Session Name: ***Rethinking the heritage of extraction, energy and waste infrastructures in the Anthropocene***

Session Proposer: Rodney Harrison, University College London

Session Abstract: The heritage sector has largely responded to the threat of climate change with a renewed sense of moral purpose to continue doing what it has always done—document, collect, plan, manage, conserve—even in the face of what we now know to be a planetary emergency that renders such approaches potentially meaningless and trivial. In contrast, this session aims to explore the potential for heritage and museums to become agents for radical forms of climate action, through exposing the interconnections between extraction, energy and waste infrastructures and the crises of the contemporary moment, to find alternatives to present practices, and to support citizen confidence in the transitions which will be required to achieve them. To do this, the session will bring heritage and heritage studies into conversation with the fields of energy humanities, environmental humanities and climate activism. Taking a relational and more-than-human approach to understanding the dynamics of heritage processes, papers in the session seek to highlight the potential for alternative forms of curating and storytelling to transform the relationship between people, their heritage, fossil fuels and waste. Crucially, however, we are interested both in the symbolic dimensions of this relationship and in the structural conditions that make such narratives and experiences meaningful, as well as the potential for heritage and museums to both expose and challenge these structural conditions. Papers will also consider the extent to which heritage might play a role in ensuring the radical changes and transitions in consumption and reliance on fossil fuels will be undertaken democratically and in a just and fair manner that supports whole of society transformations.

Presenter 1

Name: Geneviève Godin

Organisation: UCL Institute of Archaeology

Position: MSCA Postdoctoral Fellow

Primary email: g.godin@ucl.ac.uk

Biography (max 50 words): Geneviève Godin is a Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions Postdoctoral Fellow at the UCL Institute of Archaeology carrying out research at the intersection of monstrosity and anthropogenic waste. Her interests include contemporary archaeology, queer ecology, urban heritage, and non-human agency.

Summary abstract (minimum 100 words and maximum 150 words):

Anywhere But Here: The Heritage Legacies of London's Sewers

This paper offers a critical investigation of the 19th-century creation of the London sewerage system as a key moment of deliberate separation between

people and the environment, in the name of a specific vision of urban cleanliness, civility, and modernity rooted in the continuous displacement of waste as monstrous matter. By tracing the growth of this rhetoric from the Victorian sewers to the recent Thames Tideway Tunnel—the first major improvement to London's sewerage system since its creation—I propose that the societal shift away from the immediate management of waste to the management of its disappearance at the infrastructure level has reshaped urban consumption and discard. I further raise the question of whether these heritage legacies of displacement have helped sustain overconsumption and, ultimately, environmental harm in the Anthropocene.

Presenter 2

Name: Rodney Harrison

Organisation: University College London

Position: Professor of Heritage Studies

Primary email: r.harrison@ucl.ac.uk

Biography (max 50 words): Rodney is Professor of Heritage Studies at UCL. He has undertaken research in Australia, East Asia, Southeast Asia, North America, South America, the Middle East, UK and continental Europe. His current research explores how heritage/museums can support racial justice and action for climate empowerment in the context of biodiversity/climate crises.

Summary abstract (minimum 100 words and maximum 150 words):

Reimagining Carbon Heritages for Just Green Transitions

This paper draws on the collective work of the large, collaborative, international Horizon Europe/UKRI-funded PITCH (Petrocultures' Intersections with The Cultural Heritage sector in the context of green transitions) project to explore the ways in which heritage narratives can act as both incentive and disincentive to action for climate empowerment and green energy transitions. The project brings together academic and cultural partners in six European countries to undertake research on the ways in which museums, heritage sites, cultural institutions, and art spaces can support communities and organizations in the transition away from fossil fuels. The paper will consider examples from across Europe, in conversation with recent ethnographic research in East Asia, to explore how the museum and heritage field might better narrate and contextualize the legacies of the fossil fuel era and provide new ways to imagine and shape a post fossil fuel society.

Presenter 3

Name: Janna oud Ammerveld

Organisation: Utrecht University

Position: Post-doctoral Researcher

Primary email: j.j.oudammerveld@uu.nl

Biography (max 50 words): Janna oud Ammerveld works as a postdoctoral researcher at Utrecht University on the Horizon Europe PITCH project. Her research focuses on the heritage of gas extraction in Groningen (NL). She received her PhD in critical heritage studies from UCL on the intersections of climate change and heritage policy work.

Summary abstract (minimum 100 words and maximum 150 words):

Curating feral heritage: cycling through the gaslands of Groningen

This paper will reflect on the ongoing creation of a heritage intervention in the (post-) extractive landscape of Groningen (NL). Comprising a bicycle route, a land art installation, and an open call to reimagine former extraction sites, the intervention responds to the rapid systemic dismantling of the material infrastructure of decades of intensive gas extraction in the region. Against this backdrop and in close collaboration with local grass roots initiatives we use the heritage intervention as a method and medium to search for a language (visual/artistic/material/affective) to narrate the legacy of gas extraction in the landscape. Drawing on insights from critical heritage studies and the environmental humanities, and informed by collaborative work on the ground, we explore how concepts such as anti-landscapes, entropy, and more-than-human agency might help articulate alternative ways of encountering, remembering and contesting extraction during erasure.

Presenter 4

Name: Colin Sterling

Organisation: University of Amsterdam

Position: Assistant Professor

Primary email: c.p.sterling@uva.nl

Biography (max 50 words): Colin Sterling is Assistant Professor of Heritage, Museums and the Environment at the University of Amsterdam, where he leads the BA in Global Arts, Culture and Politics. Colin’s research focuses on the political and ecological dimensions of heritage and museums in the past and the present.

Summary abstract (minimum 100 words and maximum 150 words):

Grounding Energy: Heritage, Art and Power in Post-Industrial Germany

This talk examines the different ways in which heritage and art function as “critical nodes” in the formation and potential disruption of socio-energetic regimes, with a focus on the production of energy and heritage at a distinctive post-industrial site: E-WERK Luckenwalde in Brandenburg, East Germany. Originally built in 1913 to provide electricity to the people of Luckenwalde, this monumental power station was decommissioned in 1989. In 2019 artist Pablo Wendel and curator Helen Turner purchased the building and began the process of turning the power back on while simultaneously developing an artistic programme focused on ecology. In this context, the generation of power and the production of art mobilise new energy relations that subvert familiar narratives of “sustainability.” This talk reflects on the contested status of heritage in such processes, as the legacies of the industrial era rub up against critical artistic agendas and the resurgence of right-wing political forces.