

“A Plague Of Wild Boars”
Heinz Meynhardt, *Kulturlandschaft*, and Nature in East Germany
(Paper Presented to the Program in Agrarian Studies Colloquium Series)

For more than twenty years Helmut Arndt and his family had spent their precious summer vacation camping in the woods around shores of the lake Müggelsee, approximately twenty kilometers south east of Berlin, at the edge of the city’s suburban sprawl. Just a short trip beyond the working class neighborhoods of Friedrichshain, Lichtenberg, and Kaulsdorf, the lake and surrounding areas served as a popular destination for many Berliners during the existence of the German Democratic Republic (GDR). Müggelsee’s wooded landscape contrasted sharply not only with the concrete order of Berlin’s city streets to the west and north, but also with the vast fields of the country’s collective farms to the east and south. Here both rural and urban residents flocked to hike along wooded trails or to swim and fish in cool waters.

The Arndts were one of thousands of families who would convene weeklong retreats in any one of the dozens of small villages, garden colonies, and campgrounds spread across the lake-district. Of all the activities and events at Müggelsee, the Arndts most looked forward to their daily cook-outs. Yet one summer, in July of 1988, their vacation, as well as precious supply of grilling meats and vegetables, was ruined. As Arndt described in an angry letter to the Berlin authorities,

In the past week, we and over one hundred other campers were infested by a herd of wild boars. There were two sows and more than twenty of their offspring, which invaded our campsite twice almost every night. They were drawn to the site not by our potatoes or bread, but rather by our meat and *wurst* products. They rummaged through our coolers with unfailing certainty, to a degree that would surprise even Prof. Meinhard [sic].¹

¹ LAB C Rep. 112 Nr. 240, p. -. Magistrat von Berlin, Abteilung Land-, Forst- und Nahrungsgüterwirtschaft. Wildschwein Plage (1978-89). Helmut Arndt, Berlin, writing to the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry, July 17, 1988.

This was not the first time wild boars had caused problems for Arndt. For several years he, like many other East Germans, had petitioned the state for greater animal control around Müggelsee—more traps, more organized hunts—and even purchased insurance to protect his camping gear from boars. Yet nothing had changed. Worst of all for Arndt, “the relaxation value [of the trip] had been zero,” since he had spent the majority of his nights awake, “fearful of what was outside.”²

The wild boar crisis was hardly a state secret and Arndt wasn’t the only East German vexed by their increasingly destructive behavior. Grain farmers reported damaged fields and uprooted crops during the harvest and the harrow. Livestock keepers patrolled their facilities, hoping to prevent any interlopers from spreading disease to their domesticated pigs. Weekend gardeners complained that boars destroyed their fences and tore apart their vegetable patches. While wild boars had been a problem for decades, they had never been quite as bad as they were in 1988. Indeed Arndt pointedly mentioned East Germany’s most preeminent wild boar expert—Prof. “Meinhard”—as if to say to the regime, even the country’s strongest defender of these animals would be amazed by the extent of their destruction.

Prof. Heinz Meynhardt (Meinhard) may indeed have been shocked by the audacity of Arndt’s boars. Between 1974 and 1989 he had written books, produced radio reports, and most importantly, starred in a number of nature films that explored the “natural” and charismatic lives of wild boars for German audiences on both sides of the Iron Curtain. Meynhardt was not a trained biologist, but in fact an amateur naturalist. Modeling his experiments after Jane Goodall’s career amongst “a wild horde of chimpanzees”, he began his life’s work in 1974 when he went into the woods outside

² LAB C Rep. 112 Nr. 240, p. -. Ibid.

Magdeburg to live amongst a group of boars.³ Over the next fifteen years he recorded his observations on everything from their mating habits and social relations, to their dietary preferences and ecological range. In his work, Meynhardt portrayed the wild boar as an intelligent, but notoriously shy and easily spooked creature—the seeming opposite of the rapacious intruders that ransacked Arndt’s campsite. These contradictory images of the wild boar as pest and cultural emblem, however, were both true, and revealed the precarious, dual character of the wild boar in the GDR.

Meynhardt’s first boar study in 1974 and the “infestation” at Müggelsee in 1988 also bracketed a remarkable period of change for East Germany’s wild boars. After centuries of over-hunting and their near total decimation in the first half of the twentieth century, the boar population rose in these two decades to levels unseen in centuries across both Germanys. Meynhardt believed the GDR was lucky to have such a robust population, unlike other European nations like Great Britain or parts of “Scandinavia,” which had decimated their own centuries ago. Yet the greater their numbers, the more problems wild boars caused. During the same period, the country’s agricultural planners introduced sweeping agricultural reforms with an eye toward national grain and meat self-sufficiency. The unprecedented scale and intensity of this industrial development program—known as the Grüneberg Plan—envisioned food cultivation on nearly “every square meter” of land—a project that boars increasingly threatened with their multiplying numbers, bodies and voracious appetites.

While almost all of what East Germans knew of wild boars was the destruction they left in their way, Meynhardt assiduously worked to present the charismatic sides of these animals. On TV sets in both Germanys, Meynhardt rubbed the bellies of enormous wild sows, fed them corn from the back of his Soviet-made Lada, and filmed dozens of

³ Heinz Meynhardt, *Schwarzwild-Report*, etc. Almost all the observations made about Meynhardt in this paper come from this book, which he published at the end of his first four-year research trip in 1978.

striped piglets rustling through leafy underbrush, presenting them as cuddly, social, and intelligent animals. In this context, Meynhardt's work engaged with a complicated debate in the country's newspapers and planning committees over the future of these animals. On the one side, East Germans pitted conceptions of wild boars as economically destructive pests against another, more deeply held view that treasured these snorting, bristly fauna as living heritage. Meynhardt's work, however, was not the stereotypical western-environmentalist call for a prohibition on all killing. From his naturalist's perspective, wild boars and humans shared the same environment and landscapes. Therefore it was up to East Germany, its citizens, and most importantly its hunters to transform wild boars into "socially useful animals." As he wrote in his book:

Many times the question is asked whether wild boars should be considered "useful" or "destructive" animals in our cultural landscape (*Kulturlandschaft*). I believe that they belong...and as my work shows, when hunters maintain realistic population sizes in their reserves and sows are managed within their own ranges through the provisioning of "distraction" fodder, they can be counted as one of the most useful kinds of wild animals.⁴

