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## An Archive of Invisible Intensities. Susanne Kriemann's *Library for Radioactive Afterlife*

by Alexander STREITBERGER

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## Abstract

Subtitled *Library for Radioactive Afterlife*, Susanne Kriemann's books *P(ech) B(lende)* (2016) and *Ge(ssenwiese) K(anigsberg)* (2020) are dedicated to the invisibility and after-effects of radioactivity. Produced by several authors, these books-as-library bring together multiple textual genres and forms of representation to explore the "radioactive afterlife", which not only indicates the horizon of survival after a nuclear catastrophe, but also the survival of images, given the impossibility of representing an invisible, immeasurable phenomenon.

### Keywords

Photography, book, library, radioactivity, contemporary art, afterlife, archive, polyphonic assemblage, collective thinking

## Résumé

Sous-titrés « *Library for Radioactive Afterlife* », les livres de Susanne Kriemann, *P(ech) B(lende)* (2016) et *Ge(ssenwiese) K(anigsberg)* (2020), sont consacrés à l'invisibilité et aux séquelles de la radioactivité. Ces livres-bibliothèques réunissent multiples genres textuels et formes de représentation, produits par plusieurs auteurs, pour explorer la « survivance radioactive » qui indique non uniquement l'horizon d'une survie après la catastrophe nucléaire, mais aussi la survivance des images face à l'impossibilité de représenter un phénomène invisible et incommensurable.

### Mots-clés

Photographie, livre, bibliothèque, radioactivité, art contemporain, survivance, archive, assemblage polyphonique, pensée collective

In 2014, German artist Susanne Kriemann embarked on her *Library for Radioactive Afterlife* project, which currently consists of two volumes, *P(ech) B(lende)* and *Ge(ssenwiese) K(anigsberg)*, published by Spector Books in 2016 and 2020 respectively.<sup>1</sup> (Fig. 1 et 2) At first glance, the *Library for Radioactive Afterlife* can be understood as a library in the sense of a series of books published by a single publisher and relating to a single genre – the artist's book – and a particular theme – the invisibility of radioactivity and the consequences of uranium mining for *Folgelandschaften* (following landscapes) and the human, animal, and plant life growing in such landscapes.<sup>2</sup>

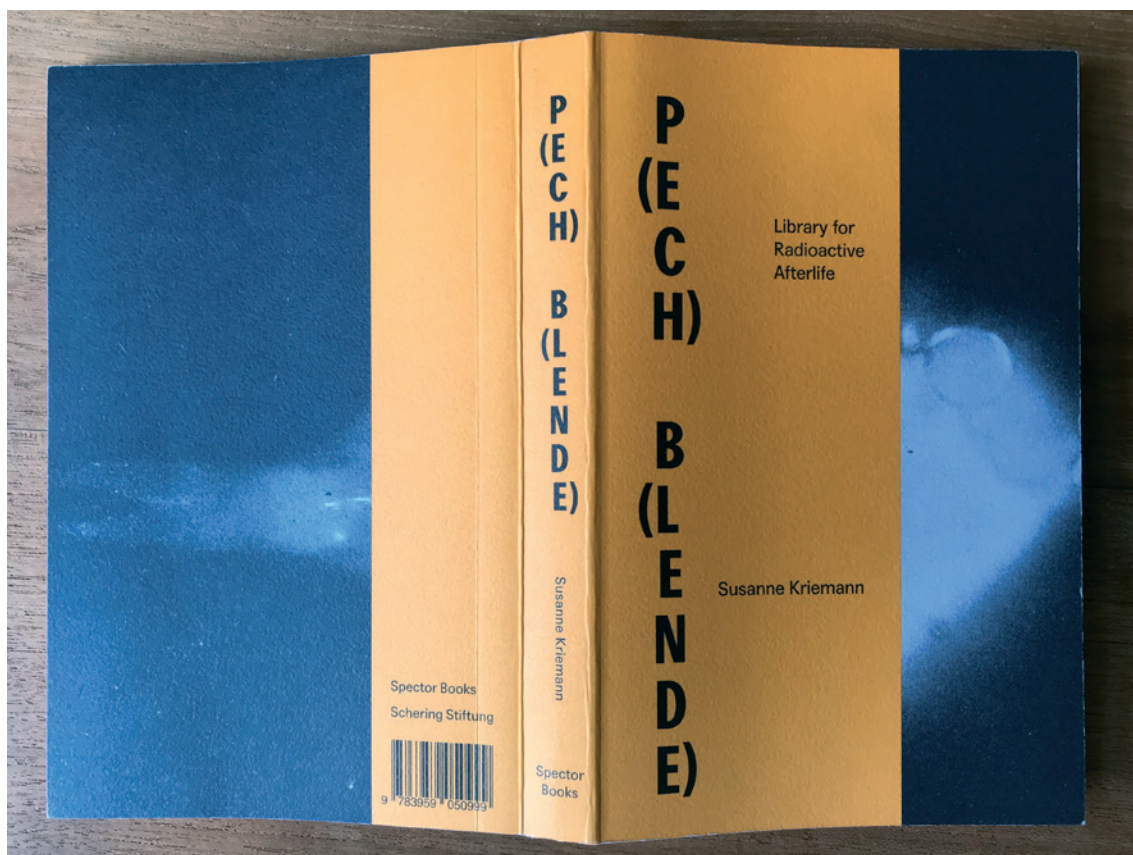


Fig. 1 : Susanne Kriemann, *P(ech) B(lende)*. *Library of Radioactive Afterlife*, sous la direction de Heike Catherina Mertens, Spector Books, Leipzig, 2016. © Susanne Kriemann.

