

## SECTION 1

# INTRODUCTION: FRAMING TOXICITY

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This section explores fundamental issues around thinking of environmental harm as heritage. When we chose the title of this volume, we were aware that both ‘toxic’ and ‘heritage’ are widely used and variously defined. The term ‘toxic heritage’ is therefore immediately recognisable, but what it means (and doesn’t mean) is harder to pin down. For this volume we are using the term in a more narrowly defined manner than Wollentz et al. (2020) who include socially harmful legacies in their discussion. That broad definition was framed in order to create conceptual links between the management of toxic materials and the management of cultural heritage, but it was only the beginning of a deeper understanding of the challenges that toxic materials bring to cultural heritage. Our working definition of toxic heritage has two components. First, it includes the history of the processes and substances – including toxins (produced by plants, animals, and bacteria), toxicants (synthetic, human-made, toxic chemicals), and anthropogenic pollution from natural materials such as lead, arsenic, and mercury – that create or threaten physical harm to environments and the life supported within them (Liboiron 2017). Second, it includes the intersections of that history of harm with both formal heritage institutions and informal memory practices. While we focus on material which is harmful to health, we understand that notions of toxicity vary over time and among cultures. Investigating toxic heritage allows us to focus not just on the history of environmental harm, but on heritage as a set of practices that work with the past in the present.

The papers in this section focus on the different ways that heritage can deploy the past, such as valorisation, remembrance, forgetting, as a spur to action, and as a mechanism for forgiveness. These authors explore how we experience toxicity – as waste, bioaccumulation, post-mining landscapes, nuclear imaginary, and poisoned places. Hoskins, Joyce, Pearson, and Refrew examine how risk is perceived and what senses are engaged, especially when toxic materials can be invisible, silent,