While the boar's ostensible "usefulness" would determine the animal's future role in the country's natural spaces, the question also revealed a crucial aspect of the East German vision of nature, best described by the term *Kulturlandschaft* or "cultural landscape." This capacious category encapsulated not only the conservation (*Naturschutz*) of wild plants and animals, but also the management of forests, and most importantly, agricultural development. According to this vision, natural ecologies, biota and a variety of human management schemes produced the East German countryside. Instead of the North American wilderness and a division between nature and culture, German cultural landscapes acknowledge the human hand in wild nature. As Hans Stubbe, director of the Forestry School in Eberswalde wrote in 1988, "today we know, that hunting and conservation and all subsections of rural culture pose no contradiction to one another,

⁴ Meynhardt, 11

that they are in fact intertwined with one another, that they serve the well-being of all people, and find in nature the source of all regeneration...”⁵ In this way *Kulturlandschaft* powerfully shaped the ways in which scientists, planners, farmers, and every day East Germans imagined the wild boar problem.

As we will see, scientific forestry, wild life management schemes, and agricultural development directly shaped the local ecosystems and environments that served as ground zero for the wild ungulate irruption of the 1970s and ‘80s. But as Louis Warren has shown, local ecosystems are historically active spaces as well.⁶ They can respond in myriad, unanticipated ways to human interventions and in doing so, ecosystems reshape the very same human cultures that brought them into being in the first place. It was into this type of managed environment that wild boars—the most “weedy” of all wild ungulates—trod, and quickly became active agents in the disruption of East Germany’s *Kulturlandschaft*.⁷

Although scientists, forestry officials, planners, and even Meynhardt, imagined deep woods as the naturally preferred habitat of wild boars, they failed to consider the degree to which their own hands shaped local ecosystems to the benefit of other organisms, like crops, trees, and domesticated livestock. East Germany’s rural landscapes were not dominated by enormous forest stands, but instead by “edge” spaces—kilometer after kilometer of mixed forest and fields. Furthermore, agricultural planners had also urged farmers and everyday East Germans to cultivate “every square meter” of land in the 1970s, including street medians, under power-lines, and on hundreds of thousands of

⁵ Hans-Georg Fink and Christoph Stubbe, *Die Jagd in Der DDR: Ohne Pacht Eine Andere Jagd ; 88 Tabellen*, 2., überarb. und erg. Aufl. ed. (Melsungen: Ed. Nimrod bei JANA, 2006), 281.

⁶ Louis Warren, *Hunter’s Game*:...with his discussion of the local commons in nineteenth century America

⁷ Alfred W. Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900-1900*, Studies in Environment and History (Cambridge [Cambridgeshire] ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 173.; Brett Walker, “Commercial Growth and Environmental Change in Early Modern Japan: Hachinohe’s Wild Boar Famine,” *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 60, No. 2 (May, 2001), pp. 331.

small garden plots. These developed landscapes formed the predominate habitat for wild boars, providing plenty of shelter and food. So by 1988 wild boars could be found across these varied cultural landscapes, like collective farms, but also small forest stands like the ones that stretched from the heart of Berlin to the shores of Müggelsee.

The Cultural Landscape of the Forest

Meynhardt first encountered his wild boars in the fall of 1973, when his friend Rudolf Meseberg—the hunting chairman of a game reserve outside Magdeburg—invited him to help distribute “distraction fodder” in the forest. For many years, wild life managers had used these extra rations of corn, oats, and other grains to lure potentially destructive animals out of the fields of adjacent farms. While Meynhardt immediately took note of the boars’ intelligence and curiosity, he thought little more of them until the following spring when Meseberg related something he had noticed over the previous months. Ever since the two men had fed this group, the same wild boars began appearing alongside his trail through the woods whenever Meseberg and his horse-drawn cart passed through, most likely in anticipation of more “distraction fodder.” Hearing this, Meynhardt seized the opportunity to establish further ties with the boars and accompanied Meseberg on his feeding trips. After only a few weeks, the boars became totally acclimated to Meynhardt’s presence, and so he decided to stay.

Over the next three years, Meynahrtdt spent every single day with the sounder, usually driving his Soviet-made Lada station wagon laden with grain into their range. Once the boars became used to his presence, he was free to sit amongst them, recording their behavior. This included noting feeding, grooming, and mating habits; annotating their social hierarchy; locating their nests; and tracking their daily movements in and out of the reserve. While this was not a perfectly objective experiment, as feeding the animals altered their behavior, the techniques of *Wildfütterung* and “distraction feeding” were common throughout Europe and the GDR. For Meynhardt they allowed him not only to

establish social contact with the animals but also to make broader assessments of forestry and game management in the GDR, as well as the general state of wild boar habitat. Since he cited the lack of high quality “grub” (*Fraß*) as a reason the animals left their ranges so often, his assessment of the country’s forests was very low.

The poor state of East Germany’s forests had begun long before Meynhardt’s experiments in the 1970s. The end of the Second World War marked a particular low point as the movement of armies and then displaced persons across Europe left much of the country destroyed, its rural spaces abandoned, and wild life scattered. The ensuing Soviet Occupation took a bad situation and made it worse as the Soviets packed up factories, machinery, and railroads, but also clear cut thousands of hectares of trees as part of their reparation plans.⁸ Initial wild life estimates were just as bad. Since there had been heavy fighting almost everywhere, wild life had become few and far between in 1945. Soviet soldiers, many of whom had grown up in the countryside as hunters themselves, preyed on the wildlife that remained. With no Nazis left to fight and too many bullets to shoot, many soldiers spent their down-time stalking red and fallow deer, as well as foxes, martens (relative of the weasel), badgers, grouse, and of course, wild boars. As one forest official in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania reported on August 20th, 1945, “The red deer has almost been completely destroyed.”⁹

Nearly a century of mismanagement had also contributed to the poor state of East Germany’s forests in 1945. Beginning in the early nineteenth century, centralizing states like Prussia introduced “scientific forestry” management schemes to their local ecosystems that remade Germany’s forests in service of industry and global trade. The industrial forest favored fast growing, straight trees, like spruces and pines, over the mixed species of hardwoods that had covered Europe until the eighteenth century. Trees

⁸ Ciesla and Suter, 198-202.

