



Notes from Underground: The Depths of Environmental Arts, Culture and Justice

**Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE)
Eleventh Biennial Conference, June 23 - 27, 2015
University of Idaho
Moscow, Idaho**

www.uidaho.edu/asle

Already even then I had my underground world in my soul.

- Fyodor Dostoyevsky

It is a marvellous reflection that the whole of the superficial mould ... has passed, and will again pass, every few years through the bodies of worms.

- Charles Darwin

Keystone XL will not cross Lakota treaty territory.... Their horses are ready. So are ours.

- Honor the Earth

In *Notes from Underground* (1864), Dostoyevsky explores relations between modernity and its discontents at an important historical conjuncture: the novella's unnamed, unpleasant hero rails against capitalist industry, imperialist architecture and an emerging social scientific understanding of human behaviour premised on predictability and knowability. By writing from the underground – from the subterranean, from the murk, from the world of refuse – Dostoyevsky asks us to consider the importance of experiences that lie beneath (and both before and after) the shiny edifices of progress, rationality and industry. But the “underground” also asks us to consider what lies beneath us much more literally: crust, tectonic plates, magma, minerals, fossil fuels, aquifers, lakes, caves, fungal networks, clay, compost, worms, ants, nematodes, roots, rhizomes, tubers, seeds, warrens, nests, vaults, graves, landfills, nuclear weapons and waste, buried treasure. In this act of collection – underground elements, underground agents, underground movements, underground epistemologies –

we hope to draw attention to the multiple ways in which things underground and the institutions that variously cultivate, harness and contain them, are constantly changing the terrain (literally and politically) on which we stand.

Especially in the midst of such widespread focus on atmospheric climate change, perhaps we also need to look down, under, beneath and below for imaginative aesthetic, critical, pedagogical and activist responses? At our current political and ecological conjuncture, the literal underground is very much the subject of contest – extraction, pollution, depletion, neoliberalisation, cultivation, sovereignty, equity, (re)claiming – suggesting the need for creative new ways of engaging in activism, reading, writing and education in these networks of depth: *underground arts, humanities, ecocriticism, justice*. For the 2015 ASLE conference, we seek proposals for panels, papers, performances, discussions, readings and roundtables that address this constellation of undergrounds. **We invite participants to interpret the conference theme as broadly as possible** and to imagine their work in terms not only of underground *content* but also of subterranean *form*: we particularly encourage non-traditional modes of presentation, including hybrid, performative and collaborative works; panels that minimize formal presentation in favour of engaged emergent discussion; interdisciplinary approaches; environmentally inflected (earthy?) readings of fiction, poetry, creative nonfiction, film, theatre and other media; and proposals from outside the academic humanities, including submissions from artists, writers, teachers, practitioners, activists and colleagues in the social and natural sciences. Topics may include, but are certainly not limited to:

- **cultures, literatures and poetics of extraction, transportation and processing:** mining, fracking, drilling, quarrying, piping, smelting, refining, spilling, polluting, murdering, resisting, witnessing, writing
- **geological writing and ecocriticism:** rocks, minerals, earthquakes, eruptions, tectonic shifts, fossils, mountains, volcanoes, trenches, fault lines, geological time, stone, sculpture, magnetism, alchemy, geomancy, petrification
- **soil biopolitics:** agriculture, gardening, fertilization, earth communities, geophagy, microorganisms, roots, tubers, fungi, erosion, sprawl, brownfields, territory, nationalisms, imperialisms, justice, community, land movements, land claims, land art, grounding, place
- **resistances and emergencies:** indigenous cultures, sovereignty, alliances, identities, literatures; postcolonial, anti-colonial, anti-racist and intersectional/assemblage politics and writing; feminist, queer, trans and allied ecocriticisms; materialist, posthumanist and object-oriented perspectives
- **underground waters:** water tables, aquifers, lost streams, caves, springs, sewers, drains, pipes, hot springs, bottles, dowsing
- **multispecies undergrounds:** moles, rabbits, prairie dogs, bats, owls, insects, arachnids, mushrooms, mycorrhizal networks, rhizomes, lichens, tunnels, subways, underpasses, caves, shafts, basements, graveyards
- **cultures and politics of refuse:** dirt, filth, landfills, compost, art, nuclear waste, toxic politics, environmental justice, international garbage trading, plastics
- **underground movements:** repressions, negations, resistances, persistences, escapes, exchanges,

migrations, hybridizations, diffusions; subterranean theoretical perspectives; literary undergrounds; grassroots politics and cultures; diasporic identities, affinities and writings; politics of the unconscious; depth as a political/ecological/intellectual aspiration; pedagogies from below; historical undergrounds/underground histories

- **underground aesthetics:** subterranean currents of literature, film, music, art and performance; literatures of excavation, decomposition, vegetation, eruption; poetics of darkness, claustrophobia, spelunking; dirty words and pictures; seismic nature writing and poetry; performing underground

Keynote Speakers/Panelists:

Our list of keynote speakers includes scholars, activists and writers working on/in different undergrounds: oil literatures, cultures and histories; the poetics and politics of extractive industry; fungal networks and lichen worlds; grassroots movements focused on food security and community agriculture with marginalized communities; indigenous land/literary resistances; and local “underground” writers of ecology and place.

