining Lakes in East Germany. The Problem of Acidification and Chances for Ecosystem Development,” 557.
\(^{92}\) To learn more about acid lakes and mining, read: Martin Schultze, “The filling and remediation of pit lakes in former open-cast lignite mines” (Master's thesis, Braunschweig Technical University, 2012).
2.3 Present challenges of national policies

The “Coal Conundrum”

Just as lignite was key to the identity of the Lausitz historically, shaping its past as a mining community during GDR times, it continues to occupy an important place in the region’s economy despite the impact of coal-exit policies. In the Lausitz, the Czech-owned Lausitz Energie Bergbau AG (LEAG) purchased Vattenfall, and continues to operate the remaining lignite-fired power plants, Jänschwalde, Boxberg, and Schwarze Pumpe, in addition to the Lippendorf plant near Leipzig.

Figure 2-7. Map of currently active open-cast mines in Lausitz (stillgelegt means “shut-down, aktiv means “active” and in Planung means “in planning,” or that the mine is set for expansion).93

Together, these four plants generate a total of 7,595 megawatts (MW) of energy onsite. Presently, there are also four active open-cast mines: Jänschwalde (6,015 ha), Nochten (4,825 ha), Welzow-Süd (9,000 ha) and Reichwalde (1,131 ha). They span a total area of 21,000 hectares (51,892.13 acres) and produce an estimated 60-65 million tons of coal per year.

It seems paradoxical that, while the German government is attempting to reduce coal production, the remaining mining companies, such as Vattenfall, have continued growing. Since 2007 Vattenfall has sought approval to expand open-cast lignite mines throughout the Lausitz, which would give them access to approximately 750 million tons of coal. The federal states of Brandenburg and Saxony have communicated their support for a coal-based economy, but this would put small villages such as Kerkwitz, Atterwasch, and Grabko at risk of demolition. For example, in 2014 Vattenfall sought to expand and continue mining in Welzow-Süd past 2026, which would have forced over 800 inhabitants to relocate. Although Vattenfall's application was rejected, there were mixed reactions: it was clear that the expansion would be environmentally detrimental and lead to the loss of hundreds of homes, yet many argued that it would bring necessary economic revenue since a region like the Lausitz simply could not survive on renewable energy sources alone.

The expansion of remaining coal mines produced a larger divide between policy implications of the Energiewende and the actual politics of the coal debate. Although Germany as a whole has been at the forefront of green energy technologies and is committed to fighting climate change, coal-exit

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95 Gerard Wynn and Javier Julve, “A Foundation-Based Framework for Phasing out German Lignite in Lausitz,” 7.
policies offer supporters of coal the tempting solution of using lignite as a “transitional energy source,”\textsuperscript{99} despite the reduced mining of lignite. Furthermore, modern technologies have actually helped lignite fired plants become more sustainable by decreasing sulphur dioxide, nitrogen oxide, and particulate matter emissions through the use of flue gas cleaning.\textsuperscript{100} This raises two key questions: Will coal ever cease to be mined as an energy source and what factors must occur to make it so?

The seemingly ambivalent future of coal has precipitated regional uncertainty on many levels. For growing numbers of people and communities, the Kohleausstieg signaled an end to much that was familiar and secure and led to the disappearance of a way of life. The impact of the coal-exit has been examined with regard to its political, socioeconomic, and environmental impact. The remainder of this thesis will address the impact of the Kohleausstieg as expressed through cultural production. The fundamental question informing this study is: how do different artists grapple with the profound changes produced by the coal-exit? In the next chapters, I will consider different artistic forms that have emerged, beginning with the visual aesthetics of coal mining in works that portray a broken, uninhabited, and uninhabitable landscape.

3.1 The aesthetic of the uninhabitable

One major theme that emerges in the art created in response to the coal industry is the portrayal of an environment without people. These works depict the open-cast mines and the associated scarring of the natural environment, confronting the viewer with an image of the land after decades of mining and highlighting the damage caused directly by the coal industry. Yet, despite the ecological devastation, there is still a kind of organic beauty in these images. A key part of the aesthetic appeal in these works is the alienating quality of the environment.

Erasing any human presence and choosing instead to concentrate on the aesthetics of the environment underlines the dynamic—albeit asymmetric—connection between people and the natural world. This is reflected in the following observation by Kastner and Wallis, authors of the book *Land and Environmental Art*: “Our relationship with the land is complex. We see stability in its mute permanence and flux in its unending variances. We exploit and attack nature, wrestling from it the things we need to survive. Yet we are also aware of its transcendent imperturbability, its awesome and uncontrollable power.”⁴¹ This complicated connection is powerfully expressed in different ways by each of the artists interviewed for this study.

The following section explores the works of four artists: André Baschlakow, a photographer from Berlin; Juergen Bergbauer, a photographer from Straubing; Hannah Becher, a painter from Marburg; and Klara Hobza, a material artist from Pilsen. There are three key patterns that unite this first group of artists. The first is a focus on the artistic and visual wonder of the subject matter.

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Although this beauty is expressed in different mediums, the artists claimed to avoid overtly politicizing their work, preferring instead to communicate their own creative messages and emphasizing a specific aesthetic approach. The second commonality is that these works draw on an outsider’s perspective. None of the artists in this chapter are originally from the Lausitz yet drew their inspiration from the region, which perhaps factors into their aestheticization of the environment. The final pattern is the marked influence of the American landscape. In many ways, each artist was driven by representations of the American West. In the works of all of the artists examined in this section, these features recur, defining a certain perspective on the consequences of coal mining and the industry as a whole.

André Baschlakow

André Baschlakow had seen the large hard coal mines in the Ruhr region in western Germany, but the mines in the Lausitz were “was ich noch nie gesehen” (“something I had never seen before”). For Baschlakow, the open-cast mines were a wonder in and of themselves, inspiring awe and fascination. He explained how he required a special camera—not a typical handheld device—that could best capture the power and majesty that at times seemed to overwhelm him. The black-and-white contrast that is a cornerstone of his photos from the Lausitz renders images that are meticulous, detailed, and intense.

Over the course of almost two years, Baschlakow traveled between Berlin and the Lausitz to take photographs of the open-cast mines. At the time, he was a contracted photographer for the

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102 André Baschlakow was born in Hannover in 1964 and studied in West Berlin at the Technische Hochschule (Technical University) from 1983 until 1985 and the Hochschule der Künste (University of Arts) from 1985 until 1991. Three years later in 1994 he founded Telos Design, a design studio located in Berlin. Baschlakow explained how, in 1993, he first came to the the former East Germany well after Germany’s reunification. All quotations are from our interview in Berlin on January 12, 2018. Conducted in German with my English translations.
Lausitzer und Mitteldeutsche Bergbau-Verwaltungsgesellschaft mbH (LMBV) (The Lausitz and Central-German Mining Administration Company). Perhaps because of this, Baschlakow’s images include a certain bias, aiming to portray the impressive quality of the mines in a way that speaks to the broader political agenda of which these commissioned photographs were a part. Today, many of his photographs are held in the LMBV’s personal collection.  

Figure 3-1. Baschlakow’s photo of open-cast mine with the powerplant Boxberg in the background taken in 1998 (left) and Lausitzer number 18 (right).

For Baschlakow, the mines were a “visuelles Phänomen” (“visual phenomenon”) and he described the feeling he experienced looking across the massive openings as though “man sieht auf ein großen Meer” (“one were looking over a vast ocean”). In a world where no trees, buildings, or human life exists, Baschlakow found peace and serenity when he stood in the middle of the once living mines, completely alone except for his 85 kilogram camera, in an environment that others had deserted. He said: “Es ist natürlich schwierig, erstmal hässlich, keine schöne Landschaft, sondern [eine] kaputte und zerstörte” (“Of course it was difficult, ugly at first, not a beautiful landscape but broken and destroyed”). Yet as a photographer, he came to see it abstractly, finding a visual beauty

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103 Additional photographs are in the appendix.
that might escape others. Upon looking at a particular photo of an open-cast mine, Baschlakow
described: “Er ist tot, aber die Seele ist noch nicht weg” (“It is dead, but the soul is not yet gone”).

For Baschlakow, this project represented more than the thousands of photographs taken: it was the experience of taking the photographs. That is, his work as an artist has always been “eine
Suche nach einer Antwort” (“a search for an answer”). As such, each image has a deeply personal
story that he tries to convey. Baschlakow recounted how, in his constant search for the “soul” of the
mines and for a deeper understanding of what the mines were and now are, he would visit the
Lausitz on days when it was extremely hot or freezing cold. He hoped that, perhaps, the mines
would reveal something more.

Baschlakow explained that, for many West German artists, the idea of the open-cast mines
“war ganz besonders” (“was quite special”), representing a sort of beauty that fired imagination and
artistic expression. Like many other artists in Europe, Baschlakow was influenced by the American
landscape, especially the national parks and the works of Ansel Adams and William Henry Jackson.
Similar to the natural world in the western United States, the open-cast mines were “ein Land, was
nicht fassbar ist” (“a land that was incomprehensible”). The visual resemblance between the two
landscapes is clear. However, identifying the mines with the magnificence of the American landscape
is problematic, since the latter represents a kind of organic beauty, while the former signifies
environmental devastation. At the same time, works like those of Baschlakow constructed an
association between these mines and the American West that allowed many people, as Baschlakow
observed, to view the Lausitz “als Landschaft und nicht als Katastrophe” (“as a landscape and not as
a catastrophe”).
Juergen Bergbauer

Like Baschlakow, Juergen Bergbauer, who is a photographer, was influenced by the aesthetics of America’s natural landscape. Indeed, Bergbauer made it clear that he was not particularly interested in art as a social or political force, but that he sees it as an expression of the aesthetic and is “drawn to the reality of space and illusion.” Bergbauer’s examination of space and illusion is seen in his photographs below:

Figure 3-2. Bergbauer’s photograph of ash piles (left) and dirt piles (right). More of his images can be found in the appendix.

