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"Introduction: Toxic Embodiment and Feminist Environmental Humanities"

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This special section on toxic embodiment examines variously situated bodies, land- and waterscapes and their naturalcultural interactions with toxicity. The ideas of toxic embodiment play out in the social imaginaries of science and popular culture. Toxins have become a widespread and well-known threat to life on the planet, accompanied by iconic photographs of dead killer whales washed ashore. Infertile orcas with extreme levels of PCB (polychlorinated biphenyl) in their system bring to the environmental social imaginary the toxic kinship of predators and other species, including humans, threatened by extinction. The cumulative exposure to endocrine disruptors, neurotoxins, asthmagens, carcinogens, and mutagens comes with everyday life today, making us all toxic bodies. In our present situation, the theme of toxic embodiment embraces extensive existential concerns around health and environment as we all interact with climate change, antibiotics, and untested chemical cocktails through the food we eat, the makeup we wear, the new sofas we sit on, or the environments in which we dwell. Without doubt, we also become more acutely aware today of how we are in nature, and nature, polluted as it may be, is in us. Terms like bio-burden or bioaccumulation circulate widely in the environmental social imaginary, injected by imagery and terminology from the natural sciences and popular culture. Bioaccumulation describes for instance the processes by which toxic substances, industrial waste or human-made chemical compounds, gradually accumulate in living tissue. The highest concentrations of toxic pollutants find their way into organisms at the higher trophic levels of the ecological chain of being in a process known as biomagnification, but human-altered chemistries spread across vast regions of the planet, even in the deepest depths of the sea. (Text from the article)

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