⁹ Hans-Georg Fink and Christoph Stubbe, *Die Jagd in Der Ddr : Ohne Pacht Eine Andere Jagd ; 88 Tabellen*, 2., überarb. und erg. Aufl. ed. (Melsungen: Ed. Nimrod bei JANA, 2006), 69.

in this modern forest served only industrial ends: as pit props for mines, railroad ties for trains, cellulose for the chemical industries, and pulp for paper manufacturing.¹⁰ Forestry managers planted in rectilinear monocultures and removed brush and the detritus layer, thus reducing the bio-diversity of the forest ecosystem. As a result most of these forests were in severe distress by the end of the First World War, suffering from the effects of extensive clear-cutting, soil exhaustion, pollution, and general ecological mismanagement.

Forest decline, however, also gave rise to a broad conservation movement in Germany. During the interwar period an eclectic mix of romantic and *völkisch* movements, from the Nazi's reactionary modernism, to the bio-dynamism of Rudolph Steiner, the *Siedlung* (Settlement) Developments of Leberecht Migge, and the close-to-nature *Dauerwald* forestry of Alfred Möller, all wrestled with the implication of dying forests, and thus the issue of alienation from nature. *Naturschutz*, as conservation became known, sought to set aside natural spaces for nature's sake and the regeneration of the human spirit, and not for its economic use or the privileged few.¹¹ These cultural and economic strands formed the discursive and practical foundations of German conservation—a complicated history to which the East German regime was an heir.¹²

The industrial forest had in a way bound forestry, conservation, and wild life management up in one another. When, in 1949, East Germany's planners prioritized the revival of the country's decimated forests and animals—in much the same way national propaganda exhorted citizens to “*Bau Auf!*” (Rebuild!) the industrial economy—they

¹⁰ Arvid Nelson, *Cold War Ecology : Forests, Farms, and People in the East German Landscape, 1945-1989* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 23.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 19-24.

¹² Anna Bramwell, *Blood and Soil : Richard Walther Darré and Hitler's "Green Party"* (Abbotsbrook, Bourne End, Buckinghamshire: Kensal Press, 1985); Frank Uekötter, *The Green and the Brown : A History of Conservation in Nazi Germany*, *Studies in Environment and History* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006). **LEBERECHT MIGGE CITATION HERE TOO; HERF'S REACTIONARY MODERNISM** The legacy of Nazis, conservation, and environmentalism has become an area of considerable research and writing in the last ten years. For a great review essay of the current literature, please see David Motadel, “The German Nature Conservation Movement in the Twentieth Century,” *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 43, No. 1 (Jan., 2008), pp. 137-153.

placed the responsibility for these efforts in the hands of forestry managers on the one hand, and hunters on the other. While forestry managers planted new forest stands, and fought over proper harvesting methods,¹³ it fell to the country's hunters to maintain the proper "balance" in nature with their rifles, traps, and hunting dogs. The resulting scheme was a mix of conservation and scientific forestry. It measured the "health" of the forest in terms of raw material produced, like tons of lumber, heads of red deer, or kilos of boar meat—the infamous "tonnage ideology." At the same time, the regime's conservation goals of "improving the quality and number" of wild life required managers to restore the "natural" productivity of the East German woods, by altering "wild" habitat through the sowing of "grazing areas," inoculation of wild life against parasites, and establishment of reserves.

The different management schemes that made up East Germany's cultural landscapes found expression in the layered, and multiple uses of forest reserves. The reserves, many of which predated the regime by a century, were not just set aside for hunting and logging, but overlapped with the property lines of collective and state farms. Both natural and man-made obstacles formed their borders, like streams, mountain ridges, and forests as well as streets and railroad lines.¹⁴ Planners proudly spoke of these unenclosed vast reserves as the "large-scale" management, distinguishing the East German system from western enclosed ones. And hunting tied this cultural landscape together by addressing three landscape management goals at once: forestry officials' desire to promote the health of forests and their wildlife; farmers' and agricultural planners' desire to limit the crop damage of wild animals; and the regime's desire for high "quality" trophies to hunt.

¹³ Nelson, 74-76.

¹⁴ Ibid., 75.

These aspects of forestry and wild life management in the GDR merged seamlessly with an older aristocratic tradition, which valued the woods not only for what they produced, but also for who controlled access to them. This logic held sway in particular when it came to hunting, and the power and privileges deeply embedded in its practice. As the regime saw it, the country's 40,000 hunters (or woodsmen, as they were commonly called) played an integral role in maintaining a "natural balances" in the country's forests. They also were part of a politically privileged class, since the regime tightly controlled access to game reserves, hunting club membership, and thus guns. Initially, the GDR's leaders believed they were overthrowing this immorally depraved traditions of noblemen, by declaring all wild life the property of the state shortly after the country's founding, in the famous phrase: "The Hunt belongs to the People."¹⁵ Yet in a short order, the right to hunt reverted quickly to the powerful and privileged. The regime restricted membership in hunting clubs to the ideologically pure and politically connected. The top of the regime in particular, from Walter Ulbricht and Wilhelm Pieck, to Erich Honecker and Gunter Mittag, claimed special hunting rights. They also used hunting as an opportunity to remake the East German forest after their own fantasies, as dark woods filled with "wild" trophies, like boars, red deer, and elk, and the sole domain of brave masculine huntsmen.

Hunting Amongst the Elites

Hunting held broad cultural purchase in the GDR, ranging from its association with an aristocratic tradition and common setting in Grimm' fairy tales, to its practice amongst the privileged and elite *nomenklatura*. For the regime, hunting harkened back to a strong "German" tradition, yet one that ironically had strong aristocratic roots. "Game reserves," like Berlin's famous Tiergarten, had once served the needs and customs of Brandenburg's lords in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The Prussian Junkers

¹⁵ In German, „Die Jagd gehört dem Volk!“

and Hohenzollern rulers had also been avid hunters. The Hohenzollern's especially had played an outsized role in the history of hunting in Germany, establishing the large reserve of Schorfheide north of Berlin in the mid-nineteenth century. Over the next century, Schorfheide became the retreat for a number of German leaders from Kaiser Wilhelm and Field Marshall Hindenburg, to Hitler and his second in command Hermann Göring. The rotund Göring in particular transformed the reserve into his personal playground. He ordered the construction of his mansion, known as Carinhall, between the two largest lakes in Schorfheide and stocked the grounds not only with the largest stags and elks he could get from eastern Europe, but also wild horses and European buffalo—his attempt at recreating a “Wild West” fantasy in north central Brandenburg.¹⁶

