

Session at ASAP (Houston, 22–25 Oct 25)

Houston, Texas

Deadline: Mar 17, 2025

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Toxicity as Atopia: Contaminated Environments and Mediated Life.

Session at ASAP (Association for the Study of the Arts of the Present).

Co-organizers: Dr. Corinna Kirsch (Pratt Institute), Dr. Rebecca Uliasz (University of Michigan).

A typical Houston sunset has a toxic beauty, with hazy oranges, pinks, and purples streaming toward a near-infinite, flat horizon line. Home to petrochemical and energy industries, the city and state have begun to shed associations with toxic commercial industries that have led to such attractive but repellent skies. Not only has the state become a notable purveyor of “clean” energy industries like wind and solar power, but tech firms, including Oracle, Tesla, and Hewlett-Packard, have relocated their headquarters to Texas within the last decade. Despite the apparent transition towards an image of green tech, the predicament of Houston reveals how toxicity accumulates new types of surplus. From exploitative micro-labor dealing with e-waste to the runoffs of mining rare earth elements and the inescapable ubiquity of plastic materials, an increasingly toxic world renders modern subjectivity as “the management of self-intoxication in a chemically harmful environment” (Preciado 2013, 360).

Beyond the image of a green digital culture, this panel seeks contributions that take this year’s conference site as a provocation for theoretical and/or practical engagements with the atopic capacities of toxicity, media, and environment. It proposes, following Barthes (1978), the notion of atopia as a potentiating out-of-place. Treating toxicity as atopia refuses the designation of the “toxic” as a damaged, demarcated, and disposable thing; toxicity becomes a topology that invites an outside environment into the body, scrambling subjectivities and temporal narratives of progress. Questions may include: How can an atopic lens address how new forms of exhaust, lethargy, and depletion are managed through media’s intra-actions? Can such a perspective allow us to critically reframe (in)toxification as an intensive boundary-making practice where incorporation, consumption, and inhalation constitute acts of mediation through which bodies and environments both merge and emerge? How does such a polyvocal treatment of (in)toxification challenge the geopolitical, biopolitical, and technological hybridities and intimacies animating legacies of (neo)imperialism, colonialism, and militarism in the present? In sum, this panel seeks contributions that think through media’s toxicity as “processual, dynamic, and interactive” (Starosielski 2019) to explore the embeddedness of contamination—“not an escape from toxicity but rather a reckoning with its permeation” (Davis 2022, 6).

Please submit a brief, 250-word abstract and CV by March 17, 2025: <https://asap16.exordo.com>.

References

Davis, Heather. 2022. *Plastic Matter*. Duke University Press, 2022.

Starosielski, Nicole. 2019. "The Elements of Media Studies." *Media+Environment* 1 (1). <https://doi.org/10.1525/001c.10780>.

Preciado, Paul B. 2013. *Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornographic Era*. The Feminist Press at the City University of New York.

Barthes, Roland. 1978. *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*. 1st American ed. Hill and Wang.

Reference:

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