Although these images appear to be of large mountain summits, in reality, they are heaps of ash and dirt beside the road. The misperception of size and changing elements of the landscape create a specific emotional response: the mundane and seemingly irrelevant are elevated in position and place in the natural environment and imbued with a value and meaning they do not inherently possess, forcing the viewer to challenge her assumptions and perhaps rethink her understanding of the

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104 Juergen Bergbauer was born in Straubing (150 kilometers away from Munich) in 1968. He studied for half a year at the San Francisco Art Institute in 1994 and the Rhode Island School of Design from 1997 to 2000. He was awarded a Diploma of Fine Arts from the Hochschule für Grafik und Buchkunst (School of Visual Arts) in Leipzig and held a teaching position there from 2004 to 2006. He was part of an exhibit at the Kunsthall Dresden in 2014 called “Kirunatopia” where he displayed a series of photographs he called “Substitute.” All quotations are from our phone interview on January 11, 2018. Conducted in English.
environment and the many elements that comprise it. In this regard, Bergbauer explained how his mountain photography alludes to Edmund Burke’s notion of the Romantic sublime, exploring different dimensions of the world. He noted that “[t]he sublime is something that creates aesthetic and power” and suggests that he found this expressed in the open-cast mines, as they inspired both awe and danger in him.

Bergbauer titled his series of ash and dirt piles “Substitute,” since his photographs evoke an emotional effect that typically accompanies landscape images, even though these images are not what they appear to be. Although the photographs show nature as undisturbed and pristine, this, too, is an illusion, because there is a threat contained within, which he defines as “contradictions of illusion and truth.” For Bergbauer, these contradictions are captured in the mountains and open-cast mines in a way that “interests us but also threatens us.” Indeed ash suggests destruction and what remains after destruction itself, much like what results from years of burning coal. The viewer is once again compelled to rethink her understanding of the environment: what has taken place within it, how has it changed, and what her relationship is to it. Has she mastered the environment or become more vulnerable to it?

Bergbauer’s interest in playing with real and perceived size extends beyond the open-cast mines. In addition to taking photographs of very small items and making them look large, he also takes pictures of small items and enlarges them, thereby hoping to discover something new about the subject. Towards a similar end, Bergbauer enjoys visiting various Flohmärkte (flea markets) and photographing different items. He referred to Walter Benjamin, who wrote that the rag-picker is the poet, able to see both the beauty and the ugliness in the rags he picks, and in so doing finds essence

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Bergbauer often expresses this by bringing his audience to a granular level and compelling them to question their own perspectives and understanding of what they are seeing.

Hannah Becher

The drive to rethink one’s understanding of the environment similarly motivates Hannah Becher’s artistic output. Becher is known for her atypical artistic method. Her paintings of industrial machinery, for example, were based on photographs she had not taken herself, but found secondhand. Some were taken by Bernd and Hilla Becher (no relation), two well known photographers from the Ruhr. Hannah Becher had found carbon paper at a flea market and wanted to use it in a project. The images of the machinery in the photographs she found gave her this opportunity. Using digital technology, Becher created computerized versions of the photographs and made stencils from these images. She cut the carbon paper into small squares and placed them on one large canvas: “It became its own artificial structure with lots of wrinkles and different layers.” The stencils of the machinery were then placed on the carbon paper canvas. Next, she painted over

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106 Benjamin’s full quotation reads: “Here we have a man whose job it is to gather the day’s refuse in the capital. Everything that the big city has thrown away, everything it has lost, everything it has scorned, everything it has crushed underfoot he catalogues and collects. He collates the annals of intemperance, the capharnaum of waste. He sorts things out and selects judiciously: he collects like a miser like a miser guarding a treasure, refuse which will assume the shape of useful or gratifying objects between the jaws of the goddess of Industry.” Walter Benjamin and Michael William Jennings. *The Writer of Modern Life: Essays on Charles Baudelaire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 108.

107 Hannah Becher was born in Marburg in 1963 and has been living and working in Berlin since 1983. She has hosted exhibitions all throughout Germany including, Berlin, Hamburg, and Leer as well as England. Her artistry focuses on industrial machinery, buildings, and structures rather than the people who animated them. All quotations are from our interview in Berlin on January 12, 2018. Conducted in English.

the stencils before removing them from the canvas. Finally she hung the carbon paper horizontally and dribbled drops of white paint on the end so they would run down the page, much like the layers of the earth. The result is seen below:

Figure 3-3. Becher’s Kohle II and (left) Kohle V (right), both created in 2014. For additional images from the series, see appendix.

Becher referred to her approach as one of “painting time.” In her view, the notion of “painting time” is not chronological or historical, but looks instead at how objects are altered by time and, in turn, themselves alter time. Becher’s fascination with machines in particular must be understood in this regard. For her, the ability of machines to accelerate progress—what she refers to as “making humanity faster”—contributes to their own destruction, when they are made obsolete by their own success or have “eaten themselves up. There is a speed that comes with efficiency and this very efficiency has eaten up the machine.” In this way, Becher examines a component of the
environment that symbolizes a past destroyed by its own success. This is what draws her to the industrial machinery, which to her “look like dinosaurs.” Her art juxtaposes the animate and the inanimate. Just as the dinosaurs once ruled the earth, the machinery of the mines once defined the landscape of the Lausitz. In this regard, both were, at one time, animate and predominant. But like the dinosaurs, the mines are also destined for extinction, leaving behind fossilized remains such as open-cast mines, lifeless machines, and vacant buildings - an environment devoid of life and living.

Klara Hobza

The emphasis on the landscape continues in the work of Klara Hobza, though she, unlike the previous artists, attempts to introduce a symbolic representation of the individual. Hobza explained that “art is a way of connecting with the world.” While visiting the open-cast mines in preparation for her exhibit Der Erdmann aus der Lausitz (The Earthman from the Lausitz), she felt “torn between the critical side of the point [the political and social implications arising from mining] and being in total awe of the landscape. Humans can alter an entire landscape in amazing ways, it was really wonderful to be there and I do not want to deny that.” Like the other artists already discussed, Hobza would rather make a statement that is, according to her, not overtly political. She enjoys telling stories and showing complexities or contradictions as a way of evoking meaning and critical thinking, just as Juergen Bergbauer does with his use of space and illusion. When confronted with the overwhelming landscape, Hobza said she felt incredibly small and was moved by its grandeur.

Klara Hobza was born in Pilsen (in what is now the Czech Republic) in 1975. She currently lives and works in Berlin, incorporating drawing, performance, sculpture, and photography in her exhibits. She studied at the Munich Academy of Fine Arts in 2003, Columbia University in New York in 2005, and at the Rogue Film School in Los Angeles in 2012. Her works are international and have been displayed in Copenhagen, Basel, and Frankfurt am Main. Like Juergen Bergbauer, Hobza also took part in the 2014 Kirunatopia exhibit in Dresden. Her piece was titled, Der Erdmann aus der Lausitz (“the earthman from the Lausitz).

All quotations are from our interview in Berlin on January 17, 2018. Conducted in English.
and beauty and, simultaneously, by its sense of destruction and ruin. It was this duality she tried to capture in her art - a common theme of the artists examined in this chapter.

Hobza had never dealt with the Lausitz or coal mining before, but was also moved by the American landscape and expressed a reverence for the environment that was clearly shared by other artists interviewed for this study. Hobza’s choice of a snowman as an artistic representation was deliberate and directed. Originally, she wanted to make a snowman out of sand - what she called an *Erdmann* - in order to mimic the natural environment of the open-cast mines in a form with which her audience could empathize. “As children we like to build snowmen and I wanted to evoke this feeling of innocence.”

Hobza also wanted to build the snowman to look “brave and daring know[ing] it was going to melt but had a determined attitude [nonetheless] . . .” She had hoped to invite the miners to build the snowman together with her, but she and her crew failed to find people who would participate.¹¹⁰ Hobza then decided to abandon the use of sand in favor of a white, clay-like substance meant to

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¹¹⁰ According to Hobza, there appeared to be no interest from the miners.
resemble snow; her intention in part was to contrast the ephemeral nature of the snowman with the permanence of the open-cast mines. This contradiction evokes different emotional responses: an environment that is powerful and dangerous, easily subduing the snowman, who, like the miner, is vulnerable and incapable of shielding himself from destruction; an innocence and memory associated with the snowman that are easily lost and impossible to restore; and a harsh environment whose beauty is both intensified and diminished by the snowman’s isolation and loneliness.

The *Erdmann aus der Lausitz* raises yet another contradiction at the artistic and symbolic levels between the open-cast mine and the snowman. By placing the snowman in an arid environment where he will clearly melt, the artist is referring to the miner whose presence faded together with the need for the mines. In some ways the snowman represents the difficult position of the miners, whose lives and livelihoods are threatened by the end of the coal mining industry. At the same time, Hobza’s work, through the reference to the snow, evokes the issue of climate change. Whether intentionally or not, the snowman, intended to represent the miners, equally points to the devastating global effects of coal mining. The miners and their jobs—ostensibly embodied in the snowman—are in fact ephemeral because of the environmental destruction they caused.

### 3.2 Conclusions

This first group of artists illuminates the devastation caused to the environment by coal and coal mining, forcing upon the viewer a direct confrontation with this destruction. Baschlakow’s stylized black-and-white photography accentuates the majesty of the mines, aiming to impress the viewer with a sense of awe. Bergbauer also attempts to elicit this reaction by provoking a kind of cognitive dissonance. By misrepresenting the size and proportions of his dirt and ash piles,
Bergbauer challenges the viewers, perhaps contradicting their own perceptions of size and aesthetic appeal. Baschlakow and Bergbauer’s images of the open-cast mines and imitation mountain tops signify a kind of stasis - they are individual moments captured in time. Likewise, Becher’s paintings of the industrial machinery provide an isolated representation of a much broader narrative. Rather than depicting a changing relationship with the land or a longer history, Becher represents the mining equipment and structures as lifeless and immutable.