Ironically, yet perhaps not surprisingly, Schorfheide also became the beloved retreat of Politburo members. When the East German elite moved out of their Berlin residences of Majakowski-Ring to the more secure suburban retreat of Wandlitz in 1960, they were also hoping to strengthen an association with the German “hunter” in their public image. While Wandlitz was facetiously known as “Volvograd” amongst the general population (due to the regime’s fondness for their fleet of Volvo limousines), Politburo members officially referred to it as the *Waldsiedlung* or forest settlement, thus draping the new seat of power in the rustic trappings of masculine huntsmen. The new settlement was also halfway between Berlin and Schorfheide, and many members had their own small hunting lodges constructed in both retreats. Somehow SED leadership either forgot, or chose to ignore, the strong ties between Schorfheide, hunting, and the infamous Nazi and Junker past.¹⁷

¹⁶ Ciesla, Burghard and Helmut Suter, *Jagd und Macht: Die Geschichte des Jagdreviers Schorfheide* (Be.Brad Verlag: Berlin, 2011), 137-190.

¹⁷ Mary Fulbrook, *The People's State : East German Society from Hitler to Honecker* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 81. Honecker, Gunter Mittag, Gerhard Grüneberg (sec. of Agriculture), Werner Felfe (successor to Grüneberg as Sec. of Agr.), and Willi Stoph (Chairman of Council of Ministers) each took control of their own hunting reserve during their times in power.

The regime used hunting not only to mark their own power, but also to distribute “status” by giving hunting memberships to regional clubs, which then granted access to a limited number of East Germans. Membership in these clubs depended almost entirely on the personal political connections,¹⁸ and even then potential members were subject to careful political evaluation. A prospective member was required to attend a set of classes, the content of which focused almost entirely on state citizenship and communism, rather than say something more practical, like marksmanship or hunting techniques. After a personal interview with a member, a board of examiners debated the prospective hunter’s ideological suitability. The clubs themselves presented an egalitarian front, but often times a single member or older faction dominated the association.¹⁹ The ideological purity of hunting members was significant mostly because of their access to guns. Most hunters in the GDR were not allowed to own guns, since they were all property of the state. Instead they had to borrow rifles from the local *Volks Polizei* unit. Both guns and ammo were in short supply—a fact that created considerable displeasure amongst hunters, and severely disrupted the organized “pest” hunts in the 1980s. Only a few hunters (about one hundred) were granted their own private weapon. And of those privileged few, the majority were either members of the highest echelons of the SED, or fairly high up in the state apparatus.²⁰

The SED not only hunted for recreation, but also used it as a tool of East German statecraft, in much the way that golf had come to serve as the domain of the

¹⁸ East Germans referred to benefits won through connections infamously as *Vitamin-B* in German, or Vitamin-C in English. B for *Beziehung*, or C for Connections.

¹⁹ Meike Haselmann, “Die Jagd in der DDR – Zwischen Feudalismus und Sozialismus”, Berlin: Bundestiftung zur Aufarbeitung der SED-Diktatur, 2007. <http://www.bundestiftung-aufarbeitung.de/uploads/pdf/haselmann.pdf> accessed June, 2013.

²⁰ Haselmann, “Die Jagd in der DDR – Zwischen Feudalismus und Sozialismus”, 2007. Ciesla and Suter, 206-207. Erich Honecker was an extreme example himself, owning some thirty rifles. His favorite weapon was a Czech-made repeating rifle, gifted to the future General Secretary in the 1950s by the CSSR’s state president Klement Gottwald and brought on nearly every hunt until the end of rule.

wealthy, powerful, men in the United States.²¹ During the 1960s, the regime had carried out regular Staatsjagd or State Hunts—when foreign leaders joined the entire SED Politburo in pursuit of wild boars and stags in Schorfheide. In their book, *Jagd und Macht*, Burghard Ciesla and Helmut Suter recount how such excursions both sparked the close friendship between Erich Honecker and Leonid Brezhnev in the 1960s, and served as important settings for both leaders’ palace coups of their respective predecessors.²² In 1964, Brezhnev visited the East German reserve only five days before he removed Khrushchev from power. Although he had informed his kindred spirit Honecker of the impending move, he had let Ulbricht know over the phone only once the deed was done and he was back in Moscow. The distance between the Soviets and East German First Secretary Honecker grew greater during these years of economic reform. History repeated itself as farce in 1971, when Ulbricht, seeking to halt his growing marginalization within the SED, requested a one on one meeting with Brezhnev during a state visit to Schorfheide. By then, however, it was too late and Brezhnev ignored Ulbricht’s request, choosing instead to go boar hunting with Honecker.²³ Even some of the most important diplomatic exchanges of détente occurred at the hunting reserve during the 1970s and ‘80s. On the eve the infamous crackdown on Solidarity in Poland in December of 1981, the West Germany’s Chancellor Helmut Schmidt visited Honecker at his lodge Wildfang. As Schmidt would later recall, the First Secretary used the one-on-one meetings to press the chancellor for some help in relieving East Germany’s increasingly burdensome financial straits.²⁴

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid, 217-223. The authors use the memoirs of the East German historian Siegfried Prokop (*Poltergeist im Politburo*), archival materials from the Bundesarchiv, as well as secondary literature (like Thomas Grimm’s *Das Politburo Privat: Ulbricht, Honecker, Mielke, & Co. aus der Sicht Ihrer Angestellten*) to reconstruct these backroom machinations between Honecker, Ulbricht, and Brezhnev.

²³ Ciesla & Suter, 217-223

²⁴ Ibid, 231. Helmut Schmidt and Fritz Richard Stern, *Unser Jahrhundert : Ein Gespräch* (München: Beck), 183. Although there was no immediate agreement, the Federal Republic of Germany

Inside the reserves, East Germany's political elite manipulated the animals and environment to suit their personal demands. Yet outside, the issues of wild life management were much more complicated. During the 1970s and '80s wild boars increasingly moved unimpeded through agricultural space, thus increasing the important role hunting played in limiting their damage. Yet even Heinz Meynhardt himself wondered what ultimate purpose hunting should serve. "Do we hunt in order to shoot wild game or in order to protect our agricultural spaces from the damage of wild animals? The ideal would be that one reinforces the other, but alas that cannot always be the case."²⁵ For much of the 1970s and '80s, hunters and forest managers struggled to find the right balance between these goals as hunting quotas went up and up. And increasingly the battle lines moved out of the woods and into the fields of the country's collective farms.

