



Centre of Excellence
for **Anthropocene
History**

Meaning, materiality and scale: massified energy resource production in the 20th century

30 to 31 May, 2024, Stockholm

Recent scholarship on the Anthropocene has started to demonstrate the staggering consequences for life on earth, as well as the emergence and development of *knowledge* about this historically new anthropogenic change to the earth system. The causal dynamics of the Anthropocene however, on both material and discursive levels, remain uncertain. While several proposals for the historical origins of the Anthropocene have been proposed by sociologists, environmental scientists, geographers and neurobiologists, history itself has been slow to pick up the immense challenge that the Anthropocene poses for our common understanding of the recent past. The structural role of energy stands out in the consolidation of new relations between humans and the earth in connection with systems of social exploitation, inequalities, and unfair labor. The harnessing of calories through neolithic revolutions, the spread of slash-and-burn deforestation as “civilization” driver, the formation of a global economic system dependent on slavery and the rise of coal as a mean to expand industrialization and control labor are among the main objects of discussion in the debate about the history of the Anthropocene. These forces and processes are all located before 1900. There is little historical conceptualization of the place of energy as a nexus of the Anthropocene during the 20th century, which represents the most intensive and exponential phase of change in the proposed new geological epoch and state of the Earth system.

With this in mind, this workshop will explore the causes and drivers of the Anthropocene by focusing on the issue of energy resource extraction, processing, and consumption, and the cultures it engendered or made possible to imagine in the 20th century. The workshop will gather scholars around the question of the role of energy resource production to critically investigate the causes of the Anthropocene by focusing attention on how and why certain forms of energy resources were developed in specific historical and political contexts.

The focus of this event will be generating creative discussions and dialogue with a smaller, focused group of engaged participants. With this in mind, we will ask attendees to prepare, at most, a short preparatory paper in advance of the workshop. And although we know we cannot predict the exigencies and complexities of life, we also request that participants attend as much of the workshop as possible to ensure that our conversations are cohesive, creative and generative.

This event is sponsored by the Centre of Excellence for Anthropocene History and the Environmental Humanities Laboratory, both housed in the Division of the History of Science, Technology and the Environment at the KTH Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm. For more information, please contact ehlab@abe.kth.se

Organizers

Antoine Acker, University of Geneva

Rob Gioielli, KTH Stockholm

Adam Wickberg, KTH Stockholm