In contrast, Hobza’s work seems to suggest a notion of movement, however transient and fleeting. Whereas the open-cast mine indeed presents itself as a completely permanent part of the landscape, Hobza’s addition of the snowman introduces an ephemeral component. The snowman is dwarfed by the mine, signifying how the environment has become dangerous for the individual. In a way, the snowman’s own doom is a result of the open-cast mine itself, as it was for the miner. This same idea of self-destruction is one that Becher alludes to in her own way when she describes how the machines were destroyed by their own success.

The focus on the visual aesthetics of the landscape and what that landscape represents is striking - whether mediated through stilled open-cast mines, exaggerated piles of dirt and ash, idled machinery, or the sculpted snowman. Each of the artists has a different relationship to the subject, yet their works share some common themes. Baschlakow’s single shots of the open-cast mines draw viewers’ attention to the aesthetic appeal even in this destroyed environment. Bergbauer’s piles of dirt and ash compel them to think about and question the origin and composition of that beauty and its destruction. Becher’s paintings complicate the viewers’ understanding of the animate and inanimate and the ways in which the environment can embrace both. And Hobza’s snowman reveals that this destroyed environment has very real consequences for those symbolized by the ephemeral
snowman. As a whole, these four artists capture beauty in desolation but do not move beyond those ruined landscapes, something which the next group artists strives to accomplish.
Chapter 4 - Reclaiming the Environment: Articulating a New Future

4.1 Bringing people back into the environment

The previous section focused on artistic representations of an environment without people. Those works spoke directly to the consequences of the lignite industry, emphasizing how coal mining left behind an environment that, even when represented in an aestheticized way, is fundamentally vacant and threatening. In this chapter, I turn to a different artistic emphasis, examining works that attempt to reanimate the environment and return people to it in the aftermath of the coal-exit. As more open-cast mines were closed in the early 1990s, mining towns in the Lausitz became characterized by a sense of emptiness and decay. Structures such as workers’ housing complexes, marketplaces, industrial buildings, and factories once energized the town and symbolized the community as a whole. They were elements of the landscape that offered “visible reminders of the mining town’s reason for being […] function[ing] as venues for the expression of shared experiences.”¹¹¹ This changed with the coal-exit.

The artists in this chapter use art to give the land new meaning. Whether through group installations, public festivals, or long-term projects, these works address the clear need to re-integrate purpose and worth into the scarred landscapes of the Lausitz. Only in restoring the environment—both in terms of its physical appearance and the way people used it—is a sense of redemption possible. For artists working within this framework, and particularly for those who participated in broader group endeavours, the future of the region resides in encouraging

¹¹¹ Rolf Kuhn and Brigitte Scholz, Bergbau folge Landschaft: Konferenzdokumentation (Berlin: Jovis, 2010), 148.
collaboration with the wider public. Rather than focusing on local inhabitants, the emphasis lies on
drawing in tourists and visitors, thereby creating a constant ‘living stream’ to feed the reclaimed land.

This chapter examines the artistic works of five people: Marion Wenzel, a photographer
from Leipzig whose images in many ways provide a bridge from the previous chapter to this one;
Michael Kruscha, a painter and material artist from Berlin; Claudia Reichardt, a curator from
Dresden; Herta Wimmer-Knorr, a material artist from Passau who participated in one of Reichardt’s
exhibitions; and Karsten Feucht, an architect, planner, and project manager from Stuttgart. While
these artists approach coal mining and the coal-exit in their own ways, collectively, the artworks they
produce address the common question of how one might build a new future for the region and find
ways of returning people to the environment.

Marion Wenzel

Marion Wenzel attempts in her work to use documentary photography as a way of
representing social relationships and conditions. It was during her studies that Wenzel first
encountered the landscapes around Leipzig, which had also been destroyed by coal mining.
Although Leipzig is not part of the Lausitz region (it is a city in Central Germany), it has a similar
relationship to and history with the lignite industry. In her opinion, the coal-exit is part of
Germany’s social memory and must be considered in this context:

Ich versuche in der Landschaft den Aspekt der Zeit als Raum zu erfassen, in dem
sich die Erinnerung und Vorstellung in alle Richtungen bewegen können. Die

112 Marion Wenzel was born in 1958 in the Leipzig area. She studied photography from 1980 until 1986 at the
Hochschule für Grafik und Buchkunst Leipzig (HGB) (Academy of Fine Arts Leipzig) and worked as a freelance
photographer. I met Marion Wenzel only briefly in person but due to timing constraints was unable to conduct a full
interview. Instead I emailed her a list of my questions, which she answered and returned to me. The information here is
based on her responses.
All quotations are from her responses, which were received on February 1, 2018. Written in German with my English
translations.
tendenzielle Vernichtung der Einmaligkeit und die Herauslösung aus traditionellen Bindungen lassen mich die Zerstörung des Naturraumes als ein Element der europäischen Kultur begreifen.

(I try to capture in the landscape the aspect of time as a space in which memory and imagination can move in all directions. The tendency to annihilate the uniqueness and the detachment from traditional ties make me understand the destruction of the natural space as an element of European culture).

For Wenzel, the legacy of the lignite industry is the landscape’s leached soil and decaying mining towns. Yet even within this devastation resides possibility. Wenzel believes there is also the opportunity to rediscover the landscape as viable and, once again, inhabitable. When asked about the open-cast mines themselves and what they stand for, Wenzel explained: “Es entsteht eine andere, neue Form von Natur - ein kulturelles Produkt. Die Bilder sind weniger Symbol für Zerfall als für zeitlose Landschaftsräume” (“The result is another new form of nature - a cultural product. The images are less a symbol of decay than of timeless landscapes”). This is the belief she has tried to capture in her photographs:

Figure 4-1. Open-cast mine Cospuden I in 1985 (left) and later in 1998 (right).
Unlike artists in the previous group, who focused on the changed landscape in terms of the negative impact of coal mining, Wenzel instead highlights the positive consequences of the coal-exit, emphasizing resurrection and potential. In this way, Wenzel’s art acts as a bridge between the first group of artists and those in this section, who move beyond the aesthetics of destruction.

For example, Wenzel takes as her subject examples of land restoration practices that have helped convert former open-cast mines from blighted spaces to serene, even pastoral beauty. By juxtaposing before-and-after photographs, Wenzel draws into question “temporal and referential dimensions by which other modes of photography are silently governed.”  

Like Hobza’s snowman, Wenzel’s images do not follow a typical linear narrative, instead presenting a history that is non-sequential, but still connected, moving from disuse to use. Furthermore, by employing black and white for the “earlier” photographs and color for the “later” ones, she accentuates the landscape’s striking transformation. In so doing, Wenzel reminds her audience of how people can redeem and reclaim a part of one’s past and the beauty contained within it.

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Michael Kruscha’s work moves a step further than that of Wenzel, integrating a performative and interactive component. Kruscha explained that his hometown, Hoyerswerda, was built around coal-mining and was the city in which the GDR first employed its *Plattenbau* architecture style. Like other mining villages, Hoyerswerda experienced considerable growth, particularly as the Schwarze Pumpe plant was nearby: “alle waren Bergleute und wenn der Bergbau nicht mehr da war, gab es große Sorge” (“Everyone was a miner and when the mining was gone, there was great sorrow”). Travelling extensively after the Berlin Wall fell, Kruscha had the opportunity to return to the Lausitz briefly and engage with the topics of coal and coal mining. In doing so, he attempted to use art to confront the region’s *große Sorge* (great sorrow).

In 2011, Kruscha and a colleague of his, Ines Diederich, built a large wooden statue of a phoenix, placing it in what used to be the center of the village known as Gut Geisendorf. In actuality, the artwork sat in the middle of the open-cast mine, Welzow Süd, which was built on the remains of 19 residential homes destroyed in 1990 to make way for the mine’s expansion. Although the mining companies relocated the residents, they still remained emotionally displaced: “wenn du dein ganzes Leben in einem Haus verbracht hast und gezwungen bist, zu einem neuen Haus zu ziehen, ist es, auch wenn es modern ist, nicht dasselbe” (“If you’ve spent your whole life in a house and are forced to move to a new house, even if it’s modern, it’s not the same thing”). Kruscha and Diederich spent more than two weeks building the statue and, at the end of the summer, set the
phoenix on fire, which they called *Der Tanz des Phönix* (*The Dance of the Phoenix*). The two artists co-wrote the following statement:

Das Bodenrelief und die farbige Gestaltung in seiner Mitte sollen für die Vergangenheit des Ortes stehen. Seine Veränderungen, der Verlust der Landschaft und auch die Verwundungen, die die Menschen davon getragen haben, waren die Grundlage für die Bergung der Kohle im Revier. Der Phönix wird zur Finissage der Ausstellung in einer Performance durchs Feuer gehen. Wie der Phönix aus der Asche, hoffen wir, daß mit der Energie, die aus der Kohle gewonnen wird, Positives und für alle Sinnvolles und Aufbauendes getan wird.¹¹⁵

(The lower relief and the colorful design in its center should stand for the past of the place. Its changes, the loss of the landscape, and also the wounds which the people bore were the basis for the recovery of coal in the area. The Phoenix will go through fire at the closing ceremony of the exhibit. Like the phoenix rising from the ashes, we hope that, with the energy that was gained from coal, something positive and meaningful and constructive for all will be done).

The symbolic phoenix rising from the ashes is a powerful metaphor, serving to remind people of the region’s future possibilities that are present, albeit unrealized. Even though a village such as Gut Geisendorf has shrunk in size and population, Kruscha’s work draws attention to the potential it holds. Though the Lausitz is distinguished by its wounded landscape, Kruscha’s hope is that, despite—or even because of—the region’s exit from coal mining, there will still be the possibility of renewal. The phoenix statue expresses the triumph of life over death, rebirth over extinction.