Agriculture and the Grüneberg Plan

While hunting and forestry management dealt directly with wild boars, agriculture most powerfully shaped the *Kulturlandschaft* in which they lived. Since the first land reform and successive collectivization drives in the late '40s and '50s, the regime had held self-sufficiency in agriculture as the central goal of rural development. Self-sufficiency, however, was not a particular obsession of the East Germans but rather a shared political conceit of rural development ideology for development programs in capitalist and communist societies since the 1930s.²⁶ This rubric held that since traditional "peasant" societies were backwards and famine prone, self-sufficiency should be the standard of "modernity" against which the progress of rural development would be measured. And

eventually came to the GDR's aid in July of 1983, when the Bavarian minister and notorious anti-communist Franz Joseph-Strauss met with his SED counterpart Alexander Schalck-Golodkowski in Schorfheide, at the large lodge of Hubertusstock. There they hammered out the details of a financial relief package—the infamous Billion Mark Credit—for the GDR, which many came to believe postponed the immediate collapse of the country for several years.

²⁵ Meynhardt, 71

²⁶ Nick Cullather, *The Hungry World: America's Cold War Battle Against Poverty in Asia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 7-15.

industrial technologies, scientific innovation, and the rational organization of agricultural production held the keys to this transformation.

From this perspective the GDR's infamous collectivization drives had just as much to do with land expropriation, power, and coercion as it did with creating massive monocultures. In the mid-1970s—after twenty years of reconstruction, political upheaval, and rural development—East German planners pushed these development principles in agriculture to a new, unprecedented degree of organization, and separated all grain and livestock collective farms (LPGs). The plan, which was known as the Grüneberg Plan, became the law of the land in 1976 and heralded a new age of agricultural production. After 1976, the number of collective farms plummeted, while the remaining farms expanded dramatically in size, on average working between 4,000 to 6,500 hectares a piece.²⁷

While development ideology underlay much of the Grüneberg Plan, particularly the creation of economies of scale, the separation of grain and livestock farming was also a product of East German geography. The GDR was a relatively small country. Every scrap of arable land had long been identified and brought into cultivation. The only way to increase production then was to carve the largest plots possible out of existing field patterns and turn them over to a single grain producing unit (an LPG P). This meant removing every man-made and natural obstacle in the way of more grain production—hedges, trees, and even infrastructure like irrigation ditches and tractor roads. Awkwardly placed barns and all livestock needed to go elsewhere. Planners decided that other farmers would consolidate all livestock into the remaining barns, feed sheds, and new facilities, like Confined Animal Feedlot Operations (CAFOs), rechristening them as independent livestock units (LPG T's). Planners believed that this arrangement would allow LPG P's to produce enough grain for humans and livestock alike. Meanwhile the

²⁷ Buechler and Buechler

LPG Ts would take that extra grain to raise more animals at a lower cost, providing a larger supply of export-ready animal products.

This new shape of agriculture proved irresistible to wild pests. Farmers wrote frequently to the regime, complaining about fields ravaged by wild boars and red deer. On July 28, 1981 the chairman of the LPG P “Saletal” wrote a letter to Bruno Lietz, head of the Politburo’s Department of Agriculture, demanding help in fighting an ungulate infestation. “On behalf of our party organization we ask for your help, in order to avoid excessive wild animal damage to our potatoes, grain, and corn crops. Day after day the damage grows worse, prompting us to bring our problems to the highest authority.” On 185 ha of winter wheat, wild boars had eaten more than 10% of the crops. The boars had destroyed around 11% of the potato crop on around 90ha, while deer had eaten through 4ha of corn on a 100ha field.²⁸

While wild boars threatened East Germany’s collective farms with their appetites, they also threatened them with their bodies. More specifically, they risked spreading disease to healthy stocks of animals. Wild boars, as one biologist put it, act as “reservoirs” for a whole host of livestock diseases, including tuberculosis, trichinellosis, hog cholera, and Aujeszky’s disease (ADV).²⁹ The transmission of pathogens between wild and domesticated animals highlighted the vectors of disease that transected the GDR. They dissolved the artificial separations not only between herds of feeder hogs and sounders, but also between city, farm, and country. In this way, the prevalence of “wild” diseases were symptomatic of transformations in the East German environment. More specifically they reflected the increased proximity between zones of agricultural production and wild life habitat.

²⁸ SAPMO-BArch DY 30/1789, p. 40. Department of Agriculture in the Central Committee of the SED. Forestry and Hunting Matters, vol. 11, 1981-1983. Wildboars, Damaged Crops, and Hunting Regulations. Letter from the LPG P “Saletal” Sitz Kahla, 29.7.1981.

²⁹ Meng, X. J; Lindsay, D. S; Sriranganathan, N, “Wild boars as sources for infectious diseases in livestock and humans” *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B., Biological Sciences*, Sep. 2009, Vol. 364, Issue 1530, p. 2697-2707.

The reformation of arable land remade farms and forests again, sacrificing many of the existing human-made and natural boundaries that had formed the boundaries of forest reserves. Yet the loss of borders and contiguous forest cover rebounded to the favor of wild boars when grain production was brought closer to boar habitat. Unlike other wild life, which suffered with the loss of forest and brush cover, wild boars increased their numbers. In order to understand how this was possible, we need to take a closer look at the particular traits of these incredibly adaptable animals.

Wild Boars, Piggyness, and Adaptation

The Eurasian wild boar (*Sus Scrofa*) is most likely the great, great grandfather of every single breed of domesticated pig in the world.³⁰ Every Duroc, Landrace, Berkshire, Hampshire, Red Wattle, and Saddleback carries in his or her DNA genes from *Sus Scrofa*. In the wild, boars are dispersed widely across every continent with the exception of Antarctica, rooting in places as disparate as Japan, Java, China, and Sudan. Even broad stretches of the of North and Central America are populated by its descendants, like the famed Razorback, which can trace its ancestry to the Iberian pigs once brought by Columbus and de Soto to the Americas.³¹ Taking their wild and domestic forms together, this makes the Eurasian Wild Boar one of the most successful colonizers animals in the history of the world.

