

UniSysCat - Colloquium

Dr. Benjamin Steininger

Max Planck Institute for the History of Science

Start Time: Wednesday, September 22, 2021 05:00 pm

End Time: Wednesday, September 22, 2021 06:00 pm

Online Colloquium

Towards a Chemical Cultural Theory: Why Historians and Philosophers of Modernity and of the Anthropocene Need to Engage with Catalysis Science and Industry

Dr. Benjamin Steininger

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Benjamin Steininger is a cultural theorist and philosopher of technology at UniSysCat and the MPI for the History of Science Berlin. Starting from a concrete, geographical and historical setting (Petrochemical Corridor, Louisiana), he places catalysis industry in the context of the dynamics of modernity and the Anthropocene.

Industrial catalysis is a well known driver of historical dynamics since 1900 (ammunition, artificial fertilizers, later petrochemicals). In the light of the Anthropocene discussion, this diagnosis needs to be reframed. The 'Great Acceleration', the global acceleration of socio-cultural as well as earth system parameters from 1950 onwards, depended not least on products of catalysis industry. No Great Acceleration without catalytic acceleration.

Central for interpreting the impact of industrial catalysis is the strategic scope of catalysis products, the position of catalysis industries within the political processes of the 20th century, and its status at a transition point from industrial to biochemical process logic.

In the cultural theory of modernity and of the Anthropocene, the connections of chemical, political, geographic and earth system spheres, of molecular and planetary issues is still

comparatively little perceived. Yet it is precisely this holistic yet very concrete perspective on multiple scales that is necessary to negotiate central questions about the present and future of the industrial and energy system. It is this arena into which a yet to be established 'chemical cultural theory' needs to be placed.

Dr. Ingo Zebger

Organizer