English translation (mine)
In later works, Kruscha continued to address the subject of lignite in post-coal mining towns like Hoyerswerda. In 2016, he worked with three other artists (two photographers and a filmmaker) on an exhibition in Hoyerswerda called *Gebrochene Landschaften* (*Broken Landscapes*). Kruscha painted a series of large- (160 × 200cm) and medium-sized (110 × 160cm) canvases that were put on display. Two of these canvases - *Verlorene Orte* (*Lost Place*) and *Neu-Seeland* (*New Lakeland*) depict apparently vastly different subjects: mine-related machinery and open-cast mines that appear sharp edged,
harsh, and threatening in the former; and living landscapes that appear quilt-like and languorously fluid in the latter:

Figure 4-4. Verlorene Orte 2013 size 110 × 160cm acrylic on canvas (left). Neu-Seeland 2012 size 160 × 200cm acrylic on canvas (right). More of Kruscha’s paintings are included in the appendix.

Both paintings, however, combine elements of the geometric and the abstract. Verlorene Orte includes the technical-geometric of the machinery, juxtaposing it against an idyllic and purely white village in the background. The stark and formal lines of the excavator in the foreground contrast with the gentle, pastel colors of the hazy landscape. The depiction of the latter emphasizes its inherent and easily penetrated vulnerability, while the juxtaposition of the machinery against the village symbolizes the conflict between technology and nature. Like so many other villages in the Lausitz, this village appears at risk of being crushed by the massive structure, which overwhelms it in size and material.

In contrast, Neu-Seeland depicts the lakes that have come to define the Lausitz today, inviting people to return and to live and play. The vivid shades of blues and greens remind the audience of the region’s vibrancy and vigor, which flows into and feeds the landscape and its rebirth. Whether intentional or not, Kruscha’s terming of Neu-seeland references ‘New Zealand’ and implies an exotic
and exciting new land that has now become the Lausitz. Both of Kruscha’s works suggest an attempt to re-imagine the damaged landscape of the region, depicting these scar-like mines as sites of potential rebirth.

Claudia Reichardt

Claudia Reichardt has worked on projects that aim to draw people back into the region on a much larger scale. She helped curate the transNATURALE festival, an event that took place over a five-year period in the Lausitz and was designed to bring in tourists by using mining artifacts as artistic elements. It centered on the Boxberg power plant in Saxony, located next to a former open-cast mine, which was transformed into the state’s largest artificial lake, known as the Bärwalder See.

Klaus Nicolai, a co-curator, explained their vision for the project: “Ich plädierte dafür, die Ambivalenz zwischen Industriearchitektur und touristischen Zielen als kulturellen Möglichkeitsraum für eine einmalige Verbindung zwischen Geschichte, Gegenwart und Zukunft neu zu denken” (“I advocated for the reconsideration of the ambivalence between industrial architecture and tourist destinations as a potential cultural space for a unique connection between history, present and future”). It is this connection which is the defining thread running through the transNATURALE exhibitions.

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116 Claudia ‘Wanda’ Reichardt was born in the 1960s in Dresden. She started her own gallery in 1986, which was closed down in 1987 but reopened in 1990 after the Berlin Wall fell. From 1994 until 2002, Reichardt was the executive director of the Festspielhaus Hellerau in Dresden and has curated and managed numerous events including transNATURALE. All quotations are from our interview in Dresden on January 23, 2018. Conducted in German with my English translations.

The Boxberg power plant was once a defining feature of the mining industry. With the coal-exit, artists like Reichardt and Nicolai assigned it a new role that honored the plant’s past while reimagining its present. By hosting artistic performances and using the cooling towers as artistic elements, the region’s mining past was simultaneously memorialized and its representative building given a new function and purpose. The artificial lake also has, in its own way, become a cultural and creative feature of the landscape, attracting tourists, swimmers, cyclists, and outdoor enthusiasts whose presence allows for positive interaction with the environment and acts as a symbolic bridge between what was and what is and will continue to be.

In its first year in 2005, the transNATURALE project drew 3,000 visitors to various artistic performances at the Boxberg power plant. The following year, 10,000 people arrived for a large-scale projection onto the Neukraft plant and a Pedalparcours exhibit. In 2007, 15,000 people came for a multimedia performance titled See-Lichtspiele and for eleven temporary art projects scattered around the lake, collectively called Boxberg-Zeit-Schicht. In 2008, the organizers focused on the artistic potential of the lake and shore landscape with a unique project called OHR, which was an auditory performance. The last year of transNATURALE, 2009, hosted a performing orchestra with lightshow, which attracted approximately 15,000 people.
For Reichardt, “die Rekultivierung ist sehr wichtig - der Tourismus und die Benutzung des Sees - es meint, alles ist möglich” (“the recultivation is very important - the tourism and the use of the lake - it means everything is possible”). The art and performances were a way of giving new meaning and purpose to the power plant. Large-scale exhibitions like transNATURALE represent a way to address socio-cultural, political, and economic developments in the region by imagining a different future. Although Reichardt was the curator and manager of this one particular project, she—much like Wenzel and Kruscha—chose to focus on what was constructive and positive. In this way, the transNATURALE drew attention to the region’s extraordinary cultural and social development. Whereas the Lausitz was once thought of only as “kaputt und ganz besiegt” (“broken and fully defeated”), a project like transNATURALE symbolized a collective and successful attempt to reintroduce new meaning and function.
Like Reichardt, Herta Wimmer-Knorr centered an interesting piece around the Bärwalder See. Wimmer-Knorr argues that “Kunst ist kreativ und eröffnet neue und andere Perspektiven” (“Art is creative and opens up new and different perspectives”). As curator of transNATURALE, Reichardt had introduced an interactive component into the exhibition (as seen in Kunstparcours in Figure 4-5). Wimmer-Knorr, who participated in the 2009 festival, took this idea further by emphasizing the interaction between people and the environment as a core feature of her work. One example was her structure called Kohle verschleudern (Squandering coal). Her sculpture was a two-meter-high slingshot on the shore of the Bärwalder See, which visitors could use to fling small coal briquettes into the water (as shown below).

Figure 4-6. Bathers using Wimmer-Knorr’s interactive sculpture with the power plant Boxberg in the background (left). A close-up demonstration (right).

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Wimmer-Knorr was born in Passau, a town in Lower Bavaria. She completed an apprenticeship at the Fachschule für Keramik (college for ceramics) and spent one year in Israel in 1978 as a member of the Berufsverband bildender Künstler Niederbayern/Oberpfalz (Professional Association of Artists Lower Bavaria / Upper Palatinate). She also completed a one year exchange program in Pujols and in Bordeaux, France in 2009. Since 1985 Wimmer-Knorr has been living and working in Kallmünz, which is in Bavaria. I was unable to meet Herta Wimmer-Knorr in person but sent her a list of questions, which she answered. The information provided is based on her responses. All quotations are from her responses, which were received on January 24, 2018. Written in German with my English translations.
The interactive sculpture *Kohle verschleudern* attempts to engage people in a way that is both entertaining and gratifying. Wimmer-Knorr believes that “Umweltschutz muß positiv sein und auch Spaß machen” (“environmental protection must be positive and fun, too”). To achieve this she has, in a sense, created a game where visitors treat the coal frivolously, as a toy. Yet this irreverence is deliberate and directed, for it allows her audience to take part in the land’s restoration, encouraging and strengthening the personal connection between the individual and the environment, and redefining the environment as normal and welcoming, endowed with a certain kind of intimacy and optimism.

Much like other artists included in this study, Wimmer-Knorr likes to engage in contradictions. She stated that: “die Arbeit ist doppeldeutig” (“the work is ambiguous”) because the physical act of catapulting coal “bedeutet Geld zum Fenster hinausschmeißen” (“means throwing money out the window”), yet when doing so “man schleudert die Kohle zurück in den See, gibt sie an die Natur zurück” (“one throws the coal back into the lake and returns it to nature”). Wimmer-Knorr thus sees the work as rebuilding a connection between the participants and landscape, while commenting on the action in an ironic way.

At the same time, certain contradictions are evident in her work. A kind of antithesis exists between the hard black coal and the fluid blue lake water, and—as her stated intention suggests—throwing the coal into the manmade lake imbues the lake with a sense of belonging, emphasizing its function as a natural part of the environment as it reabsorbs the coal. Yet, since the lake itself is unnatural, simply tossing coal into the water does not resolve its presence in the environment and the artificiality underlying it. Indeed, the act of throwing the coal into the lake is

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119 In German, “Kohle” is an informal term for “money,” and “verschleudern” is slang for “spending frivolously.” At the same time, “schleudern” translates as “to fling.”
one that, to some extent, represents pollution and perhaps undermines the stated aim of conservation. Alternatively, the action also indicates that this lake is, in fact, so unnatural that adding more coal is inconsequential.

Karsten Feucht

Engaging physically with the environment is, as it was for Wimmer-Knorr, a core feature of Karsten Feucht’s work. Having studied sociology along with architecture, Feucht explained that “es geht nicht nur um den Raum, sondern auch darum, wie wir darüber denken” (“it is not just about the space but the way we think about it”). The cultural and personal associations with a given space matter: for example, he said that, when standing in a church, it is not only the beautiful architecture that captures his attention, but the feelings of religion, faith, and culture. Feucht argued that reality is not only articulated through physical structures, but also and perhaps more importantly through the social and cultural associations they inspire. For him, “Gespräch ist härter als Glas und Stahl” (“conversation is harder than glass and steel”). Throughout his work in the Lausitz, Feucht has imbued his work with this understanding.