1 Kriemann, 2016; Kriemann, 2020. In addition to these two volumes, a collective project aiming to bring together a wide range of writings to form an archive of thought and discourse on radioactivity is currently underway. In addition, the book *10% – concerning the image archive of a nuclear research reactor*, published in 2021 by Susanne Kriemann, Friederike Schäfer, Judith Milz, Klaus Nippert and Elke Leinenweber, can also be associated with the *Library of Radioactive Afterlife*, as it was published by the same publisher – Spector Books – and comprises archive images from the Kernforschungszentrum Karlsruhe (KfK) (Nuclear Research Centre).

2 The term “Folgelandschaften” refers to landscapes altered because of disaster or massive intervention. In this case, it is the impact of uranium mining on nature. Bartoli, Clausen, et al. (eds), 2020, 192-193.

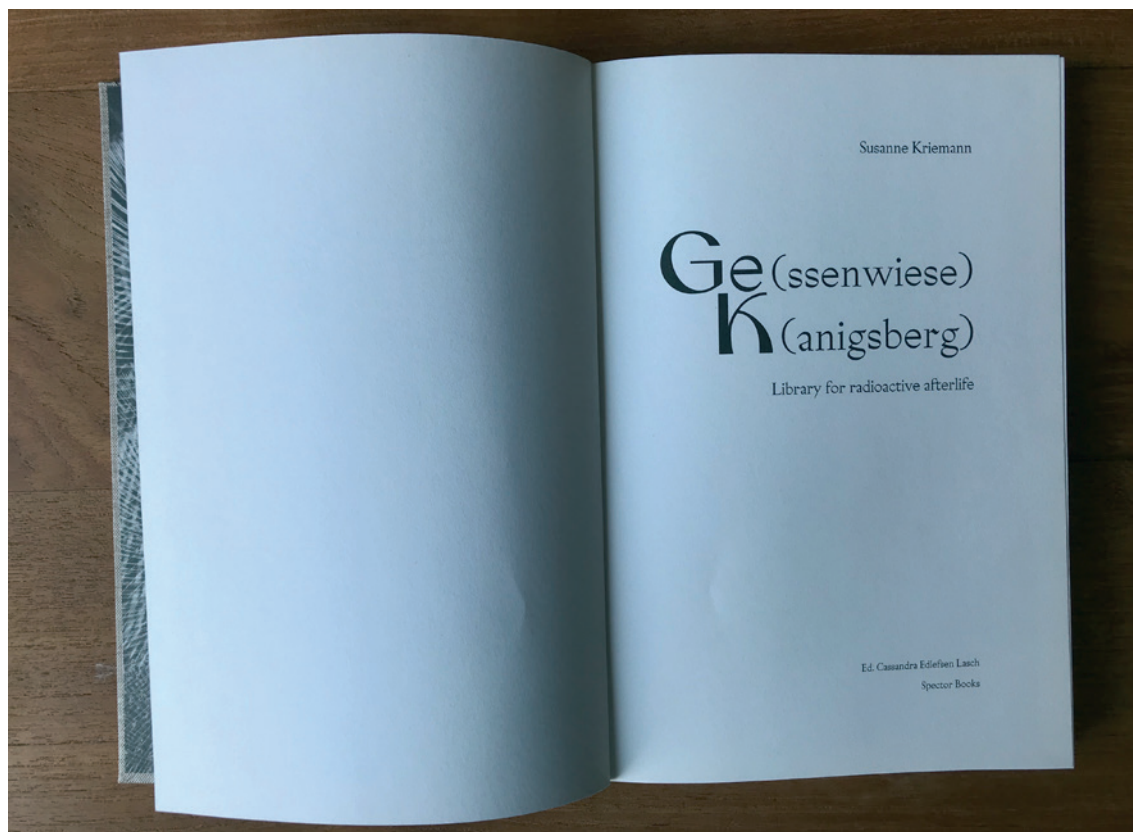


Fig. 2 : Susanne Kriemann, *Ge(ssenwiese) K(anigsberg). Library of Radioactive Afterlife*, sous la direction de Cassandra Edlefsen Lasch, Spector Books, Leipzig, 2020. © Susanne Kriemann.

However, I feel that the term “library” does not solely refer to a publishing practice. Predominantly, it is a metaphor for a *modus operandi* that assembles, associates, and classifies assorted knowledge from different fields and historical contexts, integrating it into a heterogeneous albeit coherent whole. From this perspective, *P(ech) B(lende)* and *Ge(ssenwiese) K(anigsberg)*, further than being two volumes in a book series, are themselves books-as-libraries insofar that they unite different genres and types of representation produced by several authors and organized according to specific categories. Moreover, these books-as-libraries interact with other displays based on the model of the library, particularly the exhibitions that the artist conceived using the same iconographic and textual sources. For instance, the 2016 show *Pechblende (Chapter 1)* organized at Berlin’s Schering Foundation as a practicable *camera obscura*, displays geological and mining objects under the designation *Library for Radioactive Afterlife*,<sup>3</sup> thus suggesting that the information and stories that these objects evoke fall within a wider system of knowledge organization. The latter encompasses the archives inside which the artist found her materials, the theoretical works from which she drew inspiration, the images she took herself, and the forms of mediation used to make these contents accessible to the audience. The exhibition also included touchscreen tablets that visitors were invited to use to obtain more information about the sources of the work and the projected images in the exhibition. The artist’s book, the touchscreen tablet, and the

3 Heike Catherina Mertens in Kriemann, 2016, 34.

exhibition *per se* are three distinct albeit interconnected devices used to create an interactive, multimedia and genuinely collective library.