LINDA HOGAN (WEDNESDAY) is former Writer in Residence for the Chickasaw Nation and Professor Emerita at the University of Colorado; an internationally recognized poet, novelist and essayist, she is the author of such multiple prize winning works as *Solar Storms* and *Rounding the Human Corners*, in addition to the forthcoming *Dark. Sweet. New and Selected Poems*.

STEPHANIE LEMENAGER (TUESDAY) holds the prestigious Barbara and Carlisle Moore Professorship of English at the University of Oregon, where her work focuses on environmental cultural studies and public humanities. She is the co-editor of *Environmental Criticism for the Twenty-First Century* and author of *Living Oil: Petroleum Culture in the American Century*.

JORGE NAVARRO (SATURDAY) is the multiply talented Micro-Development Program Manager at Huerto de La Familia, an organization devoted to cultivating community integration, memory, economic self-sufficiency and social equity for Latino communities in the area of Eugene, Oregon, centred on organic gardening, farming and the development of food-based micro-enterprises.

LIFE UNDERGROUND: A DIALOGUE (THURSDAY):

DONNA HARAWAY is Distinguished Professor Emerita at the University of California, Santa Cruz; she is the author of seven books including *Primate Visions: Gender, Race, and Nature in the World of Modern Science* and *When Species Meet*, in addition to countless influential articles in feminist politics, science studies and animal studies, some of which are anthologized in *The Haraway Reader*.

ANNA TSING is Professor of Anthropology at the University of California, Santa Cruz and Niels Bohr

Professor at Aarhus University, Denmark; the author of *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection*, she is also a leader of the Matsutake Worlds Research Group, which explores the ways in which these mushrooms open up global multispecies publics.

EXTRACTIVE AND UNDERGROUND POETICS: READINGS AND CONVERSATION (THURSDAY):

ANN FISHER-WIRTH is an accomplished poet, scholar and Professor at the University of Mississippi, where she teaches American literature and documentary poetics, including a strong focus on the lands and voices of Mississippi; co-editor of *The Ecopoetry Anthology*, her most recent books of poetry include *Carta Marina* and *Dream Cabinet*.

TANURE OJAIDE is a renowned, and Commonwealth Poetry Prize winning, Nigerian novelist, short story writer, poet, critic and Professor at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte; the most recent of his 17 books of poetry are *Waiting for the Hatching of a Cockerel*, *The Tale of the Harmattan* and *In the House of Words*.

RITA WONG is an award winning poet, critic and activist whose work investigates the intersections of environmental justice, decolonization and poetics; an Associate Professor at Emily Carr University of Art and Design in Vancouver, BC and water activist/poet, her recent creative works include *sybil unrest* (with Larissa Lai) and *Forage*.

A GATHERING OF PALOUSE WRITERS (FRIDAY):

Join celebrated writers from the University of Idaho and others for a literary celebration and conversation about the inland Northwest: oil, soil, rivers, mountains, lentils, and more.

Panel and Paper Submission:

For additional information and to submit a pre-formed panel or individual presentation, please visit the conference website at: www.uidaho.edu/asle

All conference sessions will be 90-minutes long. ASLE strongly encourages presenters to create pre-formed panels and to experiment with alternative forms of presentation, discussion and engagement. Both scholarly and creative submissions are welcome. As in the past few years, we expect to receive more proposals than we can accommodate; therefore, not all proposals will be accepted. Proposals for fully constituted panels will be given priority over individual paper proposals; please note that there are separate tabs for **panel proposal submission** and **individual paper/creative submission** on the conference website.

Key information (more details available on the website):

- proposals for pre-formed panels **must** include at least **four** presentations (papers, readings, provocations, responses, etc.), **15 minutes-max** each, plus a chair; panel organizers must submit the proposal on behalf of all panelists (500 word abstract for the panel outlining topic, format, participants' roles; 300 word abstract for each contribution as relevant to the format; all contact information)
- proposals for panels may also include **roundtables** (five or six 10 minute-max presentations plus discussion) and **paper/reading/hybrid jams** (seven or eight *short, sharp* eight minute-max presentations)

plus discussion); please contact 2015 ASLE President Cate Sandilands at ASLE2015@yorku.ca to discuss other format options (e.g., author-meets-critics)

- to encourage institutional diversity and exchange, all pre-formed panels **must** include participants from more than one institution and from more than one academic level/sector
- individual paper/reading/performance submissions are for **15 minute presentations**; potential presenters will be asked to indicate whether they would also be willing to participate in a paper/reading/hybrid jam with a shorter presentation (which will increase chances of acceptance); 300 word abstracts should describe both form and content and include all contact information
- only **one proposal submission** is allowed per person; participants can **present only once** during the conference (pre-conference seminars/workshops and chairing a panel not included)
- **proposals must be submitted online**; in cases in which this requirement poses a significant difficulty, please contact Cate Sandilands, as above

All proposals must be submitted by December 7, 2014. We will evaluate your proposal carefully and notify you of its final status by February 15, 2015.