Feucht tries to challenge people’s perceptions by inviting conversation and engagement with the physical environment. As part of his association with the IBA Fürst-Pückler-Land GmbH and the Bergba touristmus-Verein “Stadt Welzow” e.V. (Mining Tourism Association “City Welzow”

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120 Karsten Feucht was born in Stuttgart in 1965. He studied architecture and sociology at the Technische Universität Berlin (Berlin Technical University) and completed a graduate degree in architecture in 1996. He has led several different programs including an EU-funded project called LAURIN (2012 to 2014) for regional identity and development in the Lausitz and the Event and Visitor Services of the IBA Fürst-Pückler-Land (2001 to 2006). Since 2016 Feucht has been the project manager for Infrastrukturimpulse für Industriekulturstandorte im Lausitzer Seenland (infrastructure impulse for industrial heritage sites in the Lusatian Lakeland) (INKULA), which aims at developing better infrastructure in the Lausitz. He also works for his own office called Transform Architektur.

All quotations are from our interview in Großräschlen on January 11, 2018. Conducted in German with my English translations.
e.V)—two projects that address regional development in the Lausitz—Feucht led walking tours through open-cast mines in the region (as shown in the photographs below) between 2001 and 2007.

Figure 4-7. On the walking tour through the open-cast mine (left). A lunch break is included (middle). Visitors engaging in discussion and conversation (right).

For Feucht, people’s beliefs and experiences are the most powerful, outlasting any physical material or tangible object. Although the walking tours only lasted three hours, a range of experiences and emotional responses were elicited. Feucht described how:

“Die Oma steht da und weint, weil dort früher ihr Haus war, aber es wurde abgerissen. Der Bergmann steht da und sagt ‘ja, hier habe ich 300 Millionen Tonnen Kohle ausgegraben, ich bin stolz.’ Der Berliner kommt und schaut und sagt ‘oh man, es sieht aus wie die Sahara.’ Der Sportmann sagt ‘wow, du kannst Motorsport hier treiben.’”

(“The grandma is standing there crying because her house used to be there, but it was demolished. The miner stands there and says ‘yes, here I excavated 300 million tons of coal, I’m proud.’ The Berliner comes and looks and says ‘oh man, it looks like the Sahara.’ The sportsman says ‘wow, you can do motorsports here’”).

What drew Feucht’s interest was the way in which a single landscape could evoke four very different perspectives and emotional responses in individuals. His walking tours allowed people from different backgrounds to encounter not only the environment, but also each other in a constructive and meaningful way. The grandmother whose home was destroyed was able to meet the miner who excavated the coal. In this regard, Feucht referred to the term “verschmerzen,” which means “to
overcome something.” For him, genuine conversation and acknowledgment of how deeply people’s lives related to the mines is key for any kind of progress. He recalled how, for one woman from the region, the artificial lakes that had replaced several coal mines represented hope and new possibilities.

In a similar vein, Feucht recalled an art project called Paradies 2 (Paradise 2), which concluded the IBA’s tenth year in 2010 with a special celebration. Each performance—whether concert, artistic exhibition, or dance production—was hosted at various locations in the Lausitz throughout the year. The final presentation, on September 18, 2010, took place at sunset, when 5,000 people surrounded Lake Sedlitz (which was once an open-cast mine) with portable lamps, lanterns, and flashlights. To commemorate the demolished villages of Sorno and Rosendorf—now the site of the lake itself—the crowds waited for dark before they illuminated the entire lake.

![Figure 4-8. Aerial view of the lights around Lake Sedlitz (left). Ground view of participants with their lanterns and flashlights (right).](image)

Although many people think of the Lausitz as a dying region, lighting the darkened sky symbolizes renewal and regeneration, much like Michael Kruschka’s phoenix rising from the ashes. Feucht stated that “Wenn du nicht mit deinem Schmerz und deiner Vergangenheit arbeitest, kann man keinen Platz für eine Zukunftsvision haben” (“If you do not work with your pain and your

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121 To see the program pamphlet visit http://www.montalta.net/Paradies-2.html
past, you can not have room for a vision of the future”). Hence, the installation of infrastructure—new factories or malls—is insufficient and superficial. Although government investments in regional infrastructure are important, for Feucht it must be complemented by an investment in, and engagement with, people, particularly those who experienced the greatest loss. This represents not only a form of needed acknowledgement of what was, but it attempts, through the artistic process, to give people a renewed stake in the region and its future. For Feucht, the crucial question underlying his work is how one heals a broken region. Calling himself the *Landschaft Arz* (landscape doctor), Feucht places his faith in the resilience of people to find hope and possibility even in the ruins. In this way, his art speaks to the importance and power of human agency and its recovery.

### 4.2 Conclusions

The artwork in this chapter moves beyond an emphasis on aesthetics and attempts to draw people back into the environment as an expression of and instrument of renewal. In each of these projects, the emphasis was on instilling the land with new importance and value. Many people in the Lausitz felt left behind, whether economically, socially, or politically; for many, the transition away from coal production posed a daunting and painful challenge. By “transposing the engineering spirit of the past”¹²² onto an enthusiasm for the future, these artists are, in their own way, grappling with the environment, its history, and its promise.

This reconciliation between the past and the present goes beyond a superficial (re)engagement with the land. Wenzel’s photography demonstrates the extraordinary changes that

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have come with restoration practices. Her images act as a bridge from the previous cohort of artistic works; although they depict an environment without people, the juxtaposition of images representing a “before” and an “after” underlines a positive transition. Kruscha’s artwork points to resurrection and possibility, bringing back to life an environment that was once considered lost.

Reichardt’s curation signifies a comprehensive regional attempt to develop a new understanding of the land. In associating what is positive and fun with an area that, for a long time, represented only decay, Reichardt challenges and transforms the meaning of the land and how it can be used.

Similarly, Wimmer-Knorr reintroduces a playful though intentional sense of function and purpose to the land, while Feucht allows us to embrace that purpose in ways that are reparative, healing, and productive.

In an endeavour to once again make the land accessible and hospitable, the artists are attempting to restore a connection and, perhaps, a sense of belonging to the land in the people who are now invited back onto it. This speaks to a kind of reciprocity between the people and the environment. Yet, at the same time, a complete reconciliation is not attainable. While restoring the landscape is to some degree possible, though challenging, reclaiming the social and cultural losses due to both coal mining and the coal-exit is a goal as mythological as the phoenix itself. The legacy of the land is intrinsically linked to the loss of the coal industry and coal-exit, a concept which the next chapter explores.
Chapter 5 - Digging Deeper: Excavating a Forgotten Past

5.1 Mining history

Where the works in the previous chapter looked forward to a hopeful future, the artistic works I will turn to next look back in time. As a whole, they suggest that a society cannot know where it is going without understanding where it has been. Understanding the past and acknowledging the people and communities who were impacted by the coal industry and coal-exit are crucial to informing the future. If the works discussed in the previous chapter are rooted in an optimism about the future that is at times naive, this final group constructs a fuller chronology and returns to the beginning - to the families, miners, and communities in which they lived. I examine three artists, whose works focus on two groups: the Sorbian communities destroyed by the coal industry and the miners who lost their jobs due to the coal-exit. In some ways, these two populations might seem to be in opposition. On closer examination, however, the two groups actually overlap.

Sorbians are an ethnic minority in the Lausitz whose roots are German, Polish, and Slavic. They are a group of people whose languages, customs, and traditions have endured a long history of persecution and who are continually pressured to assimilate into German culture.\(^{123}\) Although many communities in the Lausitz faced the threat of demolition, the ethnic differences of Sorbians made them even more vulnerable. Since 1934, 136 villages in the Lausitz have been destroyed for the purpose of lignite mine expansion,\(^{124}\) including Sorbian-majority towns such as Horno, Proschim, Proschim, and Proschim.


Klein Lieskow, Klinge, and Wolkenberg. The highest number of demolitions occurred between 1974 and 1989, which was a direct result of the 1973 oil-crisis. Sorbian towns were razed to provide energy for the GDR. The uprooted families were given accommodations elsewhere but it was poor consolation for the loss of their community and their way of life.

Yet the end of coal mining did not mitigate these problems; rather, it, too, engendered its own kind of societal disappearance. Miners in the Lausitz, ‘displaced’ from their livelihoods, also experienced a loss that could not be remedied by mere financial compensation. The coal-exit deprived them of their communities and sense of pride in being a part of the lignite industry. And, although this group is not extensive and will not be addressed explicitly in this study, there was some overlap between the Sorbian and the mining communities, so that a small part of the population was doubly impacted.

The works by the final three artists examined in this chapter address the social and cultural loss caused by both coal mining and the coal-exit. The photographic works of these artists—Marcel Noack, Jürgen Matschie, and Christina Glanz—demonstrate the importance of not only preserving the memory of the Sorbians and the miners, but honoring them as well. At the same time, in their emphasis on representing the experiences of these seemingly opposed communities, the works, when taken as a whole, reveal how complex and widespread the impact of coal industry and coal-exit is.

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127 Although much fewer in number, Sorbians were part of the mining community in the Lausitz as early as 1840. Rachel Hildebrandt, “The Impact of Government Policies on the Preservation of Sorbian Communities in Germany (1945-2001),” 64.
Marcel Noack

Having grown up in the Sorbian-majority village of Bad Muskau, Marcel Noack explained that coal mining was a familiar part of his childhood. Whether it was driving to visit relatives or walking through the woods, the mines were always present. Whereas most of his extended family stayed in Bad Muskau, Noack and his parents moved to the Leipzig area. As a young man, Noack felt that his own identity and culture was fading away and realized that he wanted to learn more about his Sorbian heritage. He began taking photographs of different villages as a way of documenting the changing landscape. Seven years of collecting images culminated in the exhibit _Struga_.

