

ONLINE RESEARCH SEMINAR
2PM – 4PM (CET)

MIND THE GAP III: Unearthing Petromodernity: Oil Studies in the Anthropocene

The rise of fossil fuels has been central to the political, economic, cultural, and material transformations of the past two centuries, yet the forms of power, knowledge, and life enabled by carbon energy often remain analytically invisible. As we confront the converging crises of the Anthropocene, the need to rethink the centrality of fossil fuels to modern life has never been more urgent.

At a moment when toxic landscapes, resource frontiers, and environmental inequality reveal the uneven geographies of fossil modernity, the humanities and social sciences are reorienting analytical attention toward the energetic foundations of modern life. From pipelines and refineries to plastics and everyday petrochemical products, the material properties of oil have fundamentally shaped modern infrastructures and forms of life. What forms of political and social power are created through fossil fuel industries? How have fossil fuels shaped modern societies, their economic models, governmental regimes, everyday lives? How have they contributed to uneven global geographies rooted in colonialism and capitalism? What kinds of transitions to post-carbon futures are possible?

Bringing together approaches from history, anthropology, political ecology, and geography, we seek to expand the field of oil studies beyond established narratives, geographies, and disciplinary boundaries, amplifying perspectives from the Global South and other sites of extraction and resistance.

REGISTRATION: <https://tinyurl.com/mindthegap2026>

ORGANISATION:

Institute of Contemporary History – NOVA FCSH / IN2PAST
Interuniversity Center for the History of Science and Technology – NOVA SST



Seminar organised as part of the PETROSINES project, funded by national funds through FCT – Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia, I.P. (2023.17817.ICDT / DOI: <https://doi.org/10.54499/2023.17817.ICDT>), IHC and CIUHCT are funded by national funds through FCT – Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia, I.P., under the projects UID/04209/2025 (DOI: <https://doi.org/10.54499/UID/04209/2025>), LA/P/0132/2020 (DOI: <https://doi.org/10.54499/LA/P/0132/2020>), and UID/00286/2025 (DOI: <https://doi.org/10.54499/UID/00286/2025>).

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PROGRAMME

Every fortnight we will meet online to discuss an article or book chapter circulated in advance. The sessions will start with a 20-30 minute presentation, followed by discussion. The sessions will take place on Mondays at 2PM on the following dates: 30 March, 13 April, 27 April, 11 May, 25 May, 8 June, 22 June, and 6 July.

We will explore key concepts such as petro-culture, carbon democracy, extractivism, fossil capital, energy regimes, and transition imaginaries, examining how energy dependence shapes modern subjectivities, infrastructures, economies, and ecological futures. The texts will be shared with participants in advance. Everyone is welcome.

To register, please fill out the online form. After registering you will receive the readings and access information ahead of each session.

For more information, please write to: unearthingpetromodernity@proton.me or directly to the organisers: Davide Scarso [d.scarso@fct.unl.pt], Amedeo Policante [policante@fct.unl.pt], or Ricardo Noronha [ricardonoronha@fct.unl.pt].

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30
MAR

Timothy Mitchell, *Carbon Democracy: Political Power in the Age of Oil*. Selected chapter TBA (Verso, 2011)

Daive Scarso
CIUHCT – FCT NOVA

Focus: How fossil fuels structured democratic politics, labour power and modern governance

13
APR

Adam Hanieh, “*Petrochemical Empire: The Geo-Politics of Fossil-Fuelled Production*” *New Left Review* (139)

Ricardo Noronha
IHC – NOVA FCSH / IN2PAST

Focus: Global production networks, the Gulf region and the restructuring of capitalism through petrochemicals

27
APR

Carola Hein (ed.), *Oil Spaces: Exploring the Global Petroleumscape*. Chapter 8: Peyerl, D. “Building Brazil’s Petroleumscape on Land and Sea: Infrastructure, Expertise, and Technology” (Routledge, 2022)

Henrique Oliveira
IHC – NOVA FCSH / IN2PAST

Focus: Infrastructure, territorial development and the spatial materiality of oil

11
MAY

Stephanie LeMenager, *Living Oil: Petroleum Culture in the American Century*. Selected chapter TBA (Oxford University Press, 2014)

Raquel Ribeiro
CHAM – NOVA FCSH

Focus: Oil, media, culture, and everyday life in twentieth-century society

25
MAY

Appel, Mason & Watts (Eds.), *Subterranean Estates: Life Worlds of Oil and Gas*.

Introduction: “Oil Talk”
(Cornell University Press, 2015)

Amedeo Policante
IHC – NOVA FCSH / IN2PAST

Focus: Anthropological and political-economic perspectives on oil extraction and everyday life

8
JUN

Alice Mah, *Petrochemical Planet: Multiscalar Battles of Industrial Transformation*. Chapter 2: “Enduring Toxic Injustice and Fenceline Mobilizations”

(Duke University Press, 2023)

João Pedro Santos
IHC – NOVA FCSH / IN2PAST

Focus: Environmental justice, pollution, and grassroots activism around petrochemical industries

22
JUN

Chelsea Schields, *Offshore Attachments: Oil and Intimacy in the Caribbean*. Introduction and Chapter 1. “Crude Bargains”
(University of California Press, 2023)

Anita Buhin
IHC – NOVA FCSH / IN2PAST

Focus: Oil economies, intimacy, and social relations in offshore extraction zones

6
JUL

Tim Di Muzio & Matt Dow, “*Global capitalism and oil*” in *Handbook on Oil and International Relations*
(Edward Elgar Publishing, 2022)

Daive Scarso, Amedeo Policante & Ricardo Noronha
CIUHCT – FCT NOVA // IHC – NOVA FCSH / IN2PAST

Focus: Oil in international relations, financialization and the structure of global capitalism