The sheer variety of colors, sizes, and shapes in domesticated and feral pigs, however, is a testament not only to their genetic diversity, but also to their adaptability. Many of these traits bear the markings of the environment in which they were bred. For example, Mediterranean pigs tended to be small, more refined, and have darker skin.

³⁰ Greger Larson, Keith Dobney, Umberto Albarella, Elizabeth Matisoo-Smith, Judith Robins, Stewart Lowden, Peter Rowley-Conwy, Leif Andersson, and Alan Cooper, “Worldwide Phylogeography of Wild Boar Reveals Multiple Centers of Pig Domestication,” *Science*, Vol. 307, No. 5715 (March 11, 2005), p.1618-1621.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 109-111. These Iberian “Landrace” pig, red and black skinned due to the sunny weather of Spain, ran free, mated with the feral cousins from the Dutch and English colonists. This “new” form of Wild Boar had free range over much of the eastern colonies and the Mississippi valley by the end of seventeenth century and persists to this day.

Northern European breeds tend to be larger, with longer heads and legs, higher backs, and lighter skin. At the same time, all domesticated pigs seem eager to shed their man-made shackles and revert not only behaviorally to their wild state, but physically as well. According to animal scientist Lyall Watson, the very physical traits of wild boars remains at all times dormant somewhere in the genes of contemporary pig breeds, waiting to break out. In fact, if a domesticated piglet is presented with hardship, given no shelter and fed only sporadically, an immediate transformation begins. Its head grows longer and narrower than its domesticated parents; a dark bristly coat breaks out over the body and the piglet sprouts a spiky Mohawk-like mane. In just one generation, a soft pink piglet can revert to its most wild form.³² Technically these pigs are known as feral hogs, and are rather hard to tell apart from their truly wild relatives. Their offspring, however, will bear almost no trace of its domestic ancestry and look like any wild boar. The only thing that does set them apart, however, is the curly tail. That never leaves a pig born of domesticated parents.

Perhaps “wildness” remains in modern pigs precisely because it was essential to the first efforts at domestication. The earliest wild boars most likely evolved alongside human societies, as they feasted on the detritus sedentary life inevitably left behind it. Even the first domesticated pigs were more feral than housebroken. Roman swine herders never had to keep the animals close to home, but rather let them to roam, semi-feral across the landscape, only to call them home when necessary with a horn.³³ Meynardt relates a similar story about the famous Danubian pigs of the Lipovans in Romania. These pigs lived almost the entire year in the brackish waters of the delta, put there by their Ukranian-descended owners. In December the Lipowaners would take to their boats to round up their pigs. All they needed was a little grain and special whistle to

³² Ibid., 108.

³³ Lyall Watson, *The Whole Hog: Exploring the Extraordinary Potential of Pigs* (Washington: Smithsonian Books, 2004), 97-100.

lure them home. With the dwindling food supply of the delta, the hungry animals would swim several kilometers all the way back to the village behind their owners' boats. Were it not for the whistle, Meynhardt noted, he would never have been able to tell the difference between Lipowaner pigs and the feral sounders that moved through the woods.³⁴

Clearly survival in the wild required intelligence, but less obviously an omnivorous diet too. Throughout his career, Meynhardt remarked over and over on these amazing traits. He noted how the animals could avoid baited traps, evade hunters and hunting, and move almost silently through the forest. When hungry, they were just as happy grazing on grasses and brush, as foraging for roots, berries, fruits, nuts, or devouring fish, frogs, and carrion. On their own, wild pigs organize into maternal social groups, known as sounders, which tended to be made up of a sow or two and up to twelve offspring each of varying ages. Complex vocalizations for fear, contact, hunger, stress, food, and aggression enforce a strong social structure in sounders, thus limiting infighting and helping boars to live more than twenty years.³⁵ Mature male boars are solitary animals, as they are run out of their sounder at around eighteen months of age by the female boars, which bite, charge, and growl at them until they leave.³⁶ The primary mating season is in the winter, after which sows gestate for 110 days. They then farrow inside of bedding, usually made up of grass, leaves, and branches of around 6 feet in length. Dense cover is crucial for the farrowing period, and therefore is critical characteristic of their habitat.³⁷ While sounders have been known to migrate over 100 miles foraging, they usually prefer to stay wherever food is plentiful. Only three types of

³⁴ Meynhardt, 17.

³⁵ Watson, 90.

³⁶ Meynhardt, 45-51

³⁷ Ibid.. Walker, "Commercial Growth and Environmental Change in Early Modern Japan: Hachinohe's Wild Boar Famine", 345.

disturbance induce movement to a new habitat: clear cutting, forest fire, and (lack of food) usually due to over-abundance.³⁸

The adaptability of wild boar bodies, behavior, and diets sheds light not only on the animals, but also on the landscapes that held them. The sudden ungulate irruption that beset the GDR required a favorable set of conditions for reproduction and feeding, such as significant brush cover for nest building, the absence of predators, and a readily available food supply. All of these factors, along with regular disruptions to the rural landscape in the form of expanding grain cultivation, and the dwindling of forest stands, characterized the shifting ecosystems in which wild boars lived. In turn, wild boars took advantage of this landscape, and used it to flourish in unprecedented numbers.

Changing Land Cover, Land Usage, and GIS MAPS

[There is supposed to be a GIS analysis of three historical maps from the GDR in this section that compares changing forest cover between 1965 and 2012. I have been working here at Yale on doing this but I am still being trained in GIS, how to manipulate LANDSAT imaging, and then interpreting what I find. The final version of this article will include much more of this work in this section, which obviously means that some of this paper will have to come out. So any comments to that end would be much appreciated]

While anecdotal evidence provided the East German regime with a pervasive impression of a disrupted landscape, it was hard to determine the extent of the wild boar overpopulation from the mid-1970s onward. Even contemporary wild life biologists struggle to establish accurate numbers for wild populations to this day, as these creatures' preference for dense vegetation, their nocturnal behavior, and their complex social relations present obstacles to observation and counting.³⁹ Meynhardt repeatedly noted how hard it was to keep track of the animals, especially when it came to the piglets, as they rarely remained with their mothers. "For me personally, it was only possible to establish which babies belonged to which mother when they were nursing... [and] many

³⁸ Meynhardt, 19

³⁹ Pelayo Acevedoa,b,c,* , Francisco Quirós-Fernándezc, Jordi Casalb,d, Joaquín Vicentec, "Spatial distribution of wild boar population abundance: Basic information for spatial epidemiology and wildlife management" *Ecological Indicators*, Elsevier, vol. 36, 2014, p. 594-600.

times the spotted female [in my sounder] had six to eight babies following her, while she had only given birth four. At other times I observed a four-year-old sow, who I knew to have given birth to seven pigs, leading around just two.”⁴⁰ Even tagging, which many assume to be the easiest way to measure populations, presented its own difficulties, as it was exceedingly time-consuming, labor intensive, and not always reliable.

