

**Jean-Baptiste Fressoz**

***More and More and More: An All-Consuming History of Energy.***

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Originally published in French as *Sans transition: une nouvelle histoire de l'énergie* (2024), Jean-Baptiste Fressoz's latest book is not merely a material history of energy—it is a searing critique of the dominant narratives through which energy history has been told. Fressoz targets what he calls the 'phasist' model: the idea that human societies have moved linearly from one energy regime to the next—from wood to coal, coal to oil, and now oil to renewables. Against this tidy succession, he offers a messier, more empirically grounded picture: Fressoz brings the same critical ambition that has characterised his previous works to bear on the political and intellectual genealogy of 'energy transition'. The result is a provocative and timely book that challenges one of the most ubiquitous – and least examined – concepts in contemporary environmental discourse.

The book's core argument is surprisingly simple: energy sources do not replace each other; they accumulate, creating a symbiotic relationship of dependence that needs to be considered when explaining their histories. With intellectual clarity and a sharp critical edge, Fressoz dismantles the dominant narrative – that history develops in neat stages, with one energy source smoothly replacing another. Instead, through a careful analysis of historical data and other diverse sources, he presents a strikingly different picture: the history of energy is one of accumulation, symbiosis and mutual reinforcement, rather than linear succession or substitution.

The book unfolds in two interwoven parts. First, Fressoz offers a material and quantitative history of energy, demonstrating how each new energy source has added to, rather than replaced, earlier ones. Through detailed case studies, each chapter explores a specific synergy, showing how fossil fuel systems form a tightly interconnected and mutually reinforcing whole: wood was not replaced by coal; instead, coal increased the demand for wood. Likewise, oil did not render coal – or wood – obsolete; it was layered on top of them. Crucially, he insists that energy sources must be compared in absolute terms. Many transition narratives focus on relative shares – how much oil or coal is in the 'energy mix'. However, these percentages obscure a key fact: the absolute use of these resources continues to rise across the board. These additive dynamic challenges the linear models prevalent in transition studies, narratives that are surprisingly echoed even by radical scholars like Andreas Malm and Timothy Mitchell, who, despite their critical stance, still fall back on simplistic assumptions.

The second part of the book traces the intellectual and political genealogy of the concept of 'energy transition'. Firstly, Fressoz reveals that the term

did not originate from environmental concerns but from mid-20th-century efforts – particularly within the nuclear sector – to reframe the energy narrative in a politically strategic way. Drawing on the technocratic notion of ‘transition’ from the 1930s, the term ‘energy transition’ first emerged within a mix of neo-Malthusian fears of collapse, anti-environmentalist ideology and nuclear technophilia to support investments in nuclear energy. By the 1970s – amid energy crises and early warnings about global warming – a diverse array of actors, from environmentalists to members of the nuclear lobby, began strategically deploying the concept of ‘energy transition’ to advance their often contradictory agendas. By the 1990s, the term had become a flexible discursive tool that had gained institutional traction in climate change discourses, even influencing the scientific assessments of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, which had uncritically adopted the widespread use of the term.

The book concludes by showing how the dominant narrative of energy history – a story of progress from muscle power to renewables – is a ‘fallacious history’ that ultimately supports a form of climate inaction, since it allows for a hypothetical, future-oriented fix that conveniently pushes the problem of climate change further down the line. Fressoz claims that the transition narrative has served as a way to rationalise procrastination while waiting for a mythical future solution. Industry actors quickly became some of the most enthusiastic proponents of the techno-optimistic narrative of the energy transition.

Fressoz’s critique of the ‘energy transition’ narrative reveals the ideological underpinnings of much mainstream environmental thought and calls for a more honest, less utopian engagement with our ecological reality. *More and more and more* opens up a wide array of research questions across disciplines; as one of the few major works to date that deeply interrogates the concept of energy transition, it should be essential reading for environmental historians and scholars of climate politics alike.

If the book has a limitation, it is that its critique is sharper than its alternatives. While Fressoz offers a compelling demolition of the transition narrative, readers may wish for a clearer sense of what a post-transition framework might look like, both analytically and politically. Still, this is perhaps beside the point. *More and More and More* is not a roadmap for decarbonisation, but a reckoning with the conceptual frameworks that have shaped, and in many ways constrained, our thinking. Before we can imagine new futures, we must first dismantle the narratives that obscure them.

It isn’t easy to do full justice to Fressoz’s work in a short review. This is a landmark book – not only for those interested in the history of energy, but also for readers engaged with the history of climate and environmental thought, political ecology, and beyond. The strength of the book lies in its dual gesture: deconstructing dominant myths of the past while offering a compelling and rigorously documented alternative narrative. More than a book about energy, it is about history itself: how it is told, who tells it, and why certain stories

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endure. By dismantling the myth of transition, Fressoz opens the way for a more honest reckoning with the scale of the climate crisis – and the ideological scaffolding that continues to obscure it.

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