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Carbon Collaborators

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by prOphecy sun



About the Artist

prOphecy sun (PhD) is an interdisciplinary performance artist, queer, movement, video, sound maker, and mother of two. Her practice celebrates both conscious and unconscious moments and the vulnerable spaces of the in-between in which art, performance, and life overlap. Her recent research has focused on ecofeminist perspectives, co-composing with voice, objects, surveillance technologies, and site-specific engagements along the Columbia Basin region and beyond. She is the Arts Editor for *Ecocene: Cappadocia Journal of Environmental Humanities* and a sessional faculty member at Emily Carr University of Art + Design. She performs and exhibits regularly in local, national, and international settings, music festivals, conferences, and galleries and has authored several peer-reviewed articles, book chapters, and journal publications on sound design, installation, performance, and domestic spheres.

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*It is unselfconscious privilege that allows us to fantasize—
counter actually—that we each survive alone.*

—Anna Tsing

Bodies live in a continual state of encounter, transformation, and evolutionary process. Multidimensional and hungry, bodies are drawn to each other, and form bonds, with other molecules and structures. To survive, they perceive, itemize, commodify, and deplete essential resources from the air, water, and ground. In turn, they create new lifeforms and ways of being. Down to the atom, these forms are resilient and mutable.

Like everything else on earth, bodies are made up of different elements including hydrogen, oxygen, nitrogen, calcium, carbon, and phosphorus, as well as an array of others categorized in the periodic table. The main element is carbon, because it forms the muscle tissues, fat cells, sugars, and proteins present in all life forms. Complex combinations of these elements make life possible and form the basics of our DNA.

The fifth installment of Ecocene Arts features emergent transdisciplinary research processes and material approaches to carbon bodies, assemblages, and systems of connection. These perspectives invite notions of fluidity and interconnection, that, as scholar Astrida Neimanis describes, are rooted in our shared experiences of watery wombs and watery worlds (2017). In this way, Neimanis writes, we are never, and cannot be, alone. This togetherness is also linked to Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing's (2015) and Donna Haraway's (2016) discussions of the entanglement of all life. That "we" indeed encompasses all matter; that class—how we are organized as a species, the planet, and earth are home; that life on earth is inherently collaborative and all efforts are vital for all species to survive.

This issue explores such tensions through two diverse pieces—*Making with and Thinking through Compost* (2022) and *Connective Tissue and Bacterial Echoes: Four Artists, a River, and an Artificial Agent* (2021). Together, the works highlight creative narratives that look beyond capitalist practices of extraction and invite new approaches on the vitality of animal, plant life and more-than-human collaboration. They ask the questions: How can emergent technologies draw attention to new modalities and capitalist systems of extraction? What does it mean to be spatially, atmospherically, and geologically vulnerable? How can artists develop and depict systems of connection and even hybridization of artistic approaches?

In the first piece, **Gwenyth Chao** reimagines animal, vegetable, variegated bodies, and other lifeforms through sculptural composting, rewilding, and extraction processes. Marginalized materials such as compost scraps, sludge, dirt, and microbial parts take center stage in her drawing and installation work and provide vital insight into shared spaces and more-than-human eco-paradigms. Here, bodies live symbiotically with other animal and plant life and share sustenance without corruption.

In the second work, **Freya Zinovieff**, **Gabriela Aceves-Sepúlveda**, and **Steve DiPaola** offer macro and micro perspectives on the dynamic interplay of bodies and borderlands and the multitude of microcosms present in water and land systems. The artists use cameras, smartphones, recorders, custom-built AI tools, performance, sound, and video composition as actants to help them translate and generate visual fragments and auditory landscapes.

Collectively, the artworks make space for modes of thinking and being that attempt to move beyond nihilist paradigms of global, political, and cultural systems of eradication. As Maria Puig de la Bellacasa points out, caring for others is both limitless and historically contingent, and “passes within, across, throughout things” (2017, 1). By foregrounding experimental methods of production and more-than-human vantage-points the pieces remind us about the importance of care work and the porous nature between computational and biological systems. Like composting, which microscopically and slowly breaks down other entangled bodies in its process, this issue explores the multiplicities and contradictions present in our world. In doing so, they offer counter-frames of value, space, research, and experience that see all carbon-based, precariously existing organisms, bodies, and ecosystems, together.

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