

# Editorial

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artistic research  
crude oil  
energy transition

As our contemporary society slowly shifts away from fossil fuels as an energy source, there is still an urgent need to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, which are contributing to global warming and climate change. In order to better achieve the transition towards sustainable energy sources, it is essential to understand how energy sources shape a society and its culture. Even though modern life is primarily built upon an omnipresent culture of oil (petroculture) and the resource's wide range of applications and uses, there is very little public knowledge or awareness about it.

The interdisciplinary artistic research project *Reflecting Oil: Arts-Based Research on Oil Transitionings* (2019–2024) sheds light on this important topic and offers an innovative and multiperspectival reflection on crude oil. It approaches the substance from a holistic perspective, giving rise to new representations and narratives about oil that should bring about a radical change in public perception and new visions of a sustainable future without oil.

To give readers an overview of the book's content right from the start, I would like to briefly guide you through the various chapters. This publication captures the artistic research project in all its facets, organized into four chapters that correspond with the structure of the project and its research formats and methodologies.

After the preface by Alexander Damianisch and his introduction to the concept of "cognitive resonance," Chapter 1 consists of introductory statements by the three cooperation partners. My essay as the project leader outlines the basic ideas of the research process; Holger Ott, as our domestic cooperation partner (Department Geoenergy, Montanuniversität Leoben, Austria<sup>1</sup>), presents the project from the perspective of a petroleum engineer; and the text by Imre Szeman, our international research partner (Petrocultures Research Group, University of Alberta, Canada), looks at petroculture and crude oil against the backdrop of the term "experiment."

The second chapter features an exemplary selection of artistic crude oil experiments based on innovative approaches to the perception of the substance, whose findings provide new knowledge and creative incentives for future investigations.

The *Reflecting Oil Colloquium*, held at the University of Applied Arts Vienna from June 9 to 12, 2022, is documented in Chapter 3: the book structure follows the workshop formats of the three working groups. Working group 1 takes an experimental approach to crude oil in the chemistry laboratory; group 2 deals with the

in/visibility of the substance on the levels of image and text; group 3, in turn, speculates about a potential transformation process towards the post-fossil age in the form of a graphic novel. The sequence of the colloquium contributions is aligned with their thematic focus, spanning from the geological formation of crude oil to its actual visibility and geopolitical impacts.

The fourth and final chapter is dedicated to my artistic works inspired by the experiences and knowledge obtained in the overall interdisciplinary research process, which were presented as part of the exhibition *Reflecting Oil—Petroculture in Transformation* at the Angewandte Interdisciplinary Lab (AIL) from October 2 to November 15, 2024. My works and the contributions by participants of the *Reflecting Oil Colloquium* are documented, reflected upon, and contextualized by art historian Raphaelle Occhietti.

This book features a broad spectrum of perspectives on and perceptions of crude oil, which overlap, intersect, and refer to one another in their contents. To reveal these connections, a system of keywords has been integrated into the layout, exhibiting the interdisciplinary and collaborative nature of the research process and the true complexity of this subject.

Hoping that this project and publication can contribute to a much needed step in the transition towards a sustainable future, I wish you an inspiring and insightful read.

<sup>1</sup> In the book, Montanuniversität Leoben is referred to as the University of Leoben. In 2024, the Department Petroleum Engineering was renamed the Department Geoenergy.