Re-read:

"Environmental Histories of the Cold War"

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One field that has practically remained a blank slate in German research on the Cold War is environmental history. The use of chemical weapons in Vietnam and nuclear testing in general are but two illustrations of the obvious fact that this global conflict of systems also had effects on the environment. Nevertheless, as John McNeill and Corinna Unger argue in their collected volume "Environmental Histories of the Cold War", Cold War historians and environmental historians "have almost completely ignored one another's work [...] like two ships passing in the night." (p. 4)

The volume demonstrates the value of writing an environmental history of the Cold War. This concerns, firstly, environmental damage and the securing and monopolization of commodities that the military-industrial-academic complexes in the United States and, probably even more so, the socialist states subordinated to the systemic conflict. Both Paul Josephson's essay on the exploitation of natural resources in the Soviet Union and a paper by Mark Merlin and Ricardo Gonzalez on the effects of US, British and French nuclear testing in Oceania underscore this. The anthology also focuses on the field of science and expertise: Meteorology and climate research gained new impetus through the conflict, as essays by Kristine Harper and Ronald Doel as well as

Matthew Farish demonstrate with regard to the US and India. Space- and satellite research, which became a matter of prestige between East and West with the so-called Sputnik Shock, yielded images of Earth as a fragile planet, honing people's awareness of the environment and facilitating the nascent ecological movement. Indeed – this third aspect is a bit short-changed in the volume – the environmental and peace movements overlapped in the societal protests against the threat of nuclear destruction. Basically – this would be a fourth aspect – around 1970 environmental damage came more strongly into focus within "advanced industrial societies," and détente introduced the subject of the environment into an East-West dialogue, e.g. within the CSCE framework, as Kai Hünemörder shows in his essay on the "soft politics" of détente. Fifth, we could ask what significance the end of the Cold War had on environmental history. Frank Uekötter argues that the end of the conflict produced only a "half-hearted turning point" (p. 350) for environmental history: the Earth Summit, the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro, proclaimed the new ideal of "sustainable development" and sparked new activism, yet failed to produce fundamental changes in international environmental policy or lifestyles in northern societies.

It seems important to focus even more on the perceptions and defined interests in East and West in the 1970s and 1980s, at the intersection of environmental policy, environmental science and social movements, to explore how both sides assessed modern industrialized society and its effects on ecosystems in the period of "reflexive modernity," how they dealt with the associated global expansion of perspectives and what role

the Global South played in this process. This, too, opens an important perspective on the frontiers of the Cold War. McNeill and Unger's book provides the necessary foundations.

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