In terms of the concept of the book, this indicates that it is neither an autonomous object nor one that belongs to a specific category. Concurrently archive, exhibition, library, and artwork, it allows for a myriad of readings and approaches. Indeed, Kriemann's books are anything but artists' books, in the sense of an original work of art produced by an individual creator and based on the idea of formal and conceptual unity.<sup>4</sup> Instead, Kriemann's books are "networks" or "worlds" – to use a term Paul Edwards borrowed from Howard Becker – in which different functions and interests (aesthetic, didactic, scientific, documentary, fictional, and others) converge.<sup>5</sup> Consequently, the books are based on what Donna Haraway has called "collective thinking", i.e., collaboration and dialogue between different actors, such as artists, scientists, archivists, writers, graphic designers, and, of course, readers.<sup>6</sup>

## Polyphonic Assemblage

Initiated by Kriemann in 2014 as a way of "bringing close to her" things related to the former Wismut uranium mining site,<sup>7</sup> the conception of the library's first volume, *P(ech) B(lende)*, precedes two exhibitions *Pechblende (Prologue)* and *Pechblende (Chapter 1)*, both of which were held in 2016 at the Prefix Institute of Contemporary Art in Toronto and the Schering Foundation in Berlin respectively. From the outset, Kriemann conceived the book as a collective project based on encounters and exchanges between the artist and various authors, bringing together curators (Jayne Wilkinson), writers, and poets (Werner Bräunig and Lutz Seiler), as well as artists and scientists from different disciplines (Forensic Architecture member Susan Schuppli, art historians Friederike Schäfer and Christina Landbrecht, and media theorist Jussi Parikka). Kriemann insists that she invited these authors, not to write texts *about* art, but to contribute essays *for* the book, i.e., essentially independent of the artist's work.<sup>8</sup> The interdisciplinary, collaborative, and collective quality of the project is even more evident in the second volume of the collection, *Ge(ssenwiese) K(anigsberg)*. The collaborative status of the graphic designer, Alix Bouteleux, is now emphasized by the fact that her biography appears among those of the authors of the volume.<sup>9</sup>

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4 Drucker, 2004, 2; Moeglin-Delcroix, 2011, 52; Schraenen, 1996, 7.

5 Edwards (ed.), 2023, 7; Becker, 2008, 97. Beatrice von Bismarck's definition of the multiple *Artists É Photographs* (Marian Goodman Gallery, 1970) as an "art world" is along the same lines. According to von Bismarck, the multiple *Artists É Photographs*, by confronting diverse modes of production and distribution, constitutes a "public system" that includes the figures of the artist, the publisher, the critic, the collector and the viewer. Von Bismarck, 2015, 154.

6 Haraway, 2016, 29. See also Kriemann, 2020, 9.

7 In an interview in May 2023, the artist told me that the book was the ideal medium for this project, insofar as it allowed her to broach the theme in the sense of both intellectual and material appropriation ("die Dinge an sich heranbringen").

8 As the artist pointed out in the above-mentioned interview, the project stemmed from encounters with these authors, particularly the writer Lutz Seiler, whose poem "peche & blende" gave the book its title and features in its first pages.

9 Kriemann, 2020, 182.

Field visits and scientific exchanges with biologists and geographers from the University of Jena played a further decisive role in both the conception and the contents of the book. Finally, the book contains a kind of travelogue-essay, written with four hands with artist Grit Ruhland, with whom Kriemann took walks through the contaminated landscapes near the former Wismut uranium mine. Creating a contrast between Kriemann's black experimental text, with Ruhland's green research notebook, this parallel text reflects the collective experience of these walks, the aim of which was to discover a place together, side by side, crossing the paths "of a number of individuals invested in varying aspects [of] the post-uranium-mining landscape."<sup>10</sup>

The subject of both books is hence the same: the exploration of a terrain contaminated by the extraction of a radioactive mineral, pitchblende, also known as uraninite. The site is located in the Ore Mountains (Erzgebirge) in the former German Democratic Republic (GDR), where 230,400 tons of uranium were mined between 1946 and 1990 to expand the nuclear arsenal of the Soviet Union (USSR). Upon the closure of the mine in 1990 following the German reunification and the end of the Cold War, the Soviet Wismut company was converted into a GmbH (limited liability company) to dispose of radioactive waste and rehabilitate contaminated land. Considering that the water and soil from the terrain will constitute a risk for the next 100,000 years, the planned completion date for the renaturation process – the year 2045 – seems almost ridiculous. Kriemann focuses on the after-effects of the uranium mine as a form of what Rob Nixon calls *slow violence*: "a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all."<sup>11</sup> Indeed, the invisible and immeasurable radioactive pollution challenges and exceeds our imagination and capacity for representation.

Starting from the observation that no linear, homogeneous narrative can tell this story and that no image can represent or document it, Kriemann conceives her books as assemblages whereby various textual genres and types of images mingle to evoke heterogeneous temporalities and histories scattered across space and time. *P(ech) B(lende)* and *Ge(ssenwiese) K(anigsberg)* are thus what anthropologist Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing has defined as a polyphonic assemblage, which, as opposed to a unified coordination of time and progress, considers the multiple rhythms and trajectories that intertwine in life perceived as "a web of interdependencies and collaborations, most often without stability."<sup>12</sup>

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10 Susanne Kriemann and Grit Ruhland, "Haldenschafe, Birkenwäldchen, Abraum, Restpflanzen, Gessenwiese, Luftschacht", in Kriemann, 2020, 69.

11 Nixon, 2011, 2.

12 Lowenhaupt Tsing, 2022. <https://www.ladn.eu/nouveaux-usages/anna-tsing-vivre-dans-les-ruines-du-capitalisme/>. Viewed on 09 June 2023. Concerning the notion of polyphonic assemblage: Lowenhaupt Tsing, 2015, 22-23. See also: Cassandra Edlefsen Lasch, "Looking Down, Looking Up, Turning", in Kriemann, 2020, 7.

