

## SECTION 4

# INTRODUCTION: NARRATIVES OF TOXIC HERITAGE

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This section focuses on the stories and discourse practices around toxic legacies. Heritage is often said to be ‘about stories’, but the structure of the narrative arc is often under-examined and its silences ignored. In an era of political inertia and widespread denial of environmental crises, there is value in rooting contemporary contamination in a historical narrative. Different phases of environmental harm in the same place may produce different narratives which compete, support, or undermine each other. It is also productive to examine how toxic heritage rhetoric, discourse, and narrative navigate tropes like loss, heroism, redemption, and reversals. Particularly when there is a yearning for a simpler, somehow more pristine past and when both industrial and state interests benefit from obscuring the causes of environmental damage, toxic heritage narratives are positioned to offer a counterpoint to nostalgia as well as to speak truth to power. As the authors in this section demonstrate, the narratives of toxic heritage can complement, undermine, or act as alternatives to existing heritage narratives.

In this section, Kryder-Reid, Dwyer, and Filippelli examine the hidden discourses of dry cleaning heritage in contrast to industry and environmental science-authored sources and share an example of participatory heritage as a counter-narrative. Hubé and Bausinger’s study of the ‘Place a gaz’ shows how the valorised, commemorative narratives associated with WWI can deflect or overwhelm the stories of toxic heritage associated with the conflict. Muniz’ account of rubber production in Brazil highlights how the authorized heritage associated with colonial and corporate industry marginalises the intangible heritage of indigenous knowledge and the often invisible embodied toxic heritage of labourers producing rubber. McIvor explores community environmental justice activism associated with the chemical industry in Glasgow through creative modes of resistance such as advocacy, campaigning, the deployment of memories and storytelling. These

heritage practices, he argues, offer a counternarrative to the erasure of the toxic environment in the city's formal heritage institutions. Shackel's chapter on coal mining in Pennsylvania lays out three narrative tropes which sit uncomfortably with one another. Benussi finds a similar pattern at Chernobyl where distinct narratives are associated with different spatial scales of memory practices from the local to the national.