

Wednesday Seminars

LECTURE SERIES IN SOCIAL AND CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY

11.03.2026 | 5 p.m. | @ Übungsraum IKSA | NIG, 4th floor

Philip Wight (University of Alaska)

Arctic Artery:

The Trans-Alaska Pipeline System and the World It Made



Philip Wight is an Associate Professor of History and Arctic & Northern Studies at the University of Alaska. He is an energy and environmental historian, with a focus on infrastructure, mobility, and climate. Dr. Wight has testified before the U.S. House of Representatives on Alaskan energy issues and is a frequent commentator on resource development controversies. He is currently finalizing a book manuscript, *Arctic Artery: The Trans-Alaska Pipeline System and the World it Made* (University of Washington Press, 2027). Dr. Wight's other recent scholarship has examined the history of nuclear power in Alaska, a generation and transmission history of Alaska's Railbelt Electric grid, and the prospects for balcony solar in the United States. When not in the archives, he can be found cycling, packrafting and skiing throughout Alaska.



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The Trans-Alaska Pipeline System (TAPS) is one of the most famous infrastructures in world history—and perhaps the most misunderstood. Built between 1974-1977, its corporate owners extolled the system as the most expensive “private capital” project of the 20th Century. TAPS has transported 19 billion barrels of petroleum since 1977 and remains in operation as the only conduit for moving U.S. Arctic hydrocarbons. While the pipeline system is a very visible technical marvel—it’s the most photographed pipeline on Earth—few recognize TAPS’ true reach and consequence. Due to its historical mythology and evocative physicality (which encourages a myopic focus on the terrestrial pipeline segment), the pipeline offers a simplistic image which masks its sprawling impact and implications. This seminar presentation offers an environmental history of the pipeline system as it was understood by its corporate owners: the crucial pipeline-tanker linchpin in a vertically integrated hydrocarbon value chain. *Arctic Artery* unearths this wider midstream infrastructure using corporate archives and follows North Slope oil from wellhead to tailpipe to trace its full environmental impacts. Beginning with the U.S. Navy’s oil exploration efforts during World War Two, *Arctic Artery* investigates the inception, construction, endurance, and consequences of the pipeline system for Alaska, the Pacific littoral, and the planet.



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