## *P(ech) B(lende): Contaminated Ghosts of Living Organisms*

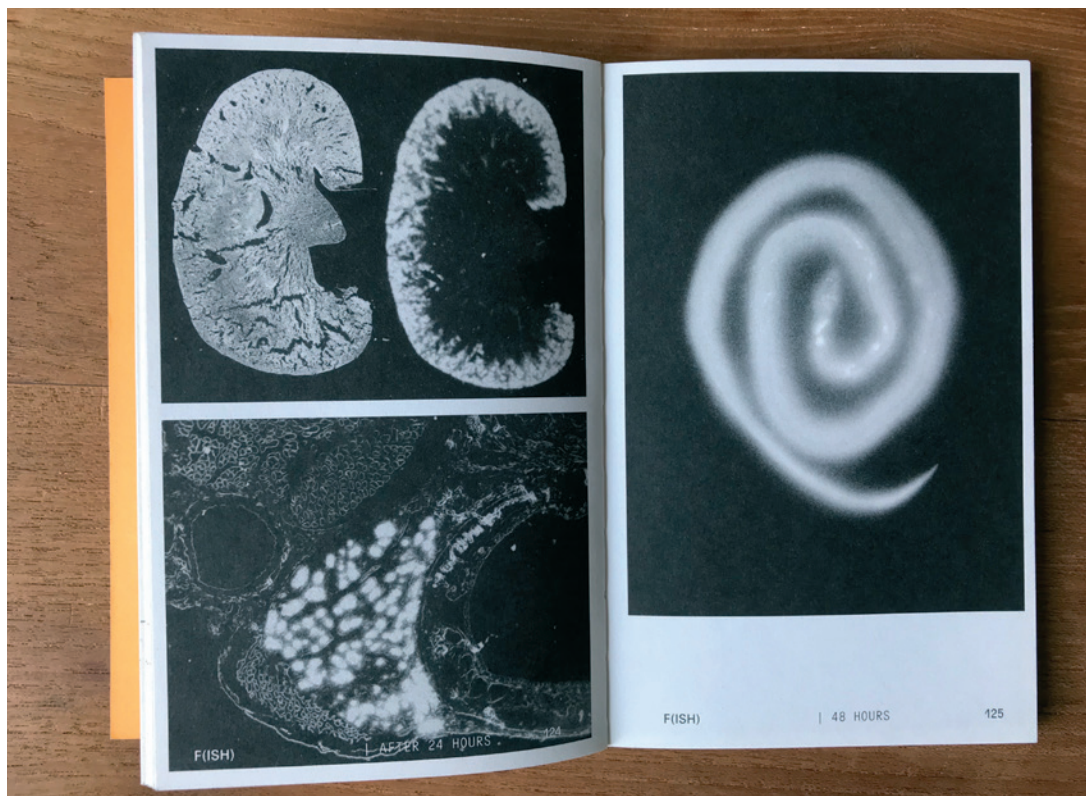
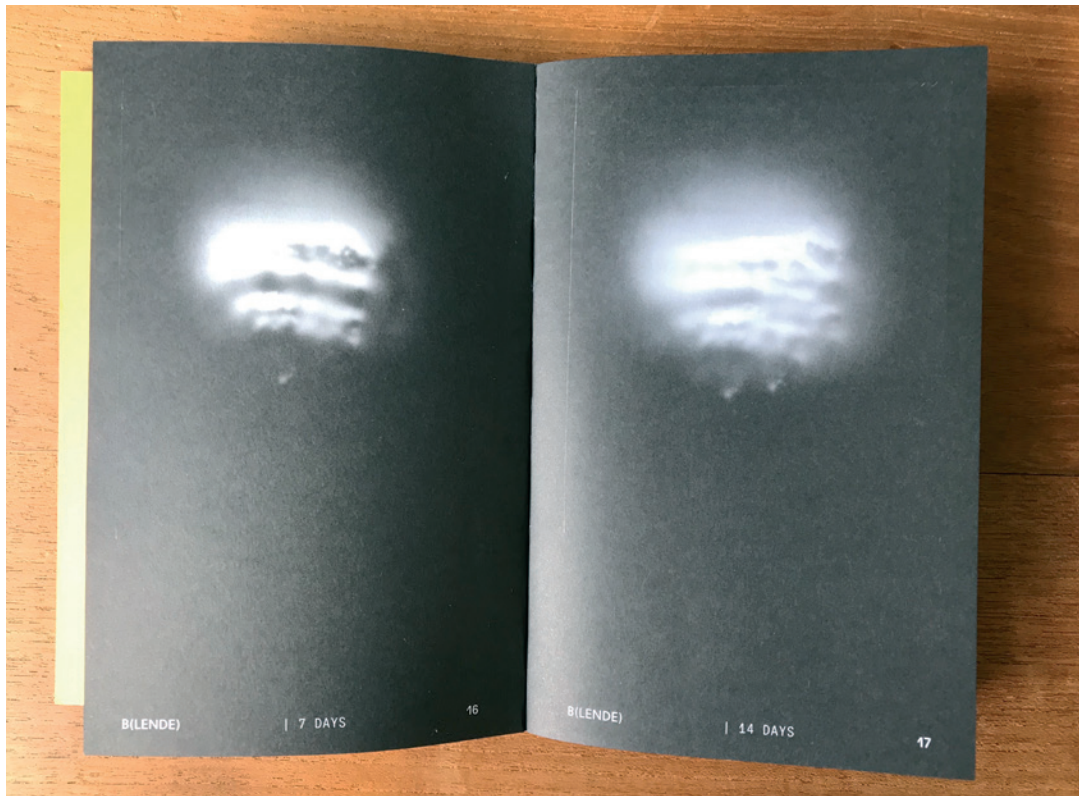
*P(ech) B(lende)* is split up into eight chapters: “STUHL” (chair), “LAMPE” (lamp), “SHELF LIFE”, “THE SLOW VIOLENCE OF RADIOLOGICAL MEDIA”, and “RADICAL CONTACT PRINTS” all address varying aspects of the representability of radioactivity using recording devices and photographic techniques including radiography, autoradiography and photograms. “RUMMELPLATZ” (Fairground) and “DAS TERRITORIUM DER MÜDIGKEIT” (The Territory of Tiredness) assemble excerpts from two pieces of prose by Werner Bräunig and Lutz Seiler describing the lives of miners and effects of their constant exposure to radioactivity, such as constant fatigue or the interruption of radio transmissions by the radiation emanating from a worker’s hand.<sup>13</sup>

