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Ecocene Arts



Grief Ecologies

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Grief Ecologies

by prOphecy sun



About the Artist

prOphecy sun (PhD) is an interdisciplinary performance artist, queer, movement, video, sound maker, and mother of three. 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 regularly exhibits 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.

Grief Ecologies

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*You can clutch the past so tightly to your chest that it leaves
your arms too full to embrace the present.*

—Jan Glidewell

The pandemic forced us to stay apart and spend time alone. While this was important for safety, it also made it hard for us to care for others, grieve, mourn lost loved ones, and feel connected. This solitude was hard on our mental health and added strains on already tense relationships. Taking care of others during this time meant building emotional and social connections beyond the boundary of existing social forms. During the lockdown, listening to and supporting others included actions such as reaching out through text or calls, using video conferencing to connect with friends and family, ordering takeout, and delivering groceries to assist neighbours. The pandemic highlighted our most basic social and psychological needs. It also revealed the underlying care and service labor that holds societies together. This period also highlighted significant inequalities, as marginalized groups experienced the most severe impacts of the pandemic, necessitating intersectional approaches in thinking about the politics of care and the myriad exclusionary mechanisms that constitute the subsoil of our societies.

The ninth installment of *Ecocene Arts* presents two pieces, *Holding On and Letting Go: Material, Grief, and Care* (2024), and *The Invisible Labour Loops Project as Portal—Framing Mother Labour through Animation* (2024), each of which reflect on loss, maternal longing, and the unseen labors of caregiving through a variety of objects, mediums, and materials during the pandemic. The pieces encourage us to consider important questions: What is grief? Which materials can magnify and translate grief into ecologies, systems, and maps? In what ways do care and labor help us move and perceive grief differently through our senses?

In the first piece, **Alexandrya Eaton** shares her creative processes for managing grief as a parent whose adult children have left home, and the ways it lives in her body—muscles, heart, and brain. Throughout the series of artworks, she poetically articulates how grief can be fluid, embodied, and held like the large brightly colored cloak she wears. She states: “I dragged the cloak behind me, with my head hung low and my body hunched forward, taking slow and careful steps. As I walked, the cloak trailed on the ground, getting caught on the boardwalk and branches, becoming dirty. This was my way of visibly carrying my grief through a place filled with memories, and I kept this up until I was too exhausted to continue” (Eaton 2024).

Eaton’s performative actions of wearing, walking, dragging, beating, tearing, and eventually repairing the cloak become emblems of cathartic reverie and connection. Grief here is portrayed through breath and action, isolation and stress. Each moment is potent, innately sculptural and ghostly.

In the second piece, **Jen McGowan** writes about her experiences caretaking for others and the creative projects she made in the pandemic lockdown. In *Invisible Labour Loops* (2024), she responds to the current socio-political climate and the complicated ways labor is often overlooked in a never-ending cycle of responsibilities. Her black and white animations of hands scrubbing plates exhibit her exasperated and oppressive feelings about the domestic space.

The two contributions foreground various ecologies and strategies for managing grief, loss, and care. If the pandemic taught us anything, caring is essential like the organs we carry in our bodies. Care is not just a mere sentiment; to give ourselves is truly all-encompassing, even in the most challenging circumstances.

References

Guthrie, Gary P. 2003. *1,600 Quotes & Pieces of Wisdom That Just Might Help You Out When You’re Stuck in a Moment (and Can’t Get Out of It!)*. iUniverse.