

Call for contributions to special issue on petrocultures in *Journal of Energy History*

That oil is one of the most important resources of the twentieth century can hardly be disputed. The role of oil in constructing our current societies is of course long known, but the way in which oil is studied has changed and developed over the past years. This is due in part to the development of a new research field known as petrocultures studies, but also to current discussions of how we can use learnings from history to move away from oil in future energy transitions. In the energy history field, this can be seen from a heightened interest in oil history in countries that have not had their own oil production, whereas most earlier work has focused on oil-extracting states. In this special issue we want to build on both of these developments and investigate the possibility of broadening the scope of oil history using the concept of petrocultures.

As Donna Haraway has pointed out, all actors are both semiotic and material, in that they have a material form, but also semiotic meaning (often several) (Haraway 1991). This echoes the basic assumption within petrocultures research that oil is not only an energy source. It is part of our lives in a fundamental way, permeating our cultures, economies, politics and material lives. In order to make this manifest it is crucial to acknowledge that oil is not a mere thing or object but, as Huber argues, a “socioecological relation” encompassing both material and social aspects (Huber 2013 p.4).

The concept of petrocultures is therefore not merely a description of the properties of a given society but also a theoretical and methodological perspective that aims to unveil the embeddedness of oil in everyday life (see, e.g., Al-Nakib 2016, Lemenager 2014, Daggett 2019, Huber 2013). Different concepts and methods enable this process of making oil visible. For the proposed special issue, we are interested in studies that uncover this normal state using genealogical methods where the “contingent processes that have brought [petroculture] into being” are analysed from a historical perspective (Dean 1994 in Garland 2014), that engage with the veiled and embedded character of oil in combination with historical research into the materialities of oil, or that uses narrative analysis in order to unpack the semiotic side of oil and the sway it holds over many societies. Following the work of Huber this means to move beyond the actors and elites most deeply and visibly engaged in petro-industry and instead look at the everydayness of oil and how oil in contemporary society has become “equated with life itself” (Huber 2013, p.xii).

In short, the overarching theme of this special issue is identification and analysis of central cultural beliefs and practices that have historically shaped and maintained different forms of petrocultures and that today may hinder climate change mitigation efforts. In addition, we aim to examine and develop the petroculture concept in itself, and will therefore ask contributors to include a meta-discussion about how and why the notion of petroculture is useful in their analysis.

The working title of the special issue is *Pervasive petrocultures: histories, ideas and practices of fossil fuels*. The editors of the special issue are Anna Åberg, Kristoffer Ekberg, Susanna Lidström and Jens Millkrantz.

Time and work plan

We ask for short abstracts of proposed research articles to be submitted by **15 March 2022**. We will notify contributors of accepted proposals in April 2022.

In **May 2022** we will organise a half-day online workshop where all accepted contributors will present their abstracts to each other and the special issue editors. We, the editors, will also explain the plans and aims for the special issue in more detail. We believe this workshop will provide a useful starting point and support for the ensuing writing process and create a coherent and interrelated set of articles.

We will ask for extended drafts (more than half of the final article length) to be submitted by **November 2022**. Based on these submissions, we will organise another workshop around the same time, this time in-person (if possible). At this workshop, each draft will receive detailed feedback from at least one other contributor and the editors.

Final articles will be due in **February 2023**. At that time, all articles will be sent out for regular peer review.

Contact

Please submit abstracts to:

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Questions can also be submitted to any of the other special issue editors:

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Susanna Lidström susanna.lidstrom@abe.kth.se
Jens Millkrantz jens.millkrantz@chalmers.se

References

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