The name refers to an area in the Lausitz, which, according to Noack, “was a special place because the Slavic minority was actually the majority.” The relationship between nature and culture is an intimate one and a balance that Noack tries to capture in his work. Instead of addressing mining itself, Noack focused on, in these works, the Sorbian loss of culture and land. _Struga_ is unlike most exhibits, as it is structured as an archive. Noack explained the three main components (pictured below): a custom map in the center of the room, panoramic images that line the wall, and several boxes of photographs. Each component of the archive serves a specific purpose. In organizing the exhibit specifically as an archive, Noack fixes a position and a moment in time that no longer exist today.

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128 Marcel Noack was born in Bad Muskau in 1980 but he and his family left their village and moved to the Leipzig area to study. Noack completed a degree in Fine Arts from 2002 to 2010. In 2008, he spent a year abroad at the University of Barcelona. He has had a number of teaching workshops, solo and group exhibitions. Noack is a member of the _Bund Bildender der Künstler: Landesvorstand und Landesausschuss Mitglied_ and the _Deutsche Gesellschaft für Photographie, DGPh_. All quotations are from our interview in Leipzig on January 19, 2018. Conducted in English.
The hand-drawn map included locations and sites that were especially important to Sorbian culture. The four panoramic images were taken of different places in the Lausitz. One was made up of six panels, one of three, and the last two of four. The boxes contained photographs that were sorted according to topic (such as “nature” or “home”) and, on the back of each photograph, there was a description in German and in Sorbian, as shown below.

Noack explained on his website that “ein Innen und ein Außen wird erfahrbar; aber nie zur gleichen Zeit. Entweder betrachte ich das Bild oder lese den Text und orientiere mich an der Karte des Tisches” (“An inside and an outside can be experienced; but never at the same time. Either I look at..."
the picture or read the text and orient myself by the map on the table”). Furthermore, the visitor had to read all of the texts to understand the translations or difference in translations; according to Noack, one could not simply read one or two cards and understand the full meaning. For him, this, in and of itself, was representative of the Sorbian experience over time: day to day, their loss of land and culture was less noticeable, but it became very clear when viewed over generations.

Noack’s combination of panoramic views and single photographic shots reflected his two approaches to the topic: “I want to make people feel like I did when taking these pictures.” Noack tried to show a subjective and a more personal perspective with the individual photographs. The following two images are some examples:

Figure 5-7. Image of a door with different Sorbian license plates over time (left). A commemorative piles of rocks with the writing “Wolfs Stein seit d.14 Decbr. 1845” (Wolf’s Stone since the 14th of December 1845) (right).

Both photographs were taken at a certain time and place, yet they communicate a narrative and a period of time outside their own historical context. The door with Sorbian village license plates,

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identifiable by their lettering, suggests years of habitation and of progress. The rock pile implies a connection to the inscription as well as to the stone itself. In many ways, Noack has captured a story-within-a-story. He has changed the images into containers or vessels, reminding the audience that memory is “a practice to be enacted and performed variously in different settings.” The photographs have become an extension of a much longer duration and thus represent time, change, and transition.

In contrast, the larger panorama images serve mainly as documentation. Many of these composite pictures are linked together with a road, treeline, or even electrical lines, symbolizing continuity and progression.

As shown in the photographs above, this sense of flow and continuity is then interrupted by the presentation on separate panels. The scene pictured above was one of many areas that were razed as a result of lignite mining. Thus, separating the panels deliberately disrupts the integrity of the image and draws attention to the fact that the landscape shown is an artificial representation, simply an

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131 It is interesting that these electrical lines were transmitting energy produced from coal.
image, but no more. It also distances the viewer by visually fragmenting the land. For Noack, the incongruity underlined by his work is only intensified by “a vanishing countryside, culture and people.” On his website, Noack writes:

Zum einen erscheint die Fotografie als Medium der Erinnerungskonservierung und fortführend als bildhaftes Gedächtnis diese Gebiete. Es beinhaltet somit Sozial- und Kulturgeschichte, Struktur- und Umwälzungsprozesse, mit welchem die nationale Minderheit der Sorben weiterhin konfrontiert ist und ermöglicht zeitgleich eine Verknüpfung von Gegenwart und Vergangenheit.132

(On the one hand, photography appears as a medium of memory preservation and continues as pictorial memory of this area. It thus includes social and cultural history, structural and transformative processes, with which the national minority of the Sorbs continues to be confronted, and at the same time enables a linkage between the present and the past).

What drives Noack is “wanting to speak with people and wanting to understand everything.” He wants his audience to be moved and to feel - in terms that are both emotional and somatic. The most important part of the archive was its interactive component, embodied in the images, booklets, maps, and boxes. “Das Struga Archiv ist Ziel und Methode zugleich. Es verbindet durch die Kategorisierung der Bilder - abgebildet auf den Archivbildern - die Bilder selbst zueinander, ist selbstreferenziell”133 (“The Struga Archive is simultaneously the end and the means. Through the categorization of the images - pictured on the archive images - it connects the images to each other, is self-referential”). Not only do Noack’s photographs connect with each other, they also allow the audience to connect with a people and a community that once was. His archival project enables this in two ways: first, the physical act of digging for knowledge by reading through the material is

symbolic of the excavation process of coal mining; and second, the unearthing of cultural resources becomes a way of reclaiming a buried past.

Jürgen Matschie

From 1979 until 1987, Jürgen Matschie’s work focused exclusively on Sorbian culture. For him, photography is not merely aesthetic but a key form of documentation and “Selbstfindung, Selbstreflektion” (“self-discovery, self-reflection”). Matschie, like Noack, explained how, growing up, lignite had always been a part of his life - whether he was trying to comprehend the massive open-cast mines as a boy, studying industrial machinery as a young man, or taking photos of destroyed Sorbian villages as an adult. In the introduction to his book, he recalled one of his earliest experiences with coal:


([The open-cast mine was] a huge, deep hole, more of a cut. The people and trains down there like toys. For the devices and the extent I had no scale. Even decades later, I can remember exactly the uncanny feeling that came over me when, as a

134 Jürgen Matschie was born in a Sorbian community north of Bautzen in 1953. From 1969 to 1979 he studied engineering and technology in Görlitz but realized he wanted to pursue photography, which he did at the Fotografie Fernstudium an der Hochschule für Grafik und Buchkunst Leipzig (Photography studies at the Academy of Visual Arts Leipzig) from 1983 until 1986. Since 1988 he has been a freelance photographer. Matschie associates his documentary approach with the teachings of the Düsseldorf School of Bernd (1931-2007) and Hilla Becher (1935-2015). In 1996 he was appointed to the German Society for Photography, Cologne and in 2000 he won an art prize for the Upper Laustitz. Matschie currently lives and works in Bautzen. All quotations are from our interview in Bautzen on January 9, 2018. Conducted in German with my English translations.

nine-year-old boy, I looked from the edge of the pit into the deep coal mine. We had ridden our bikes to Lohsa for the school’s hiking day. The whole class stood there and looked into the open pit on the outskirts. I knew brown coal from the cellar at home. It lay in large lumps, sometimes like wood or earth, next to the briquettes. It was not so easy to get it into the oven and it burned worse).

Like other artists examined in this study, Matschie was drawn in by the sheer size and oppressive atmosphere of the open-cast mines; yet he addressed the topic “nicht als Künstler sondern Dokumentarist” (“not as an artist but a documentarian”). This understanding is conveyed in his images of the mines:

Figure 5-9. A miner in the Nochten open-cast mine in 1989 (top). Industrial machinery and miners in the open-cast mine Jänschwalde in 1985 (left) and open-cast mine Nochten in 1989 (right). Additional images can be found in the appendix.

In these examples, Matschie depicts the small and familiar briquettes of coal he had burned in his childhood home with their origins in the formidable landscape that had so deeply impacted him.
Unlike the works included in the first cohort of artists, Matschie incorporates people in the environment, focusing on their work in the mines as natural and routine. His emphasis on the inclusion of the population of miners and members of the community is carried throughout several of his photographs and reminds the audience of who these people were and the lives they once led.

Matschie’s fascination with the environment and the machinery was deepened by an intimate and personal connection with the people who worked them. He stated that: “Einerseits ist die Kohleindustrie mit den Tagebauen, den Brikettfabriken, den Kraftwerken der Arbeitgeber für tausende Menschen in der Lausitz, andererseits bedeutet die extensive Ausbeutung des Bodens den Verlust von Heimat”\textsuperscript{136} (“On the one hand, the coal industry, with its open-pit mines, briquette factories and power plants, is the employer for thousands of people in Lusatia; on the other hand, the extensive exploitation of land means the loss of home”).

It is this loss of home that forms the central focus of Matschie’s photography. His work became “eine Existenzfrage und ein Verlangen nach einer Verbindung und beziehung dazu haben” (“a question of existence and a desire for a connection and relationship to it”). He states:

Was bedeutet es für das Dorf, die Menschen, in Nachbarschaft mit dem Tagebau zu leben? Ein Leben mit dem Wissen, auch einmal betroffen zu sein, Haus und Hof aufgeben zu müssen. Später, nach der Kohle, ist nichts mehr da davon. Das Neue ist eine Notlösung, alles nur Ersatz für den Verlust von Heimat und Geschichte.\textsuperscript{137}

(What does it mean for the village, the people, to live in close proximity to the open-cast mine? A life with the knowledge, that one will someday be affected as well, have to give up home and farm. Later, after the coal, nothing is left of it. The new is an emergency solution, a mere substitute for the loss of home and history).

