



## **First iHUS Seminar on *Energy Humanities: The Role(s) of Fiction***

*iHUS: Institute of Humanities of the University of Santiago de Compostela*

**CEA: Centro de Estudios Avanzados (Campus Norte)**

**16 September 2025**

**9:00-9:15:** Opening Remarks: Laura M<sup>a</sup> LOJO RODRÍGUEZ (Professor of English and Director of iHUS)

**9:15-10:45:** Keynote Lecture: **Graeme MACDONALD** (Professor of English and Comparative Literature, University of Warwick, UK): ***Novel Powers? Fiction and the Energy Humanities***

**10:45-11:00:** Coffee break

**11:00-12:30:** Plenary Lecture: **Daniel Lewis WUEBBEN** (Research Professor, Technological Research Institute, Comillas Pontifical University): ***Can Fiction Spark Climate Action? Critical Energy Utopias and Energy Transitions***

**12:30-14:00:** Plenary Lecture: **Luis Miguel VARELA CABO** (Professor of Physics, USC): ***A History of Energy Transitions***

**14:00-16:00:** Lunch break

**16:00-17:30:** Plenary Lecture: **Germán LABRADOR** (Distinguished Researcher, ATRAE-CSIC, Spanish National Research Council): ***Eco-Energy Unconscious in Iberian Cultural History***

**17:30-18:00:** Coffee break

**18:00-19:30:** Plenary Lecture: **César Pablo DOMÍNGUEZ PRIETO** (Professor of Comparative Literature, USC): ***From the Crisis in the Humanities to Anthropocene Humanities***

**19:30-19:45:** Closing Remarks: Jorge SACIDO ROMERO (Associate Professor of English and Member of iHUS)



*It's not climate change—It's everything change*

Margaret Atwood (2015)

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“Without the forms of energy to which we’ve had access and we’ve come to take for granted, we would never have been modern. We are citizens and subjects of fossil fuels through and through, whether we know it or not. And so any meaningful response to climate change will have to tarry with the world and the people that have been made from oil” (Szeman and Boyer, *Energy Humanities: An Anthology*, 2017, 1). Fossil fuels —coal, oil and gas— have made us, continue to make us and seriously threaten to unmake us and our planetary co-inhabitants (Ritchie and Rosado 2024; “GISS Surface Temperature Analysis [v4]” 2025). Our ways of life, particularly those of the Global North —social interactions, daily habits, work and leisure, life-projects, cultural manifestations, unrestrained or forced mobilities, political life, economic dynamics, etc.— have been shaped by “energy resources, systems, and use patterns” (Williams, forthcoming) in ways so pervasive that, paradoxically, remain most of the time hidden and unrepresented (Patricia Yaeger speaks of “an energy unconscious” at work in a novel such as Jack Kerouac’s *On the Road* [1957], in which the protagonists drive around the country totally unconcerned about “how much fuel they’re using or the price of oil”, a commodity that makes their countercultural experience and the novel’s publication and distribution possible in the first place [Yaeger et al 2011, 306]). It is the task of the Energy Humanities, an emergent field of study that addresses a global emergency, to bring to the surface the ways energy has shaped modern society, to probe into the workings of the energy unconscious in cultural discourses and products of all sorts, to produce, in

sum, what Imre Szeman calls “energy epistemologies” (2013; see also Szeman and Boyer 2017, 6). “We are up to our eyeballs ‘in oil’”, Graeme Macdonald writes, “and yet we fail to register its ubiquity in social life” (2017, 163). But Energy Humanities is not only about getting our heads out of the ocean of oil to look at the past or the present, but to sharpen our mind’s eye and imagine a future world after fossil fuels, oil in particular. Because energy regimes are more, much more, than a techno-scientific question, the “energy transition” in which governments, research institutions and companies are presently engaged has, so far, proved unsuccessful in mitigating climate change and curbing the steady rise of its main indicator, global warming, due to, in great part, the relentless growth of CO2 emissions (Ritchie and Roser 2024). Though a *sine que non*, scientific information concerning environmental degradation (such as the reports of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change - IPCC) will not by itself alone “communicate—and hence trigger—the social and political changes needed to address climate change” (Szeman and Boyer 2017, 5). To put all the trust on the latter is a hopeless illusion, not to say that it is totally unfair to the scientific community. Something much greater is needed: “shifting away from fossil fuels, especially oil, requires more than policy changes and technological advances; it demands a deep understanding of how fossil fuels have made us who we are, so that we might begin to make ourselves and our societies otherwise” (Williams, forthcoming; see also Szeman and Boyer 2017, 3).

The **First iHUS Seminar on Energy Humanities** will be a one-day event that aligns with two of the three priorities of the research agenda of the Institute of Humanities of the University of Santiago de Compostela (iHUS): “Anthropocene, Wellbeing and Justice” and “Identities, Global Change and Mobilities”. It will focus on this occasion on the role(s) of fiction in either reproducing the invisibility of energy as the shaping force of modernity, or rendering “fuels nameable, readable, and visible” (Szeman and Boyer 2017, 6). It will also look at the literary prefigurations of the planet’s future, whether they be idealistic (which take for granted a seamless transition from fossil fuels to renewables), post-apocalyptic (which draws a scenario of energy depletion and general catastrophe), or a soberly constructive one (more optimistic in spirit, yet aware

of the inevitable challenges that must be confronted and the changes that need to be implemented at all levels). Finally, the seminar will examine the ways in which inherently fictional strategies are used in scientific research, energy policy and industrial projects, as the systematic use of scenario-building shows (Smith 2017).

## References

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