

Collective Atmospheres: Air, Intimacy, and Inequality

ASLE 2025 Biennial Conference

July 8-11, 2025
University of Maryland, College Park,
ancestral lands of the Piscataway People



Call for Proposals

Reflecting on the use of tear gas and other chemical weapons during the 2016 Standing Rock protests, Paiute scholar Kristen Simmons notes that “[t]he conditions we breathe in are collective and unequally distributed. ... The atmosphere is increasingly a sphere to be weaponized.” A few years later, this weaponization became clear as the unequally-experienced COVID-19 respiratory pandemic overlapped with protests over the chokehold murder of George Floyd at the hands of police—giving heartbreaking new relevance to the Black Lives Matter rallying cry, “I can’t breathe.” Meanwhile, deforestation and air pollution are again on the rise. The Amazon rainforest, for instance—dubbed the “lungs of the world” due to its ability to absorb carbon dioxide and produce oxygen—has come under intensified threats. Wildfires stoked by climate change fill the air with toxic smoke. And new research finds that unhoused people are disproportionately exposed to air pollution. Breath and air, as has become palpably obvious, are phenomena necessary for life, yet often overlooked and not equally available to all. As historian Achille Mbembe states, what humanity currently faces is “a matter of no less than reconstructing a habitable earth to give all of us the breath of life.”

Fittingly, in our fields of ecocriticism, ecomedia studies, and environmental humanities, we find a nascent wave of work attending to the idea that air/atmospheres are at once specific to our individual bodies, unequally experienced, and shared by all biotic life across time and space. This work contributes to an emerging “respiratory humanities” and “atmospheric humanities” —the latter of which, as the International Commission on Science and Literature and the International Commission on History of Meteorology recently declared in a joint call for papers, considers “the atmosphere’s agency as it becomes manifest as a medium, life-giver, carrier, nutrient source, threat and a concern in modern life, politics, and art.” Meanwhile, the prominent subfield of affect studies engages with more figurative conceptions of “atmosphere,” including mood and ambience. In sum, atmospheres become increasingly visible as sites of contestations and convergences where the intimacy of breath is bound up with wide-ranging environmental and cultural crises.

Of course, atmospheric thinking has a very long history. The idea of “bad air” as a disease vector is an ancient one, and it persisted into the 19th century in the miasma theory of disease transmission. In the 1800s, polymath Charles Babbage wrote of the air as a “one vast library” that serves as a repository of human and more-than-human history. Scientists Simon L. Lewis and Mark A. Maslin recently concurred, suggesting with their “Orbis Hypothesis” that the European colonization of the Americas left an atmospheric trace. And since the late 1970s, the ozone layer and greenhouse gasses have been major topics of scientific as well as public concern.

We seek papers, creative works, and other forms of inquiry that engage with these concerns, broadly construed. Possible topics include but are not limited to:

- “Settler atmospherics” (Simmons) and Indigenous activism
- Climate and/as history; histories of weather
- Sensing air pollution; citizen science around air pollution
- The emergence and role of the “respiratory humanities” or “atmospheric humanities”
- Relationship of the above to the “blue humanities,” “green ecocriticism,” and/or “energy humanities”; waves of ecocriticism
- Aesthetics of visibility/invisibility and air
- Representing air inequality in haptic, olfactory, or other non-visual media
- Unhoused populations and air inequality
- Environmental racism and air inequality
- Wildfires and smoke; prescribed burns and Indigenous fire knowledge as alternative technologies
- Respiratory pandemics and the media
- Rhetoric of anti-AAPI hate during COVID-19
- Masking and dis/ability rhetoric; long COVID and “crip time” (Alison Kafer)
- Air purification technology and the commodification of air (see Yangdon Li)
- “Atmospheric rivers,” flooding, and representation
- Representations of atmospheric layers (troposphere, stratosphere, mesosphere, thermosphere, exosphere)
- Air travel and alternatives
- Space environmentalism: space debris, cosmic dust, extraterrestrial exploration
- Airwaves, radio waves, soundwaves—from podcasts to birdsong
- Affect studies and intangible/figurative atmospheres

We also welcome work that engages in other ways with the larger concerns outlined above—including climate change, environmental health and justice, settler colonialism—and/or with the vision and mission of ASLE, which seeks to inspire and promote intellectual work in the environmental humanities and arts. Our vision is an inclusive community whose members are committed to environmental research, education, literature, and art, as well as service, environmental justice, and ecological sustainability. See more here: <https://www.asle.org/discover-asle/vision-history/>.