These chapters are interspersed with sequences of images arranged according to categories such as “B(lende)”, “A(braum)”, “P(ech)”, “T(ools)”, “F(isch)”, “F(ission)” and “C(hapter 1)”. The bracketing-out of the initial letters alludes to the periodic table of chemical elements, with Pb standing for lead, B for boron and C for carbon, such that the organization of the images into categories matches the classification of metals and minerals mined. Alternating between archival documentary material and photographs taken by the artist herself, the sequences of images form a parallel universe while interacting with the texts. Sometimes, these images serve as the objects of analysis, at other times, visual equivalents. Positioned at the very beginning of the book under the title “B(lende)”, the first sequence of images is a sort of prologue made up of autoradiographs created by the artist at New York’s American Museum of Natural History in New York and in Berlin’s Museum für Naturkunde. **(Fig. 3)** To produce these images, Kriemann took specimens of uraninite (pitchblende) sourced from Saxony and placed them on light-sensitive paper for some time, in a manner akin to the process of creating a photogram. But unlike a photogram, which requires an external light source to inscribe the object’s shape on the surface of the photographic paper, autoradiography employs the radiation emanating from the object itself to produce the image.

Discovered in 1896 by Antoine Henri Becquerel, in the 1940s autoradiography was used as part of research into the impact of a nuclear explosion on the ecosystem concerned. Following the nuclear tests carried out on Bikini Atoll in 1946, shoals of fish were sliced and placed on photographic plates to measure the radiation activity in the soft tissues of the animals.<sup>14</sup> A selection of these images is reproduced on pages 120 to 129 together with an essay by Susan Schuppli on the history of the relationship between photography and radioactivity. **(Fig. 4)** Echoing this historical legacy, the autoradiographs figured in the prologue are presented in the manner of a scientific experiment, showing photographic papers that were in contact with radioactive minerals for a duration ranging between three and 56 days. If, after three days’ exposure, the shape and volume of the mineral remain identifiable, after 56 days they are increasingly blurred, giving way to an abstract, mysterious apparition vaguely reminiscent of luminescent jellyfish from the depths of the ocean, or still, medical X-rays of human organs or bones. The mysterious, disquieting character

13 Lutz Sailer, “DAS TERRITORIUM DER MÜDIGKEIT”, in Kriemann 2016, 193–207.

14 Susan Schuppli, “RADICAL CONTACT PRINTS”, in Kriemann, 2016, 132–133.



above: Fig. 3 : Kriemann, 2016, p. 16-17. © Susanne Kriemann.  
below: Fig. 4 : Kriemann, 2016, p. 124-125. © Susanne Kriemann.

of these images is underscored by Lutz Seiler's poem "Pech & Blende", which alludes to the hard work carried out in uranium mines during the Cold War, and the dangers that radioactivity poses to miners by depositing itself in their bones and tissues.<sup>15</sup> This invisible, persistent process of destruction of the human body, triggered by constant contact with radioactive materials, finds its visual equivalent in the self-dissolution of the uraninite sample which, over time, metamorphoses into a ghostly halo evoking the nebulous spectres of spiritualist photography. In other words, the paradox of the aura, described by Benjamin as "the unique phenomenon of a distance, however close it may be", is quite literally conveyed by these images, where the represented object evaporates or dissolves as the contact with the photographic surface is prolonged.<sup>16</sup> In this respect, the polysemy of the word "Blende" – which simultaneously means "photographic aperture", "to blind" and "to deceive" – is anything but commonplace. Just as photography gives the illusion of direct access to reality, uraninite was given its name "pitchblende" by 18<sup>th</sup> century miners, because it "deceived" them about its high metal content impossible to extract. However, modern measurement methods allow us to ascertain that the ore's deceptive character primarily lies in its radioactive content, which increases with the stone's growing darkness.<sup>17</sup> Ultimately, the photographic radiography process is characterised by a profound ambiguity: while making radioactivity visible, it creates abstract, phantasmagorical images, opening a breach into a parallel, unreal, and poetic universe.

The documentary photographs that follow under the title "A(braum)" (slag heap), which were all taken by Jan-Peter Kasper between 1997 and 2003, depict the slag heaps that – akin to dull, melancholy monuments – testify to the era of uranium ore mining in the region. In the "P(ech)" section, we move on to aerial views shot between 1960 and 2013 that the artist found in various archives, depicting mining areas located in the communities of Seelingstädt and Schlema. These images show the huge transformations of the land during mining and, subsequently, during the renaturalization of the site. Finally, the photograms reproduced in the "T(ools)" section are created with the tools and objects used by the miners in their daily work. Part of the collection of the Bad Schlema Museum of Uranium Mining, these boots, drill bits, helmets, and Geiger counters are remnants of a bygone era, albeit one that still exerts a considerable impact on both the present and the future, due to the long-term contamination of the land, people, and objects that came into direct contact with the radioactive substances. **(Fig. 5)** These objects, often cropped and occupying the whole frame, appear as abstract, enigmatic figures reminiscent of the surrealist photograms of Man Ray who defined his images as "oxidations of light – and chemically-fixed residues from living organisms."<sup>18</sup> The same could be said of Kriemann's photograms, except that these living organisms are contaminated ghosts who cast their shadows over the illuminated images to remind us of the invisible threat they carry within. Kriemann produced these photograms using the flash of her smartphone, which itself contains around thirty chemical elements, including yttrium, cobalt, nickel, zinc, and magnesium, which are also found in contaminated plants and objects in the Erzgebirge mining area. And so the story comes full circle: ores mined during the Cold War as part of the Soviet nuclear program

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15 Lutz Seiler, "Pech & Blende", in Kriemann, 2016, 12-13.