Still there are other ways to measure wild populations, like counting scat, noting “scrapes” or abrasions left on trees by boars, or collecting hunting data.⁴¹ In the GDR “bagged boars” served as the main method for planners and forestry managers, although it was heavily dependent upon several independent variables like prevalence of weapons, traps, and frequency of hunting trips. While such hunting records cannot accurately predict the total animal population, they can illustrate a baseline for wild life density as well as measure year over year growth in population.

The data that did exist in the GDR, however, showed a shockingly rapid population takeoff, the majority of which occurred simultaneously with the implementation of the Grüneberg Plan. In his book, Meynhardt presented some of these numbers, comparing not only the baseline of the wild boar populations, year over year within the GDR, but also with the neighboring Federal Republic of Germany (FRG). Between 1963 and 1976, the population in East Germany had risen from just over 20,000 to 103,000, a 500% increase. Even more striking, in the three years between 1973 and 1976, that number nearly doubled from 54,000. Over the same period in the FRG, which was nearly three times the size of the GDR, estimates put the wild boar population at just over 24,000 in 1963. That number, however, grew at a much slower rate, rising to 41,000 by 1973, but then peaking at only 52,000.⁴² According to Forestry

⁴⁰ Meynhardt, 188-189.

⁴¹ Emilio Virgós, “Factors affecting wild boar (*Sus scrofa*) occurrence in highly fragmented Mediterranean landscapes,” *The Canadian Journal of Zoology*, Candian Science Publishing, Vol.80, n. 3, March 2002, p.430-435.

⁴² Meynhardt, 188.

school in Eberswalde, East Germany's wild boar numbers continued to climb well after 1976, peaking at 150,000 in 1989.⁴³ The subjective factors help account for some of the difference in year over year numbers, but taken together they paint a dramatic picture of an unchecked explosion of wild life.

Some of the clues for this eruption could be found in the changing makeup of the forest and agricultural landscapes of the GDR during this period. As we already discussed, the industrial transformation of agriculture in the 1970s created massive monocultures for grains and root vegetables, forming essentially vast troughs of food for wild life in all directions. This industrial transformation had also yielded an imbalance in land use. Compared to every other country in Europe, the GDR had the highest percentage of its land in use as cropland: 46% of East Germany's 6 million hectares was planted annually in grain, while only 27% in forest, and 13% as grassland. Compare this to Belgium, which cultivated grain on 27% of its land, or the FRG 33%, France 34%, the Netherlands 23%, or Czechoslovakia 41%.⁴⁴ And while the percentage of land in forest in the GDR was comparable with other countries like Belgium, which kept 27% in forest, or the FRG (29%), France (26%), and Czechoslovakia (35%), it was the overall combination of vast fields of grain with fragmented forest cover that gave rise to the boar irruption. Smaller forest stands, created by rural development, actually provided the necessary "edge" environment for boars to flourish. Yet wild life managers and experts failed to realize the implications of this change, holding on to the belief that the best habitat for boars was the deep woods of great game reserves. As a result, they conducted their research assuming one type of landscape (deep forests), without appreciating the predominance of another landscape—an industrially developed agricultural one.

⁴³ Numbers produced by the Database for Hunting in the Johann Heinrich Von Thünen Institute for Forest Ecology in Eberswalde, collated upon request by Dr. Kornelia Dobiáš

⁴⁴ BArch DK 5/1730, p. -. Nitrate Pollution. Get full citation in Chapter 1.

Take for example the work of Dr. Lutz Briedermann, a scientist and one-time director of the Forestry Institute at Eberswalde. In an experiment from 1980, Dr. Briedermann attempted to address the issue of wild boar damage to crops by showing that the animals in fact preferred to remain with their own established range (approximately 100 square kilometers), if quality food sources were made available. For Briedermann this meant the use of “distraction fodder” and the planting of plants for the animals to eat in the woods. Through tagging and recapturing of 1,762 wild boars in the Wild Life Research center (WFG) in Wierzen, the study showed that 91% of the male boars and 95% of the sows kept within range with a diameter of 10km.⁴⁵ Meynhardt also observed much of the same behavior amongst his sounder. “I cannot endorse the conventional wisdom on wild boars that they restlessly through their reserves, today here and tomorrow there. Quite the opposite, if they remain undisturbed and there is enough to eat, the wild boar is territorially true...the more beloved a reserve is, the more unlikely they are to leave.”⁴⁶

While some wild boars maintained their established ranges, many completely ignored the expectations of land managers. A closer look at Briedermann’s study revealed that his wild subjects were already “misbehaving.” For example, of the 1,700 animals tagged, only 452 had been recaptured. So while the study claimed 90% or more of the animals stayed within the 10km area, more than two thirds of the test subjects had yet to return. Furthermore, of the animals recaptured, eight sows had been found more than 50 kilometers away. The study inadvertently hit on several factors that accounted for the “restlessness” of the GDR’s wild boars, such as the fact that adult males become solitary animals and once they’ve been kicked out of their sounders, will roam hundreds of

⁴⁵ BArch DK 107/33347, p. -. Ibid. „Erarbeitung wissenschaftlicher Grundlagen zur Sicherung einer nachhaltigen Produktivität in Schwarzwild-Bewirtschaftungsgebieten einschließlich Beziehungen zwischen Zuwachs, Dichte und Körperstärke.- Abschlußbericht von Dr. Briedermann, L., 1980, p. 10.