Confirmed Keynote Speakers:

- **Hsuan Hsu**, author of *The Smell of Risk: Atmospheric Disparities and the Olfactory Arts, and Air Conditioning*
- **Craig Santos Perez**, winner of the 2023 National Book Award for poetry
- **JT Roane**, author of *Dark Agoras: Insurgent Black Social Life and the Politics of Place in Philadelphia*, and co-leader of the Black Ecologies Lab at Rutgers
- **Kaia Sand**, poet, activist, and Executive Director of Street Roots (Portland, OR)

Call Details

ASLE welcomes proposals for the following presentation formats for our 2025 conference (described in more detail in the sections below):

- pre-formed panels of scholarly papers, creative readings, roundtables, or discussion symposia of between 4 and 8 presenters;
- individual scholarly papers or creative readings, to be placed into panels;
- pre-conference workshops

While the vast majority of sessions will only be available to people attending the conference in person, there will also be fully virtual sessions and a virtual keynote to allow people who cannot attend in person an opportunity to participate (at a lower registration cost). **These will be held on July 17-18 2025.**

In-person plenary sessions will also be available to virtual participants, both as live streams and recorded, and a couple of virtual pre-conference workshops are planned. Other in-person conference sessions will not be available virtually, and we are not able to accommodate hybrid sessions at the conference. People who submit proposals to present at the conference in-person will therefore *not* be able to present at in-person sessions virtually.

Paper and Panel Submission Process

All presentation sessions will be 90 minutes long. We will accept proposals for the 2025 conference for both pre-formed panels and individual presentations, with no preference given to one type of proposal or the other. Both scholarly and creative submissions are welcome. ASLE encourages experimentation with alternative forms of presentation, discussion, and engagement, especially in pre-formed panels. We expect to receive more proposals than we can accommodate; therefore, not all proposals will be accepted.

Only one individual abstract submission is allowed per person. Participants can present only once during the conference as part of a panel; facilitating or participating in a pre-conference workshop or chairing a panel do not count towards this limit. If a pre-formed panel organizer wishes to submit two or more topically linked panels, that is allowed, but organizers may still only present on one panel.

All presentation proposals must be submitted via the Pheedloop submission platform. Click on your submission format type below and fill out the required form. If this online submission requirement poses a significant difficulty, please contact us at 2025asleconf@gmail.com.

Please read below to find specific submission information for the various presentation formats, submission guides, and links to the submission forms.

Pre-Formed Panels

Proposals for pre-formed panels can be in several formats:

- traditional scholarly papers or creative readings, which must include a chair (who may also serve as a panelist) and four presentations of fifteen minutes each, followed by discussion time
- discussion symposia (new in 2025), which must include four to six moderators who frame a topic and lead a discussion with the panel attendees

- roundtables, which must include a chair (who may also serve as a panelist) and five to six panelists who speak for no more than 10 minutes each, followed by discussion time
- paper jams, which must include a chair (who may also serve as a panelist) and seven or eight panelists who speak for no more than 7-8 minutes each, followed by discussion time

We especially encourage groups engaged in artistic, pedagogical, activist, or other types of collaborative work to present the results of those efforts in one of the formats above. Alternative formats for pre-formed panels are also encouraged, such as visual exhibitions, interactive creative engagements, debates, etc. Please contact ASLE Conference Chair Beatriz Rivera Barnes at 2025asleconf@gmail.com before proposing such alternative formats.

A proposal for a full panel session should be a summary abstract which gives a brief description of the session in 300 words (2000 characters) or less. This might include applicability to the conference theme, how it connects to the mission and goals of ASLE and the broader environmental humanities community, and/or scholarly and creative merits. Proposals may also be submitted for virtual panels. Any proposals for virtual panels must be clearly indicated as such at the time of submission. Please note again that we are NOT able to accept hybrid part-virtual panels.

For traditional panels, paper jams, and roundtables where presenters DO have separate formal talk titles/abstracts, this submission requires two steps:

1. Panel chair/organizer should select the panel format and submit the panel abstract for session. Please include presentation titles and authors for all other panelists in the provided fields, so we can check them against submissions in step 2.
2. Other panelists (including the panel organizer if they are also presenting) must also submit their individual abstracts (300 words/2000 characters or less) as a separate proposal. Please have them select "Individual Abstract that is part of a Pre-Formed Panel" and include the panel session title in the appropriate field. Full panel sessions will be considered completed and ready for review once all panelists have submitted their abstracts as separate proposals.

For roundtables where presenters DO NOT have a separate formal talk title/abstract, and for discussion symposia, step 2 is not required, but all discussants and their contact information must be listed in the "Co-speakers" section of the submission form.

Pre-formed panels are not guaranteed acceptance in the conference, unless they are submitted by affiliated organizations or ASLE interest groups. If we are unable to accept a panel, the proposals in that panel will receive full consideration as part of the individual abstracts review. To encourage institutional diversity and exchange, all pre-formed panels must include participants from more than one institution and from more than one academic rank or sector.

Posting Your Panel Call

To facilitate more inclusion and interdisciplinarity in pre-formed panels, we encourage people with panel ideas to post a brief call of no more than 300 words to invite presenters to apply to your proposed panel theme. Please post your panel call **no later than October 10, 2022** [via this link](#). We will post these calls on the ASLE conference website and advertise them in our publicity channels.