16 Benjamin, 2007, 222. See also Vanessa Joan Müller, "Rays", in Kriemann, 2014, n. p.

17 Christina Landbrecht and Friederike Schäfer, "LAMPE", in Kriemann, 2016, 61.

18 Man Ray, 1933, 1.

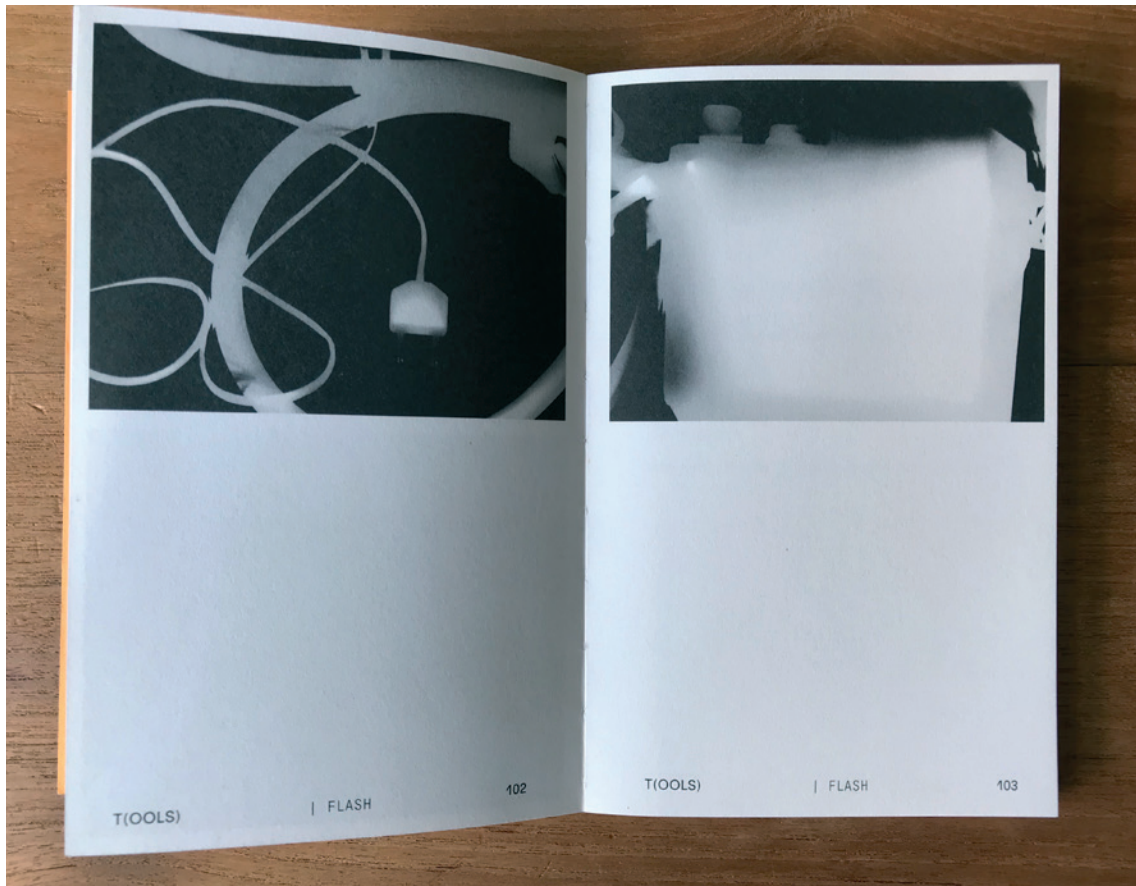


Fig. 5: Kriemann, 2016, p. 102-103. © Susanne Kriemann.

may be understood to serve as elements used by the communications industry to produce ever more efficient, high-performance multifunctional mobile devices.<sup>19</sup> Yet today, these metals and rare earths no longer come from European countries, but from China, the Congo and Latin America. In Kriemann's work, we move from local to global, from the past to the future (via the present), from photogram to digital technology, from science to art, from document to fiction.

## ***Ge(ssenwiese) et K(anigsberg): Making the Uncontrollable Accessible***

*P(ech) B(lende)* is primarily concerned with the extraction of uranium for atomic weapons and the harmful effects of radioactivity on the health of miners specifically, and on human, animal and plant life as a whole. The second volume of the collection, *Ge(ssenwiese) and K(anigsberg)*, focuses on two former mining areas transformed into environmental rehabilitation zones after the 1990 closure of the Wismut SDAG (Soviet-German stock

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19 Eva Wilson, "Exclusion Zones", in Kriemann, 2020, 120-121.

corporation). The result of a close collaboration since 2016 with botanists and geologists from Friedrich Schiller University in Jena, the book explores the history and current state of the Gessenwiese and Kanigsberg sites, which were severely contaminated by pitchblende mining. Cassandra Edlefsen Lasch's introductory text is followed by a series of aerial photographs taken between 1999 and 2010 and drawn from the Wismut archives. The two main chapters, "Ge(ssenwiese)" and "K(anigsberg)", bring together black & white and colour photographs taken by the artist herself on both sites. These images document the scientists' field studies, methods of observation, sampling, and analysis, as well as the equipment and devices used to detect radioactive contamination in plants and test how they react to heavy metal pollution of groundwater.<sup>20</sup> To represent the transformation of the landscape into a field of study that has been explored and divided according to scientific criteria, Kriemann organizes her photographs in the form of a dynamic, fragmentary montage. The book ends with an inventory of uraninite samples from different sites, which the artist found in German museums, along with their respective inventory number and available data on location, and the time of extraction and collection. (Fig. 6)



Fig. 6: Kriemann, 2020, p. 128-129. © Susanne Kriemann.