Note: you must be or become a member of ASLE by the time of registration to present at the conference. Join or check your membership status at www.asle.org.

For questions about the program, please contact 2015 ASLE President **Cate Sandilands** at ASLE2015@yorku.ca. For questions about the conference site, field sessions, progressive event and other local activities, please contact the **conference site hosts** at asle2015host@uidaho.edu. For questions about ASLE and membership, please contact **Amy McIntyre**, ASLE Managing Director, at info@asle.org.

Travel and Writing Awards

Once again ASLE will offer a small number of travel funding awards (\$250 and \$500) to graduate students and independent scholars to help defray the costs of attending the conference. We will also award our biennial book and graduate student paper awards at the conference. Information on deadlines and how to apply for these awards is posted at the conference website.

Pre-/ Mid- Conference Seminars and Workshops: Call for Proposals

As we have in the past, we will hold a number of *pre-conference* workshops and seminars on important and emerging topics that reflect the diversity of our approaches and our membership: these workshops may or may not relate directly to the conference theme (although we encourage it) and will be held on **Tuesday, June 22** (the day before the general conference begins). In addition, in response to participant feedback we will also hold two *mid-conference* seminars/workshops on **Friday, June 25** at the same time as the field trips (see below).

Information on which topics are being offered will be available in early 2015. There is limited availability (15 persons) in each workshops or seminar, so you must pre-register to reserve a spot. For further information and/or to reserve a spot in a workshop or seminar, please email **Janet Fiskio**, ASLE's 2015 Seminar and Workshop Coordinator, at jfiskio@oberlin.edu. As participants' names will appear on the

program, we encourage presenters to apply to present in one of these events **instead** of giving a paper during the conference.

Conference Site:

The hip little city of Moscow, Idaho is nestled amongst the rolling green hills of the Palouse, a distinctive, beautiful region in the inland Northwest that offers some of the best photographic and birding opportunities in Western North America. Moscow is accessible via three airports: Pullman, Washington (10-minute drive); Lewiston, Idaho (35-minute drive); and Spokane, Washington (90-minute drive). Known as the “home of the arts,” Moscow boasts a vibrant arts and culture scene that features independent bookstores, over forty restaurants and coffee houses, a thriving local Co-op and farmer’s market, art galleries, lively bars and an independent movie theatre. The town lies within easy distance of a host of outdoor activities, including hiking, biking and running along miles of local paved paths and mountain trails, birding, fishing in the nearby Snake River and whitewater rafting on the Salmon River. Given all of these amenities, it is no surprise that Moscow was recently named one of the nation’s five best places to live among college towns by *Men’s Journal* and the University of Idaho was recently named one of the top 30 great universities for “hitting the books and the back country” by *Outside Magazine*. The campus is home to a century-old, 63-acre arboretum and botanical garden and public golf course and is fully wired and wireless. Conference housing will be provided in the University’s residence halls, which offer both single- and double-occupancy options and are within a five minute walk of campus classrooms and a ten minute walk of the heart of downtown Moscow. Accommodations will also be available at several hotels located next to the University campus and within easy walking distance of downtown, including the Best Western-University Inn (<http://www.uinnmoscow.com>), the Idaho Inn (<http://www.idahoinn.com>) and the Palouse Inn (<http://www.palouseinn.com>). Both the University of Idaho and ASLE are committed to making the conference as accessible and sustainable as possible for all participants; the conference website will provide more details.

Field Sessions, Progressive Evening Event:

As with past conferences, there will be a number of half-day field excursions on Friday afternoon. Activities will include hiking, running and/or biking on Moscow Mountain; a visit to a Nez Perce tribal site; environmental films at the Kenworthy cinema; and a tour of the campus arboretum and botanical gardens. New to the ASLE conference this year will be a “Progressive Event” that will connect the ASLE conference with local Moscow artists and businesses on Thursday evening. This event will feature creative work in downtown locations: BookPeople of Moscow, our thriving independent bookstore; One World Café, which will offer live music and a variety of beverages; the Pritchard Art Gallery, which features locally made artworks; and the Kenworthy Performing Arts Center, our historic independent movie theatre. Conference participants will be encouraged to move among the sites to experience the full spectrum of Moscow’s charming community.