Before submitting, check out these detailed guidelines with step-by-step instructions:

[ASLE 2025 Submission Instructions](#)

[Submit a Pre-formed Panel Proposal](#)

Individual Presentations or Readings

Proposals may be submitted for individual paper presentations or readings, for a maximum of 15 minutes each. These presentations, if accepted, will be placed into panels. Potential presenters will be asked to indicate whether they would also be willing to participate in a roundtable (5-6 presenters per panel) or paper jam (7-8 presenters per panel) format, with shorter presentation times; willingness to participate in such formats will increase chances of acceptance. Individual proposals should contain abstracts of no more than 300 words/2000 characters, and should include:

- Working title for the presentation (you will be able to edit this later)
- Brief overview of the topic background
- Specification of content type (e.g. theoretical contribution, project description, pedagogical experience, presentation of artistic work, personal or institutional experience, etc.)
- Statement of content, including presentation's main focus

Proposals may be submitted for virtual presentations, to be included in virtual online panels. Any proposals for virtual presentations must be clearly indicated as such at the time of submission.

Before submitting, check out these detailed guidelines with step-by-step instructions:

[ASLE 2025 Submission Instructions](#)

Submit an Individual Proposal

Pre-Conference Workshop Proposals

As we have in the past, we will hold a number of pre-conference workshops on important and emerging topics that reflect the diversity of our approaches and our membership: these workshops may or may not relate directly to the conference theme (although we encourage it), and will be held on the morning of Tuesday, July 8, prior to the start of general sessions in the afternoon. This year, we are calling for workshop proposals and will choose from the submissions received. We will offer between 6-8 in-person and 2-3 virtual workshops.

A proposal to lead a Pre-Conference Workshop should be geared to an audience of fifteen participants, keep in mind a three-hour time frame, and include no more than two co-leaders. Proposals should include:

- an abstract of 300 words/2000 characters or less, describing the workshop content, goals, and structure, written for a broad, multidisciplinary audience; and
- your (and your co-leader's, if applicable) particular experiences and qualifications to lead the workshop, including a brief bio.

As workshop leaders' names will appear on the program, we encourage (but do not require) accepted proposers to present in the workshop instead of giving a paper during the conference. If your workshop proposal is not accepted, there should be ample time to submit in a different proposal format prior to the deadline on January 3.

Pre-Conference Workshop leaders are eligible for a registration waiver for the 2025 conference. **To submit a proposal to lead a workshop, please apply by October 24, 2024.**

Conference participants may register for one of the chosen workshops on a first come, first served basis during registration, for an additional \$20 fee. There will be 15 spots available for each workshop. Depending on the specific workshop format, workshop participants will either do shared readings in advance of the workshop; share a short scholarly paper in advance; and/ or bring ideas and projects with them to the workshop. The names of all workshop participants will be listed in the conference program. Workshop participants may also present in another format at the conference, if they wish.

Before submitting, check out these detailed guidelines with step-by-step instructions:
[ASLE 2025 Workshop Submission Instructions](#)

Submit a Pre-conference Workshop Proposal

Dates and Deadlines

- All proposals for pre-formed panels, individual presentations that are part of pre-formed panels, and individual presentations or readings must be submitted via Pheedloop by **11:59pm PST on January 3, 2025**. Any proposals for presentations in pre-formed panels that are not accepted for the conference will automatically be considered as individual presentations.
- All proposals for Pre-Conference Workshops must be submitted via Pheedloop by **11:59 pm PST on October 24, 2024**. Proposers will be notified of acceptance status no later than **November 24, 2024**. Those whose workshops are not accepted are welcome to submit a proposal in another conference presentation format by the **January 3, 2025** deadline.
- If you submitted a proposal but discover you can no longer attend the conference, please inform the organizer of your panel (if relevant) *and* ASLE of withdrawal by **January 30, 2025**, if possible.
- We will evaluate all proposals carefully and notify people of whether their proposal has been accepted by **February 27, 2025**.

For questions about submitting, please contact us at 2025asleconf@gmail.com.

Conference Location

As environmental humanists, we recognize that in-person meetings such as the ASLE conference are largely made possible by fossil fuels and thereby contribute to climate change. Guided by the goals outlined in the [2020-2026 ASLE Strategic Plan](#), we selected this conference site due to its relative proximity to the majority of ASLE members as well as its connectivity to interstate rail transit. Additionally, College Park is located on the Green Line of the DC light rail metro system, and we encourage attendees to utilize it when possible. The stop is about a mile from campus. <https://www.wmata.com/rider-guide/stations/college-park.cfm#>

The nearby area boasts several projects and landmarks of interest, including ECO City Farms, the Hyattsville Food Forests, the Rachel Carson House, and the Chesapeake & Ohio Canal. As per tradition, the conference will include field trips to such sites, as well as a local “cultural crawl.”

The [University of Maryland, College Park](#) is the state's flagship university, located just outside Washington, D.C. One of the nation's preeminent public research universities with an enrollment nearly 41,000, UMD has a commitment to environmental and social values, such as the programs, projects, and events offered through the Office of Sustainability's [SustainableUMD](#) network and the School of Public Policy's [Do Good Institute](#).