20 Cassandra Edlefsen Lasch, "Looking Down, Looking Up, Turning", in Kriemann, 2020, 12.

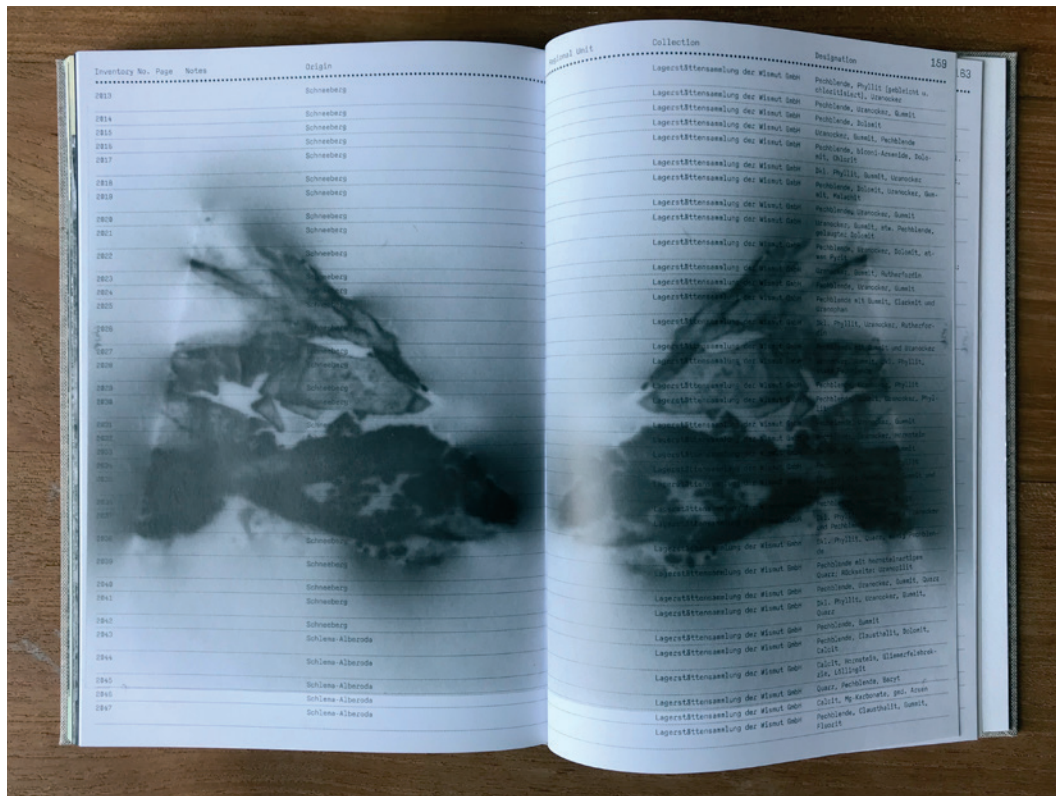


Fig. 7: Kriemann, 2020, p. 158-159. © Susanne Kriemann.

In this book, Kriemann deploys a variety of strategies to make an invisible, immaterial phenomenon accessible to the visual and tactile senses, while simultaneously shedding light on the “slow violence” that the extraction and use of radioactive metals entail for human life and the natural environment. While the large number of uraninite samples presented in photographic reproductions and included in the inventory list indicates the incommensurability of the phenomenon, the autoradiographs of two pitchblende specimens reproduced on pages 156 and 157 evoke the threatening, violent facet of the lasting effects of radioactivity. Emerging from the white background of the pages like the heads of mythical creatures, these toxic fragments split the monotonous inventory list into two parts. Each part of the inventory is crossed by one of these two motifs as a background image, reproduced symmetrically, mirrored, and becoming increasingly evanescent. (**Fig. 7**) This waning away of the object, though not bringing about its complete disappearance, can be understood as a metaphor for the slow process of uranium radioactive decay. Furthermore, the fact that one of the images resembles a cattle skull alludes to the toxic effect that eating contaminated plants can have on the slag heap sheep (Haldenschafe) that still graze the grass in these areas today.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, the photograph that follows this list of radioactive specimens depicts the torso of a sheep cut off at the level of the right ear, as though suggesting that the missing head now haunts the collections of natural museums in the form of a petrified skull, thus recalling the monstrosity of the radioactive after-effects of uraninite mining.

21 Kriemann, 2020, 69.



Fig. 8: Kriemann, 2020, p. 48-49. © Susanne Kriemann.

“The return of the inaccessible as monster” is the title of the following chapter, which brings together extracts from *Unverfügbarkeit (The Uncontrollability of the World)*, by German sociologist and philosopher Hartmut Rosa.<sup>22</sup> According to Rosa, nuclear radiation is the most striking indication of a process in which the project of modern science to make the world accessible has the opposite effect of alienation, leading straight to radical inaccessibility. While the discovery of atomic fission opened up previously unimaginable possibilities for the knowledge and energetic exploitation of the world, it has been revealed that the radioactivity unleashed during the nuclear disasters at Chernobyl and Fukushima cannot be completely controlled or contained. It is monstrous, not only because it renders the contaminated zone inaccessible, but also because it is “silent, invisible, odourless, impalpable.”<sup>23</sup>

Kriemann’s objective seems to be finding metaphors and visual and tactile equivalents to represent this paradox of the uncontrollability generated by processes implemented to make the world more accessible. The aim is to make visible and palpable that which is not, to better grasp the effects – both physical and real – on life and the environment. One example is the transformation of the radioactive mineral fragment into a monstrous skull. Another is the use of the colour shades of pitchblende decay products – light green,

