Nuclear Waste and Deep Time (Amsterdam, 3 Nov 17)

CLUE+ and Environmental Humanities Center, VU Amsterdam, Nov 03, 2017
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Study Group 'Nuclear Waste and Deep Time'

This workshop comes as part of the Nuclear Waste Weeks at the EHC in Amsterdam and aims to bring together PhD students from various disciplines who share an interest in deep time and/or nuclear waste.

While the term 'deep time' has been introduced by John McPhee as recently as 1981, the concept was developed more than two centuries ago in early modern British and Scottish scholarship and has undergone several transformations since (see for example Paolo Rossi 1984 and Martin J.S. Rudwick 1995, 2002). Back in the 18th century, the discovery that the earth must be much older than previously thought challenged religious conceptions of time. In the last couple of years, the concept of deep time has gained unprecedented momentum with the Anthropocene debate that was kicked loose in the year 2000 by nobel laureate Paul Crutzen and his colleague Eugene Stoermer. The Anthropocene is the most recent proposed geological time period superseding the Holocene. With it, terms like the Anthropozoic (Antonio Stoppani, 1873), Psychozoic (Joseph Le Conte, 1879), and the Noosphere (Édouard Le Roy, 1927) that sought to denote the far reaching impact of collective human activity on Earth, finally seemed to resonate with the vastness of geologic time, adding, moreover, a distinctly ecological edge to the debate.

Keeping in mind the many problems this term raises (and which have been addressed in previous sessions at the EHC), the Anthropocene urges us to think beyond human timescales without losing sight of the human legacy within them. One of the practices to which this kind of understanding is pertinent is the long-term storage of radioactive waste. Thus, high level radioactive waste and its inconceivable aftermath brings us into proximity with deep time and urges us to find long-term storage solutions for the countless generations to come. In this regard, not only it points to a deep past (the Uranium Oxide that is used to fuel reactors is mined from deposits as old as the Earth) but importantly poses the challenge of engaging with a deep future, that is, the millennia to come in which waste elements like plutonium pose a threat to the living environment. It is a tricky challenge, not least because, leaving the practicalities aside for a moment, it is paradoxically much easier to imagine eternity than the 'very large finitudes' (Timothy Morton) of ten or even a hundred thousand years that these elements entail.

In this workshop, we want to engage with the practical challenges these vast time-frames pose and speculate on nuclear waste's aesthetico-political dimensions through a corpus scientific and

cultural accounts. As this is a rather specialised subject, we find it immensely important to connect to those who work in the field and share ideas, case studies, experiences and cookies. Our aim is thus to establish a small, but international community of peers to strengthen, widen, and deepen each other's work. We, the organisers of this workshop, both come from the Humanities and work on contemporary art and philosophy, but we are open to other disciplines as this is a fairly interdisciplinary subject matter. If you want to be part please consider joining us in Amsterdam:

We scheduled a kick-off meeting for November 3, 2017, to close our event series, the Nuclear Waste Weeks, at the Environmental Humanities Center in Amsterdam. It will consist of two parts: the screening of two short films at 15:00 and a 1+ hour discussion of selected reading material will take place starting at 16:00 (texts that will be distributed beforehand). The readings are supposed to stimulate discussion and offer an entry point into our respective research projects. The meeting will be informal and, if there is a shared interest, the first in a series to discuss not only texts, but also offer a platform to present one's own research.

The workshop is primarily geared towards PhD students, but ResMA students and (early career) researchers are welcome as well. If you wish to participate, please drop us a line to kyvelimavro@gmail.com and a.volkmar@hum.leidenuniv.nl.

Reference:

CFP: Nuclear Waste and Deep Time (Amsterdam, 3 Nov 17). In: ArtHist.net, Sep 22, 2017 (accessed Mar 20, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/16162>.