TRANSITION IN ENERGY, CULTURE AND SOCIETY

FUTURE ENERGY SYSTEMS THEME 4: PROJECT 2

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BACKGROUND

What have we learned about the social impacts of past energy paradigms, and what can this teach us about the potentials and the limitations of future energy systems?

A genuine and comprehensive shift in energy usage today requires more than just the adoption of renewable, ecologically sustainable energy sources. Energy transition from fossil fuels to other, cleaner forms of energy also necessitates a wholesale transformation in contemporary petroculture: the political structures, built environments, social dynamics, gendered realities, educational systems, discursive modes, and everyday values, practices, habits, feelings, and beliefs that have developed in relation to and as a result of the shaping force of fossil fuels. The most illuminating and incisive scholarship on energy transition and energy impasse—those social forms and forces that block or inhibit energy transition—aims to more fully understand and analyze energy as a comprehensive social and cultural relation. The developing field of Energy Humanities increasingly plays a key role in understanding how energy shapes modern social practices, and so identifies the social and cultural transitions changes necessary for viable energy transition.

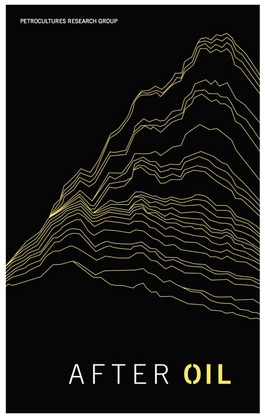
PROJECT OVERVIEW

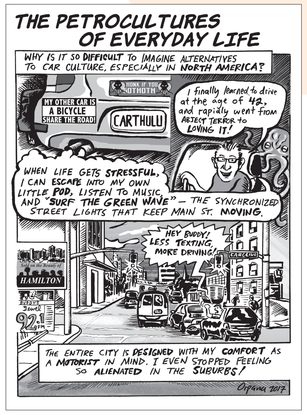
TRANSITION IN ENERGY, CULTURE AND SOCIETY (TECS)

Energy humanities represents and grapples with the social life of energy, and its social and cultural impacts. Energy humanities critically addresses the social and cultural impact of energy systems; past, current and a range of future systems-wide models.

How might plans for energy transition benefit from critical attention to the physical and social infrastructures that shape it today?

How might qualitative, humanities-based research into social and cultural aspects of energy transition foster community engagement and generate genuinely new perspectives and knowledge regarding the socio-cultural dynamics of energy futurity?





EXPECTED OUTCOMES

- Scholarly symposia and knowledge sharing, including a 2nd and 3rd After Oil School and the Petrocultures 2018 conference
- Research-creation: a graphic novel examines the crucial role played by energy systems in structuring contemporary culture, politics, social relations and visions of the future
- An Energy Transition Public Policy Working Paper (with Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives)
- Provide insights relevant to energy policy, as inspired by sustained inquiry into energy practices, their social reproduction and energy knowledges
- Develop new methods for realizing socially just energy futures, as materialized in aesthetic practice, multi-media documentation, and broad public connection

PHOTO CREDITS (LEFT TO RIGHT, TOP TO BOTTOM):
Images are examples drawn from several previous intermedia and documentary projects from which iDoc will draw its inspiration.
1. [Dinosaur mural image]. Photo by Imre Szeman
2. *After Oil*. Cover of anthology produced by TECS team members on a previous interdisciplinary project. Design by Jonathan Dyck. Website: http://afteroil.ca/
3. Graphic novel excerpt. Sample page from the forthcoming TECS graphic novel, by Simon Orpana.
4. [Refinery image] Photo by Mark Simpson

SHORT TERM OBJECTIVES

- Foster interdisciplinary collaboration among researchers, research-creators, policy makers, and other constituencies interested and invested in energy transition
- Enable the production of new ways of seeing and imagining energy transition and energy futurity as well as the circulation of such new perspectives among diverse publics
- Promote education in Energy Humanities as well as opportunities for interdisciplinary engagement among emerging researchers at the undergraduate, graduate, and post-graduate levels
- Provide concrete opportunities for the realization of these objectives by helping to organize Petrocultures 2018 and After Oil School 2.0

THEME OVERVIEW

L'Université de l'Alberta reconnait respectueusement qu'elle est située à ᐊᒥᐢᑲᒻᑖᐊᐢᑲᑊᐃᑲᐣ (Amiskwacîwâskahikan) sur les terres du Traité 6, le territoire du Papaschase, et les territoires de la nation Métis. / The University of Alberta respectfully recognizes it is located in ᐊᒥᐢᑲᒻᑖᐊᐢᑲᑊᐃᑲᐣ (Amiskwacîwâskahikan) on Treaty 6 territory of the Papaschase, and the homeland of the Métis Nation.

Energy systems shape social life. Transitioning away from a predominantly fossil-fuel global energy system, to new more complex integrated energy systems composed increasingly of renewal forms, demands that we reimagine the social and the shape of our future communities. To overcome practices, processes, guiding attitudes and policies that impede a transition to new energy systems response to local and global demands, we must transform myriad aspects of social and cultural life, and render our institutions and social infrastructures more responsible: things that may seem unrelated to energy. Examples include political systems, built environments, educational programs, business operations, policy positions, gender and race relations, social power dynamics, and artistic and cultural practices that shape all of the above. EH researches the historical and political significance of technologies, their potentials and limitations, including their modes of social implementation and institutionalization. As such, the EH projects in FES will explore how new sources and integrated systems may respond in socially equitable ways. EH helps to articulate ways to implement the technologies and systems required by a future energy system, with communities and colleagues alike. As one of its most significant contributions, EH explores the complex, multi-scalar dimension of energy transition so as to understand more fully how we can design integrated future energy systems, starting now, locally here in Alberta, making Alberta a leader in Canada and a contributor on a global scale.

EXTERNAL PARTNERS

- Communications, University of Waterloo
- CENHS, Rice University
- Energy Institute, MIT and MIT Program in Art, Culture and Technology
- Media@McGill
- Petrocultures Research Group
- Energy Transformations Laboratory, Berlin
- Integrative Research Institute on Transformations of Human- Environment System (IRI THESys), Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin
- Durham Energy Institute, Durham U
- Energy and Environments, University of New South Wales

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