

ASLE Graduate Student Symposium
“Toxic Borders and Bondages:
Intersecting Ecology with Capitalism, Racism,
Heteropatriarchy and (Dis)possession”
October 21st - 22nd, 2016
University of Michigan, Ann Arbor

Steeped in contradiction, many discourses of toxicity warn to maintain distance from noxious threats, yet also gravely intone that no border can prevent their infiltration. The hazardous condition of toxins evokes fear and repulsion, but their seeping, leaking, pervading, saturating nature suggests that there can be no escape from their silent invasion. Through a provocation to erect borders and a simultaneous admonition that they will fail, the notion of toxicity urges critical inquiry into how barriers of aversion are both configured and undermined. At this symposium, we aim to collaborate across discourses and develop a space for dialogue about how toxicity broadly writ has become discursively bonded to certain natural, human, and national bodies in order to uphold systems of colonization and imperialism, racism and white supremacy, capitalist accumulation and dispossession, patriarchy and compulsory heterosexuality, and other regimes of hierarchical oppression.

How does the discourse and lived reality of “toxicity” redefine the borders of mind, body, and community? And indeed, what becomes coded as “toxic” and what does not? We interrogate how communities represented as “toxic” become subjected to environmental violence when state and corporate powers chose their lands and resources as the sites for depositing pollution, whether from nuclear power plants, mining and petroleum extraction, waste dumps, or toxic water supplies. And we question: if certain state-sanctioned regulations surrounding “environmental protection” are implemented, whose lives will benefit and whose lives will be exposed to higher levels of surveillance and greater degrees of precarity? How have militarized borders become defined as authoritative sites upholding the division between purity and toxicity? How might we argue against the territorial dispossession of communities, without resorting to the language of possession so central to capitalist and imperialist discourse? Finally, what revolutionary imaginings can we envision for a transformation rooted in racial, economic, gender, sexual, and environmental justice?

In response to these threads of inquiry as well as the broad and variegated definitions and discussions of toxicity, we seek contributions from an array of disciplines--including literary studies, disability studies, environmental justice and environmental studies, history, cultural studies, film/media studies, ethnic studies, gender and sexuality studies, and the arts. Over the course of this symposium, which will lead up to the Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment (ASLE) 2017 Biennial Conference in Detroit, we invite you to attend two keynote addresses by environmental justice scholars [Julie Sze](#) from the University of California, Davis and [John Blair Gamber](#) from Columbia University; participate in workshops on creative writing with local artists, environmental activism with activists from Detroit, Flint, and Ann Arbor, and community food initiatives with local farmers and beekeepers; and engage in networking and community-building with graduate students from universities throughout the country.

In order to participate, please submit a paper abstract of up to 300 words to aslegrad2016@gmail.com by Monday, April 25th.

For more information, visit <https://aslegrad2016.wordpress.com>.