22 Hartmut Rosa, “The Return of the Inaccessible as Monster”, in Kriemann, 2020, 177-180.

23 Rosa, 2020, 116.

bright yellow, and grey<sup>24</sup> – in the book’s production: thus, the pages of the “Ge(ssenwiese)” chapter are printed on light green paper, those of “K(anigsberg)” on bright yellow paper, while grey dominates in the black and white photographs. The subtlety of this approach is best illustrated on pages 48 and 49, where one of the black-and-white images features fluorescent green spots whose saturation perfectly matches the intense tone emanating from the folds of the green pages in a sort of reminiscence of the radioactive peril hanging over the seemingly peaceful landscape depicted in the photographs. **(Fig. 8)** Finally, each copy of the book contains two plant specimens that the artist has collected on the spot, dried and slipped between the pages. In addition to the tactile experience of turning the pages to discover texts and photographic reproductions about an intangible, invisible phenomenon, this unique material item suggests forensic evidence in the form of a concrete, measurable trace of the radioactive contamination of the two zones.

## The Double Afterlife of Image and Radioactivity

If Bergit Arends describes the artist’s approach as a “composite montage of an environment”,<sup>25</sup> we shall add that the book itself constitutes a multi-sensory environment where the transformation of the landscape by the invisible phenomenon of radioactivity is reflected in the organization of images and the manipulation of pages (both literally and figuratively). According to Eva Schmitt, this approach is comparable to geological stratification, akin to superimposing layers one on top of the other.<sup>26</sup> Cassandra Edlefsen Lasch suggests the metaphor of a “radial approach” linking the activity of “sighting” with the principles of “siting” and “citing”.<sup>27</sup> However, the ultimate model for Kriemann’s approach is that of the library as a knowledge-organizing system bringing together events, images, texts, and heterogeneous agents around the complex question of “radioactive afterlife”. Most authors understand the term “afterlife” as indicating a posthuman world, a world following the nuclear disaster, or in the sense of a continuation of radioactivity beyond any temporal horizon imaginable to human beings.<sup>28</sup> Consequently, Heike Catherina Mertens translates the term “afterlife” into German as “Jenseits” – the beyond or the otherworld.<sup>29</sup> And she’s certainly not wrong, given that radioactivity can have devastating effects on human life, to the point of eliminating all humanity. However, a more literal translation of “afterlife” would be “Nachleben” (“survival”). From this point of view, it is not a passage to another world, to life beyond death, but rather, it is a continuity or metamorphosis in which something that has disappeared survives or re-emerges in a new form. This translation seems enlightening for two reasons: Firstly, in the hypothetical case of a nuclear disaster wiping out all human

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24 Heike Catherina Mertens, “STUHL”, in Kriemann, 2016, 36.

25 Bergit Arends, “Walking through Ge(ssenwiese)”, in Kriemann, 2020, 53.

26 Eva Schmitt, “I do not know what I should do with it – Appropriation versus Unavailability”, in Kriemann, 2014, n. p.

27 Cassandra Edlefsen Lasch, “Looking Down, Looking Up, Turning”, in Kriemann, 2020, 6.

28 Jayne Wilkinson, “SHELF LIFE”, in Kriemann, 2016, 86. Jussi Parikka, “THE SLOW VIOLENCE OF RADIOLOGICAL MEDIA”, in Kriemann, 2016, 110.

29 Heike Catherina Mertens, “STUHL”, Kriemann, 2016, 34.

life on earth – which is theoretically possible but practically unlikely – it would nevertheless remain certain that other species and life forms would survive and adapt to the new situation – as would any human survivors. But there is another concept of “Nachleben” that seems to be fruitful and that allows us to understand Kriemann’s library as an archive of intensities, as Georges Didi-Huberman envisages it, borrowing the concepts of afterlife (“Nachleben”) and pathos formula (“Pathosformel”) from Aby Warburg:

From ancient sarcophagi to the works of the Renaissance, Aby Warburg’s search for a thread of “afterlife” (*Nachleben*) capable of revealing the temporal significance of certain “pathos formulas” (*Pathosformeln*) was an attempt to draw up something like an inventory of the psychic and bodily states embodied in the works of figurative culture. It was nothing less than a *historical archive of intensities* that he was aiming for in this research.<sup>30</sup>

If Kriemann’s archive of intensities is indeed based on the afterlife (“Nachleben”) of psychic and bodily states, in a literal, biological sense and a figurative, representational sense, it is nonetheless not conceived to expose iconographic and cultural filiations of certain ancient formulas. Paradoxically, an invisible phenomenon replaces Warburg’s formula of pathos as the starting point for Kriemann’s archive: radioactivity. Both a deadly threat (the nuclear bomb or the nuclear disasters of Chernobyl and Fukushima) and a source of life (the production of electricity or diagnostic and therapeutic uses), radioactivity remains all-pervading in contemporary society, yet it is impossible to see, touch, or smell. So we return to the fundamental questions underlying the artist’s projects: How do we represent this imperceptible phenomenon? How can we create a work of art, limited in time and space, capable of measuring the inconceivable temporality of a heavy metal like uranium 235 remaining radioactive (with a half-life of 700 million years)? And finally, how can we demonstrate the complex relationships between science, economics, politics, ecology, and technology at work when it comes to understanding “radioactive afterlife” within and beyond our human society? In her *Library for Radioactive Afterlife*, Kriemann takes up this challenge by coupling the question of the survival of biological life with that of the survival of images in the form of photograms of mining objects, autoradiographs of minerals and animals, photo-environmental montages and dried plants. Imperceptible to the human senses, the radioactive afterlife thus finds its visual, tactile, and affective echo – in short, its perceptible intensity – in these images and their integration within a book-as-library, conceived as a polyphonic assemblage where different voices, perspectives, and forms of representation overlap and clash.

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30 Didi-Huberman, 2001, 144.

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