⁴⁶ Meynhardt, 44.

kilometers in search of food or a mate. Even more importantly, Briedermann also observed that many of the boars left the experimental range when humans or hunting dogs encroached too closely. Disturbances combined with the relatively small size of forest stands (Briedermann's was only 100ha) had become the norm for boar habitat in the GDR, and thus contributed to farmland destruction.

Yet more than declining forest size, or habitat disruption, the increased cornucopia produced by the country's collective farms drew wild boars from their established "ranges." Even Briedermann's assertions that damage to farm fields could be reduced depended on the presence of adequate feed in the woods.⁴⁷ Meynhardt believed this as well, laying blame for the increased crop damage, not on the boars themselves, but on the state of East Germany's environment, saying "The reasons for the damage to fields are well known and obvious: the first reason is that most of our forests do not offer our wild boars enough food year-round...the second is that there is an overwhelming amount of tasty, nutritious, easily accessible food in adjacent farming land at certain times of year."⁴⁸ Yet what Meynhardt and others saw as the *inability* of the forest to provide enough for wild boars, looked completely different from the perspective of the wild boar. The rural spaces of the GDR were in fact perfectly suited to these animals, and as a result, many wild boars ranges that took advantage of the shelter of the smaller tree stands and access to food in both cultivated fields and nearby forests.

Meynhardt, when not framing the issue in terms of damage to agriculture, observed how his own boars utilized edge space regularly. "Between two larger wild boar ranges, which were separated by a four kilometer wide field and small stream, an animal trail ran, which several older hunters claimed had been there 'for ages'...in March and

⁴⁷ SAPMO-BArch DY 30/1789, p. 535. Ibid. As one researcher summed up this perspective "the focus [of these efforts] is on the reduction of wild animal damage to agriculture and forestry. At the same time an improvement in the wild populations is to be expected. A better use of the natural fodder reserves will help increase the connection of ungulates to wooded areas."

⁴⁸ Meynahrtdt, 167.

April I often sat near this area...and observed a large sounder of wild boars move in between these the reserves twice a day. Their range in fact was *both* reserves.”⁴⁹ While Meynhardt used the example to argue for better construction and development to make room for known wild boar ranges, he also revealed the extent to which boar habitat encapsulated fields and forests.⁵⁰ This was the byproduct of a rural development program that fragmented forests and expanded field size.

Conclusion

During the 1980s, as East German agriculture expanded in scale and intensity, the country’s farmland encroached on woods and marginal spaces, bringing wild animals and farmers into increasing conflict with one another. Forestry officials adjusted hunting regulations to limit the damage repeatedly in the 1980s, eventually abandoning their “cultivation” completely and declaring open season on all wild boars across the country in 1987—a last desperate attempt to bring the plague under control.⁵¹

Berlin’s wild boar problem now seems oddly familiar, presaging similar plagues that have since befallen most developed countries. In Berlin, locals take shocking pictures of wild boars using bike lanes and rooting through city trash. In Georgia, Ft. Benning has commissioned the USDA to study a wild boar infestation on the base while hiring local hunters to shoot the animals on sight. Ungulate irruptions on the part of boars, but also deer, seem to follow in developed landscapes around the world. Knowing what we do about wild boar behavior and biology, the presence of these once scarce game in the world’s most “developed” cities is indicative of broader, and more common environmental shifts. First and foremost the industrialization of agriculture has played a major role in this transformation. Several factors, like the increase of “wild” food

⁴⁹ Ibid, 46.

⁵⁰ Virgós, “Factors affecting wild boar (*Sus scrofa*) occurrence in highly fragmented Mediterranean landscapes,” 2002, p.430-435. He argues that wild boars are less susceptible to loss of forest than other mammals and can flourish given certain conditions (proximity to larger forest stands, presence of cereal grains, water).

⁵¹ Stubbe, 99-100.

supplies on monocultures, the decline of rural populations (and thus people dependent on wild life for their subsistence needs), as well as the expansion of wooded and green areas in cities and suburbs have re-shaped wild boar habitat. In the GDR, some variations did exist. As we have seen, agricultural production expanded beyond farmland, and into backyards, gardens, city parks, and other public spaces. Food was plentiful and shelter best in these spaces that divided city from country, farmland from garden. Yet the East German struggle with wild boars anticipated what has happened since in Europe precisely because their industrialization occurred at a rapid pace, in a relatively small country. In this sense, the German Democratic Republic performed a micro-experiment in agricultural development and wild ungulate population dynamics for the rest of the world to see.

East Germany's hunting culture also played a role in the expansion of wild boar range. Hunting helped mark status and patrolled hierarchy in the GDR—in a way, it may also have been the most “German” thing the communists brought to real, existing, socialism. Yet despite everything we have seen about hunting, it is less clear if the GDR could have shot their way to a stable environment. From occupation and the end of the war, to collectivization and industrialization of agriculture, “disruption” was a regular dynamic in the East German environment. And as we have seen, such disturbances can create the right conditions for prolific animals like wild boars. In this sense, the history of East German rural development has much more to tell us about contemporary ungulate irruptions than shocking stories of Erich Honecker's wanton disregard for wild life.

Over the succeeding years, Berlin's municipal authorities intensified their efforts to control the wild animal population. In December of 1984, they passed an ordinance focusing explicitly on the besieged Berlin suburbs. “In response to the repeated petitions of citizens of the capital city about the increased amount of wild life damage to allotments, gardens, and other areas,” the city's upland forestry chief, a Comrade

Oechsner, abrogated the existing hunting regulations, in effect declaring open season on all large ungulates.⁵² In addition, he ordered the two hunting associations in suburban Berlin to develop special trapping and hunting plans for these emergency areas, the majority of which surrounded Müggelsee--the very same suburb where wild boars would rampage through the camp of Helmut Arndt four years later. Oechsner had no way of knowing his efforts would be futile. He was at a disadvantage from the start. Wild boars are the eternally elastic animal. They existed long before rifles, and if European landscapes continue to produce free food and ample forest cover, they will persist long after.

⁵² LAB C Rep. 112 Nr. 340, p. -. Ibid. "Maßnahmen zur Bejagung von Schwarzwild auf dem Territorium der Hauptstadt der DDR, Berlin." 4.12.1984. The order stated "Für das Territorium der Hauptstadt und deren Jagdgebiete sind keine Bejagung- und Bewirtschaftsrichtlinien zuverlässig."