Environment & Society Portal

Multimedia Library Collection: Periodicals

"Toxic Bodies: Ticks, Trans Bodies, and the Ethics of Response-Ability in Art and Activist Writing"

Straube, Wibke

Straube, Wibke. "Toxic Bodies: Ticks, Trans Bodies, and the Ethics of Response-Ability in Art and Activist Writing." *Environmental Humanities* 11, no. 1 (2019): 216-38. https://doi.org/10.1215/22011919-7349510 .

Tracing ticks in two different artworks and Leslie Feinberg's activist writing, Wibke Straube takes their lead in this article from philosopher Donna Haraway and her suggestion to think about engagement with the environment through an "ethics of response-ability." By deploying close readings, Straube discusses the affects represented in the video installation *Act on Instinct* (2013) by Elin Magnusson, a sequence of the film *Something Must Break* (2014) by Ester Martin Bergsmark, and blog entries from the "Lyme Series" by the late trans activist Leslie Feinberg. Through these works, Straube explores the meaning of this correlation between ticks and transing bodies for environmental ethics as well as for the forging of livable lives for trans people. Toxicity surfaces as a link in these works. The notion of feminist figuration, developed by philosopher Rosi Braidotti among others, allows Straube to discuss toxicity as a material-discursive figuration, which highlights how human societies in a Western context approach the body of the Other, in this case the transgender body as a human Other and the tick as animal Other. As a figuration, toxicity then becomes a shared meeting site that helps to problematize the Western pathologization of trans bodies and asks what ethics emerge in this proximity between ticks and trans bodies. Toxicity exists in the discussed works in particular as a complex material-discursive trajectory. Although some discourses on toxicity uphold social hierarchies and racist assumptions, as illustrated by Mel Y. Chen, for example, the works here seem to reappropriate the status of the toxic body as a strategy for adjustment and alliance and a site of ethical engagement with the world. The tick is Straube's guide in weaving together stories of different bodies and of what Deborah Bird Rose and Thom van Dooren call the "unloved other." (Text from author's abstract)

© Wibke Straube 2019. *Environmental Humanities* is available online only and is published under a Creative Commons license (CC BY-NC-ND 3.0).

Periodicals Collection, Multimedia Library, Environment & Society Portal
"Toxic Bodies: Ticks, Trans Bodies, and the Ethics of Response-Ability in Art and Activist Writing"
Source URL: http://www.environmentandsociety.org/node/8793
Print date: 03 November 2026 11:53:28

Download:
PDF: https://www.environmentandsociety.org/sites/default/files/key_docs/216straube.pdf

Related links:

- *Environmental Humanities* website
  http://environmentalhumanities.org/
- *Environmental Humanities* 11, no. 1
  https://read.dukeupress.edu/environmental-humanities/issue/11/1

Websites linked in this text:

- https://doi.org/10.1215/22011919-7349510

Periodicals Collection, Multimedia Library, Environment & Society Portal
"Toxic Bodies: Ticks, Trans Bodies, and the Ethics of Response-Ability in Art and Activist Writing"
Source URL: http://www.environmentandsociety.org/node/8793
Print date: 03 November 2026 11:53:28