

Transitions in Energy Landscapes and Everyday Life in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries

Vanessa Taylor

During her time at the RCC, Vanessa Taylor will develop ideas arising from the recent workshop at the Rachel Carson Center/Deutsches Museum on [“Transitions in Energy Landscapes and Everyday Life in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries”](#) (April 2017). Convened with Heather Chappells (University of British Columbia), Helmuth Trischler (RCC/Deutsches Museum), and Christof Mauch (RCC), this explored the coevolution of energy landscapes and everyday lives in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries across a range of geographical settings. Energy landscapes—environments defined by energy-related processes and by infrastructures of extraction, generation, distribution, and consumption—have changed dramatically in the last two centuries, especially through shifts towards “modern” centralized energy generation and long-distance transmission. But how energy has transformed everyday lives and how people have engaged with energy and other infrastructures of modernity has been highly differentiated by political, cultural, and social contexts. The workshop explored the variability of human-environment encounters with material energies and infrastructures, challenging conceptualizations of energy as a universal, modernizing force acting upon nature and society; it considered questions of agency and resilience in relation to people’s roles as consumers, citizens, and environmentalists. This writing project at the RCC has two aims: to identify common threads and analyze disjunctions between the workshop contributions, and to assess their significance for wider questions about energy transitions. How should we conceptualize the ways in which diverse households connect to energy environments? How useful is the idea of energy landscapes or “energyscapes” (Strauss, Rupp, and Love 2016) for understanding the changing nature of households over the twentieth century? What do these changing household/energy landscape relations tell us about domestic transitions and “behaviour change” in the future?

With these questions in mind, Vanessa will

- write a proposal for a publication relating to the workshop theme (edited book or special environmental humanities journal issue);
- work on the introduction for a shorter publication: a series of “think pieces” arising from the workshop;
- revise the workshop paper she coauthored with Heather Chappells drawing on case studies from Britain and Canada (“Landscapes of Home: Variability in Household-Energy Connections in the 20th Century”), both for the shorter “think piece” and for an extended version of the paper;
- consider how ideas arising from this workshop relate to a separate chapter on energy, space, and the household for a book coauthored with the Material Cultures of Energy team.