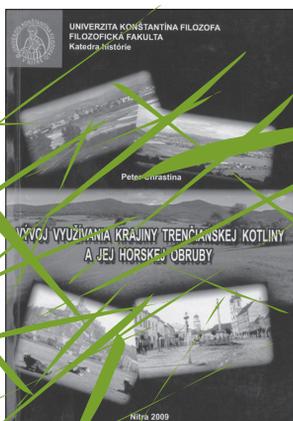


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Geneviève Massard-Guilbaud
Histoire de la pollution industrielle. France, 1789-1914
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This book by Geneviève Massard-Guilbaud – Directrice d'études at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales in Paris and President of the European Society for Environmental History – reconstructs and analyses the history of industrial pollution in France from the French Revolution (1789) to the outbreak of the First World War (1914). The first chapter is devoted to the progressive development of French industry and the consequent approval of legislative measures (notably the decree of October 1810) aimed at regulating industrial emissions: the author demonstrates that France may be regarded as the first European country to pass a legislation whose specific aim was to protect the health of its citizens from the obnoxious effects of industrial fumes. Chapter Two deals with citizens' reactions in the face of the discomforts caused by industrial activities. By reading on we discover that the main causes of discomfort were bad smells and noise. Especially interesting is the paragraph "Visions de l'urbain", where the author notes how the acronym NIMBY (Not In My BackYard) – coined at the end of the 20th century to describe opposition by residents to plans to build new infrastructure (incinerators, wind turbines, power plants...) in the neighborhood – perfectly fits the 19th century too («Vous me

répondrez, Monsieur le Maire, qu'il faut bien que ces établissements soient quelque part. Cela est vrai, mais il y a d'autres quartiers qui ont déjà été sacrifiés», p. 98-99). The third chapter deals with the complex relationships between industrialists, builders (the paragraph title « L'industrie confrontée à la spéculation foncière et immobilière » is eloquent enough), and political decision makers (« Entre le marteau et l'enclume: les maires »). Chapter Four is devoted to physicians and engineers. The author examines the development of scientific knowledge on pollution and its reception among the state bureaucracy (« Les corps techniques de l'état face à l'industrie privée », p. 191-201). Highly interesting are the paragraphs dedicated to boards for hygiene (*conseils d'hygiène*), which the author rehabilitates – albeit highlighting their shortcomings and inclination to favour the interests of industrialists –, arguing that their action was more commendable than what had been attempted earlier on (*Retour sur l'histoire des conseils d'hygiène*, p. 170-171). The fifth chapter is devoted to literature and knowledge about public health (especially in handbooks and scientific journals, such as Montfalcon and Polinière's *Traité de salubrité*, Freycinet's *Traité d'assainissement*, and Layet's *Hygiène industrielle*), and to the relationship between pollution and the production of vitriol. The sixth chapter addresses the relationship between scientists and a nomenclature established by the State to classify industries according to their degree of insalubrity. Interestingly, inclusion in this nomenclature was required for an industry to obtain permission to produce; however, it was common practice to rank new industries low in the nomenclature, which was an advantage since a low ranking indicated low risk of production processes. The reasons for the ranking of industries in the nomenclature are also worthy of interest: out of 558 cases examined in 1886, about 205 concerned smells, 105 the risk of fire or explosion, 68 smoke, and only 30 (5.38 per cent) water pollution (*Quelles Nuisances, causées par quelles industries?*, p. 273-277).

The seventh chapter is devoted to issues of regulation enforcement. The sections dedicated to the role of prefects and industrialists are especially interesting (*Les industriels: une résistance économique mais aussi culturelle*, p. 330-331). Finally, the book closes with a substantial bibliography and list of sources.

The author's conclusions are not negative, and thus contrast with those of Bill Luckin, who in his essay "Pollution in the city", published in the third volume of the *Cambridge Urban History*, dismisses as an utter failure the results of British anti-pollution policies of the Victorian

and Edwardian periods. The regulatory measures experimented with in France, argues Massard-Guilbaud, were successful to a certain degree, as they somehow managed to convince industrialists (even the small and very small ones) that the activities of their plants must conform with a certain number of rules regarding the health of industrial processes and the safeguarding of hygiene.

The author also stresses that industry obeys to a logic and time rhythms that are different from the State's. Industrialists were thus forced to disregard the rules of the 1810 decree to avoid plunging their businesses into certain deficit.

Massard-Guilbaud's book adds new lymph to urban environmental history, which by now is a consolidated research sector, with an enormous bibliography. Her *Histoire de la pollution industrielle* adopts the main analytical categories of urban environmental history: the importance and role of technology, the notions of "sanitary city" and of nature-city metabolism, urban sustainability, and environmental justice. Massard-Guilbaud effectively employs these categories to perform a complex and effective analysis, which clarifies concepts already expressed in the book *Le démon moderne* (2002), which she coedited with Christoph Bernhardt: between the 18th and the beginning of the 20th centuries, the history of urban industrial pollution was strongly influenced by hygienistic culture and the intervention of the State through legislation regarding unsanitary industries. Problems of industrial pollution were faced essentially by trying to mediate between the demands of industrialists and the need to guarantee acceptable hygienic conditions. The French case seems to confirm that for a long period of time the struggle against pollution was conducted on the basis of the theories of hygienists and physicians, on the one hand, and engineers, on the other, without an adequate understanding of the ecological dimension of the problem.

In conclusion, *Histoire de la pollution industrielle* also confirms some peculiarities of European urban environmental historians who study urban pollution in connection with industrialisation and the concentration of great numbers of people in cities: the preference for the long term – and here the influence of Braudel and the *Annales* school is evident – and the preference accorded to the centuries before the 20th, which is itself rarely researched beyond the 1950s (cf., for example, B. Luckin, *Pollution and Control: A social history of the Thames in the nineteenth century*, 1986; P. Brimblecombe, *The Big Smoke: A history of air pollution in London since medieval times*, 1987; S. Mosley, *The Chimney*

of the World: A history of smoke pollution in Victorian and Edwardian Manchester, 2001; A. Guillerme, A. Lefort, G. Jigaudon, *Dangereux, insalubres et incommodes. Paysages industriels en banlieue parisienne XIX-XX Siècles*, 2004; F. Uekoetter, *The Age of Smoke: Environmental policy in Germany and the United States 1880-1970*, 2009).