\textsuperscript{136} Jürgen Matschie and Měrana Cušcyna, \textit{Brunica: Leben mit der Kohle} (Bautzen: Domowina-Verlag, 2011), 8. English translation (mine)
\textsuperscript{137} Jürgen Matschie and Měrana Cušcyna, \textit{Brunica: Leben mit der Kohle}, 7. English translation (mine)
Matschie’s photographs address what was lost - especially the people who inhabited the region and who, like the coal itself, were removed and sent away. In doing so, Matschie returns a sense of being to the villages and towns that once constituted entire communities and cultures. This is seen in the following images, which are part of his collections of works entitled *Doma: Fotografien aus der Lausitz* (*Doma: Photography from the Lausitz*) and *Brunica - Leben mit der Kohle* (*Brunica: Life with Coal*).\(^{138}\)

![Figure 5-10. Image titled *Auf der Dorfstraße Grötsch* (On the village street Grötsch) taken in 1987 (left) and *Im eigenen Haus* (in one’s own home), taken in the village of Weißagk in 1985 (right).](image)

These photographs are now historical artifacts; the town of Weißagk was demolished in 1985 and the eastern part of Grötsch was demolished in 1993 due to the Jänschwalde mine expansion. The audience is confronted with how the man and woman might have felt standing in their own home one more time before its destruction. The stark contrast between the village festivities and the couple’s final moments are meant to shock the reader. Just as Matschie’s earlier question asked what it meant to live next to an open-cast mine, these images serve as a reminder of what that mine displaced and of the human cost incurred, which was permanent and irrevocable.

Matschie’s series goes beyond typical “before-and-after” photography because it disrupts the linear narrative and draws a deeper connection between the environment and the changes taking

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\(^{138}\) *Doma* is the Sorbian word for “At home” and *Brunica* is the Sorbian word for “Brown coal.” Matschie explained during his interview that he always enjoyed *Wortspiel* or the play-on-words, which he included in the title of his works.
place within it over time. Much like Noack’s story-within-a-story, Matschie’s technique illustrates a larger chronicle. The photographic series focused on development adds a layer of subjectivity and fluidity, showing an “unseen time [that] provide temporal spaces for viewers to fill with their own narratives, given the interpretive framework.”\(^{139}\) In doing so, Matschie suggests there is more than one way of understanding the past and there are stories “located both inside and outside the picture frame.”\(^{140}\)

![Figure 5-11. The development series of “Grötsch” taken between 1987 and 2005.](image)

The slow degradation of the houses between the first and second photograph is reinforced by the third, in which houses no longer appear. The viewer is forced to consider what is omitted - perhaps the experiences of the couple pictured in *Im eigenen Haus*, which likely occurred to many residents. The fourth and final image of the series, showing the open-cast mine, completes the story by demonstrating the eradication of the previous homes.

In addition to documenting the progression of time and landscape, Matschie also employs techniques of photojournalism. He captured moments of protest against village demolition in the following images:


Although this subject matter can be considered political, Matschie’s images most urgently communicate agency and empathy. His work articulates a range of stories and histories, while insisting that each is unique and distinct and must be considered and respected on its own terms.

*Christina Glanz*[^141]

Christina Glanz’s work approaches the question of lost communities in a different way. Her work in the Lauchhammer (a region in the Lausitz) lasted two years - a duration in which she grew close to the local residents and miners. She explained how they would see her every day, carrying her

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[^141]: Christina Glanz was born in 1946 in Eichsfeld, a rural region in Thuringia but moved to Berlin when she was 11 years old. From 1966 to 1972 she studied architecture at the *Technischen Universität Dresden* (Technical University of Dresden) but transitioned to photography. Eventually Glanz accepted a research internship in architecture and photography at the *Kunsthochschule Berlin-Weissensee* (Berlin Weissensee School of Art), which lasted from 1979 to 1981. She was part of the GDR’s *Verband Bildender Künstler* (Association of Visual Artists) and has been a freelance photographer since 1981. She has held both solo and group exhibitions throughout Germany including the Lausitz, Frankfurt, and Berlin and has photographs held in the *Photographische Sammlung der Brandenburgischen Kunstsammlungen Cottbus* (Photographic collection of the Brandenburg Art Collection Cottbus), Deutsches Historisches Museum (German History Museum), and *Internationale Bautenstiftung Fürst-Pückler-Land* (International Building Exhibition Fürst-Pückler-Land). From 2010 to 2012 her exhibit *Die letzte Schicht* (*The last shift*), was held in the *Sächsisches Industriemuseum Knappenrode* (Saxony Industry Museum Knappenrode). Additional images of industrial architecture are included in the appendix. All quotations are from our interview in Berlin on January 22, 2018. Conducted in German with my English translations.
large camera in a handcart. Her determination soon won their respect and admiration; sometimes they would even offer to help carry her equipment.

Glanz emphasizes this relationship she had with the miners that was built on her time in the region and that becomes evident in her work. For example, she has a series of photos called *Kohle Frauen* (*Coal Women*), where she took photographs of the headscarves of female workers in the factories. Each scarf was a different color, pattern, and size, and each had a different history. When she met new people, Glanz would often conduct interviews and took a personal interest in what each person had to say. Below are portraits of these coal women.

![Figure 5-1. Two example images of female miners from the Lauchhammer as part of Glanz’s portrait series.](image)

The snapshots of the miners are stylized in black-and-white and offer a singular representation captured in the moment. Echoing post-World War II images of the *Trümmerfrauen*, the women in these two photographs are working in rubble-like conditions that one would not naturally associate with women. Like the *Trümmerfrauen*, they are also attempting to contribute to Germany’s well-being, despite their seemingly inhospitable environment. Glanz shows that these women are not

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142 *Trümmerfrau* imagery refers to the women who cleared rubble from the streets in Germany after World War II. To read more see Leonie Treber’s *Mythos Trümmerfrauen: Von der Trümmerbeseitigung in der Kriegs- und Nachkriegszeit und der Entstehung eines deutschen Erinnerungsortes.*
uncomfortable with the work they are doing, but instead feel a certain connection to and derive a sense of purpose from it. For them, and for the miners as a whole, losing their jobs as a result of the coal-exit signified the loss of all that was normal and ordinary. Glanz reflected how one woman she interviewed, after being dismissed from a briquette factory, was overcome with a sense of aimlessness: “ich weiß gar nicht was ich machen soll” (“I do not know what to do”).

Glanz noted that, throughout her time in the Lauchhammer, the biggest surprise was how much people loved their work. Whereas Glanz was often forced to carry her camera around in a plastic bag to protect it from the environment, the miners accepted and embraced the dust and soot as a natural part of their surroundings. She recalled how, at the end of a long shift, workers would clean themselves up and celebrate the end of a productive work day. One woman she interviewed said: “Unsere Arbeit war schwer, unsere Arbeit war schmutzig und doch war diese Arbeit unser Leben” (“our work was difficult, our work was dirty and yet this work was our life”). Like many others, Glanz noted how the workers were “stolz auf diese Arbeit, es war die größte Erfahrung” (“proud of this work, it was their greatest experience”). It is this dignity and gratification that Glanz tries to capture in her photography. Unlike other colleagues, she did not focus primarily on the open-cast mines, as she felt it was already a commonly sensationalized topic.

Glanz created the exhibit *Die Kündigung (The Dismissal)*, for which she took photographs of 64 briquette factory workers who were laid off on January 28, 1993 as part of the factory's closure. On her website, she writes:

\[\text{An die Situation selbst erinnere ich mich noch ganz deutlich. Der Meister saß am Tisch in einem sehr kleinen Büro und gab den Eintretenden jeweils ihren Entlassungsbrief, den er einem Pappkarton entnahm. Es wurde unterschrieben, und man ging mit dem Brief aus dem Büro. Bevor sie den Ort verließen, fotografierte ich diejenigen, die sich dazu bereitfanden.}\]

(I still remember the situation clearly. The manager was sitting at a table in a very small office. He handed the letter of dismissal, which he took from a cardboard box, to every person entering. They signed and left the office with the letter. Before they left the place, I took pictures of those who agreed to it).

This was a memory that Glanz has never forgotten and discussed in detail during our interview. “Sie haben ihre Fabriken verloren und alles verloren, es gab keine Arbeit mehr” (“They lost their factories and they lost everything, there was no work left”). The images from the series articulate her preoccupation with the individuals’ fates:

![Three photographs of miners immediately after receiving their notice of dismissal.](image)

Figure 5-2. Three photographs of miners immediately after receiving their notice of dismissal.

These three examples encapsulate the distress, pain, and perhaps betrayal experienced by the miners. Certainly, there is a tension between the intrusion represented by the photographer’s presence and the subjects’ willingness to document this pivotal event in their lives. The images convey their sense of powerlessness, yet Glanz has captured a historical moment, creating “the emotional and metaphysical appeal of presence [that] enhances the power of the image as a historical document.”

By agreeing to be photographed, the miners were expressing a kind of agency that was otherwise

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taken from them. Her photographs not only preserve a moment in time, but also allow the audience to imagine and re-imagine their own interpretations of what happened and even to put themselves in the subject’s place.

The images later became part of a larger exhibit called *Die Letzte Schicht (The Last Shift)*, where Glanz also included group photographs of miners in their last minutes working at the briquette factory.

![Image](image_url)

**Figure 5-3.** One example group shot from *Die Letzte Schicht* series.

The group photographs are implicitly a construction of memory, becoming, in a way, a testament to what happened and to whom. In one image, Glanz captures several different histories, experiences, and stories. Her photographic narration gives the audience “a sense of the past, anchored also in concepts of place and locality, and the kinds of knowledge that might be drawn from them.”

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145 Olga Shevchenko, *Double Exposure: Memory & Photography*, 204.
fact, the entire notion of “the shift” recalls East German solidarity and community - a social structure perceived as coming to an end with reunification and the end of the East German state.

Following her work with the miners, Glanz subsequently created a series of photographs from the Enkelgeneration (Grandchild Generation). Whereas most of the images from the Lauchhammer were in black and white, those of the grandchildren are in color, providing a more vivid and immediate portrayal of the younger generation. The former signify the past as something that was captured in a previous era, while the latter represent life and continuity.

Figure 5-4. Two photographs from Glanz’s series Enkelgeneration that portrayed the grandchildren of the miners she had previously photographed.

These examples reconstruct an identity for members of a once vital community and offer continuity between past and present generations,\textsuperscript{146} which did not end with the destruction of the mines or with the coal-exit. Although the miners themselves suffered deeply, it was a sacrifice that ensured the health and safety of subsequent generations. Glanz wants her audience to react in a specific way:

“Die Geschichte und auch die Schönheit der Menschen zu sehen und nachzudenken” (‘To see the history and also the beauty of the people and to think’). For her, honoring the miners’ work is not about artificial lakes or tourism—topics of which she is skeptical—but rather about emphasizing their humanity and their legacy.

5.2 Conclusions

Noack, Matschie, and Glanz’s memorialization is a form of resistance and self-preservation, insisting on bearing witness, while also demanding a “right to exist.” For Noack, art was a direct response to his own disappearing identity. By taking photographs of a landscape that no longer exists, Noack was able to construct an association and link to a culture that was increasingly threatened over time. Noack’s archival exhibit embodied this connection: excavating knowledge represents both the act of piecing together his personal history and preserving a broader historical context. Likewise, Matschie’s work stems from a similar understanding of photography as a medium of documentation and conservation. His images convey a story of the Sorbian communities and the devastation they endured and of the miners, industrial machinery, and broken landscapes that resulted. Glanz’s focus on the coal miners emphasizes both the joy and the trauma produced by coal mining and the coal-exit. Yet remembrance is not only about the past and its losses, but also the present and the legacy it represents. Glanz’s work stresses the notion of continuity, engaging the miners’ grandchildren with a view toward a better future.

Although the artwork in this chapter is an attempt to reclaim a past and articulate a discourse that was defining to so many in the Lausitz and beyond, this final chapter also communicates a

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narrative that would otherwise have remained untold. Both coal mining and the coal-exit have led to
the loss of heritage and culture, a loss that has been unacknowledged and forgotten. The
photographs examined in this chapter act as memorials to a collective memory in which justice,
reconciliation, forgiveness, and remembrance become possible. And yet there remains an inherent
paradox.

The inclusion of these works focusing on the Sorbian communities and the miners in the
same chapter—two groups seemingly in contention—aims to underline their similar experiences of
dispossession. The artists here draw attention to the people’s lives and experiences, endowing them
and their sorrow with dignity. Representing them is a way to both memorialize and respect them.
Nevertheless, there is an undeniable tension between the two groups that is apparent when they are
presented together. Art not only communicates the devastation caused by coal mining and the
coal-exit, but also illustrates that the two are inherently linked. Although the loss felt by the miners is
undeniable, it is critical to remember that they were part of a system that created trauma for their
own community and others. Observing the despair of the miners alongside that of the Sorbian
communities does not suggest the continuation of mining as a solution, but rather confirms that
exiting from coal is necessary. The representation of these experiences of loss through art allows us
to engage with the miners and the Sorbians as human beings in pain while also accepting that
reconciliation may not be possible.

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148 Lisa M. Moore, “(Re)covering the Past, Remembering Trauma: The Politics of Commemoration at Sites of Atrocity,”
Conclusion

During my time in the Lausitz, I saw first-hand some of the real problems individuals and communities must confront and overcome in trying to move forward from the Kohleausstieg. Yet it was the creative ways in which people addressed such painful challenges and the lessons they learned that convinced me of the hope and determination that remain. Individually, the artists represented in this study have emphasized different aspects of the coal industry and the subsequent exit from coal. Collectively, these artists insist that we must acknowledge, remember, and honor these individuals for who they were and what they contributed at a particular and vital part of Germany’s history. They provide a more complete and comprehensive narrative that is, and must remain, a part of Germany’s future.

The relationship between lignite mining and the Lausitz is a complex one. We must therefore consider the economic, social, and political contexts that came to define the coal industry and coal-exit. Although coal mining was less prevalent prior to World War II in eastern Germany (in comparison to the Ruhr region in the west), the country’s division in 1945 and the massive expansion of lignite under the German Democratic Republic revolutionized it as a vital industry. Economic and political pressure compelled the GDR to export high amounts of coal to other Eastern Bloc countries as a way of competing with the West. Therefore, coal and coal miners were a prominent part of the national narrative until reunification in 1989.

Coal mining once shaped regional policy, but the transition from a planned economy to a free market one represented a dramatic change. The Kohleausstieg particularly impacted mining communities in eastern Germany. People’s identities were closely linked to their work in the mines; it was not just a source of income, but a source of pride from which they derived great meaning and
purpose. And, while there were many positive consequences of the coal exit—e.g., increased environmental quality, better public health standards, and government subsidized programs—they were not enough to lessen the shock and grief associated with the region’s transformation. The Lausitz remains a predominantly blue-collar region to this day, whose decline in population and lower economic output were products of reunification. The process of phasing out coal, which deeped the demographic and economic decline, is fraught, posing many challenges, not the least of which is societal.

The Kohleausstieg created emotional loss in part because there was no space to discuss its social and psychological dimensions. In many ways, the miners themselves and the forgotten communities in which they lived have come to represent a broader loss of something that was once an integral part of Germany. The coal-exit produced enormous upheaval and pain for many, much of it locked away with other components of Germany’s past. Embedded in the coal-exit was a message that condemned the miners for the work they had done and, for some, continue to do; certainly, given this, there is no chance of acknowledging the important role they played in Germany’s economic development. Yet each of the artists examined in this study was compelled to unlock and engage with this history, which others preferred to forget.

There are three key themes that the artists examined in this thesis convey: an environment without people, the potential for a new future, and the reclamation of a forgotten history. The first group of artists exposed the barren landscape that characterized the Lausitz. The images of what resulted after decades of coal mining are immediate and real. Yet these artists discovered their own kind of beauty in, and appreciation of, the environment, embracing, as beauty, not only its emptiness, but also its mystery. At the same time, the images unsettle the viewer, never allowing her
to forget that these aestheticized subjects are actually open-cast mines that represent ecological and social destruction.

The second group of artists seeks to return people to the environment by imbuing the land with a new purpose. The decaying mining structures and forgotten coal communities symbolized the region’s desolation that resulted from both the mining industry and the coal-exit. These artists aim to restore and rehabilitate the natural landscape by integrating the region’s industrial and mining past into present and future opportunities. Their works, many of them performative and interactive, are characterized by a sense of optimism and try to redefine a framework for understanding the Lausitz and the people who once lived (and continue to live) there. At the same time, these artists have, perhaps unintentionally, diminished the legacy of destruction from the coal industry and the coal-exit that was and will remain.

The third group of works suggests that the optimism about the future is to some degree misplaced. These artists embrace the communities and miners impacted by the coal industry and coal-exit, respectively. Both groups experienced a cultural and societal loss that went unacknowledged. By addressing this loss and the forgotten history that accompanies it, these artists uncover conflicts in lived realities and histories that may never be resolved. Yet by engaging with and representing the past—as the artists here attempt to do—they give voice to dispossessed populations. Like Noack’s archival exhibit, the search for knowledge is an act of empowerment, restoring agency to both the viewer and the subject of the art.

The artists examined in this study have given us a unique perspective on the coal industry and the coal-exit and a way of understanding both of their effects. Their works expose the loss and grief that found little expression elsewhere. Especially when viewed as a whole, the artworks
examined reveal a complexity that acknowledges this suffering and suggests a way forward beyond
the harm inflicted.

Returning to the quotation from Adrienne Rich about “the power of art to break despair,” this study has argued that art is a compelling medium for engaging with communities. Art cannot change the realities caused by first the coal industry and later the coal-exit; it cannot repair the environment, restore the razed communities, or return the miners to their jobs. What it can do, however, is expose these issues and represent them in ways that are sometimes more persuasive than words. It reveals these events within an historical context and as a lived experience not one’s own. In this way, art carries the power to break despair: not by undoing loss, but by endowing it with meaning and ensuring its acknowledgment.

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Appendix of Images


Three of Baschlakow’s untitled images taken during his time in the Lausitz. During our interview, Baschlakow shared several of his original photographs, including the above examples. I will never forget the meticulous care with which he pulled out the containers and put on white cloth gloves to handle them.
Both paintings were created using stencils on carbon paper. Kohle, size 198 x 107 cm (left). Kohle III, size 102 x 81 cm (right). Becher had shown me the original paintings in her studio in Berlin. She had several industrial-focused works that were not limited to coal mining.
Bergbauer explained that this image was of a burned cornfield a few weeks after a rainstorm. He recalled how people thought the above image was of a large mountain top. One person had referred to the small white dots scattered throughout the green and asked if there were sheep. In reality they were actually left-over pieces of corn from the fields.

Two additional examples of Berbauer’s “mountain tops.”
Glanz, Christina. *Lauchhammer*. Personal Website. Accessed March 10, 2018

Two examples from her collection of photographs depicting industrial architecture.
http://michaelkruscha.de/portfolio/paintings/mental-maps/.

transformation, 2011, (1.60 x 2.00m) acrylic on canvas (left) and o.T., 2016, (1.10 x 1.60m) acrylic on canvas (right). Kruscha showed me the original paintings during our interview in his apartment. Some were already in bubble wrap in preparation for an exhibit he was hosting in Senftenberg beginning in February 2018.

sinfonie der lausitz, 2011, (1.60 x 2.00m) acrylic on canvas.

These images were from his collection of works exclusively on Sorbian culture. They are from the villages of Seidewinkle in 1990 (left) and Rosenthal in 1990 (right).


From Matschie’s collection, *Brunica: Leben mit der Kohle*, these three photographs are clearly more aestheticized and could easily have been included in Chapter 3. They show the open-cast mine Jänschwalde 1985 (left), a conveyor bridge from the Welzow-Süd mine in 2001 (middle) and the open-cast mine Cottbus-Nord 1985 (right).

Aerial photograph of open-cast mine Espenhain in 1994.