Socially Engaged Art and Tech at the Intersections of Ecology, Disability and History
(Bass Team 2022 - 2023)

"Turning to the critical and generative understandings of health, limitation, woundedness, loss, adaptation, and care that have emerged from disabled [and illness] communities can help us as we navigate and salvage a changing, imperiled world." – Saunara Taylor

“Age of Disability: On Living Well with Impaired Landscapes”
Orion Magazine, December 2021

Background

Human diversity and biodiversity are interconnected, and we live with the legacy of how monoculture-thinking has imperiled us all. The accumulation of carbon is only a symptom of the ecological crisis, whose root cause grows from the breaking of consent, trust, accountability and reciprocity.

What stories and histories do we need to tell and illuminate, so that we can imagine ourselves into the future, living otherwise? How do we work to repair the broken relations between people, the earth, and each other?

Bass Connections Project

We will create a prototype of an interactive, performance-based artistic installation that engages diverse human and forest communities.
Ancient (“old-growth”) forests are astounding in their biodiversity, yet many are critically endangered. The goal of this project is to help individuals reconnect with the living world, connect to complex histories and intelligences held in the land and in our bodies, and imagine how to live well with disabled ecologies. The final installation will slowly travel to endangered old-growth forests across the United States, and Russia/Siberia over the next 5+ years.

A key component of the larger Bass Team’s work will be creating responsive sensor technologies that can respond to forests (i.e. carbon, light) and humans (i.e. breath, heartbeat, tremors) and will be part of the interactive puppet installation.

The responsive technology is part of the piece’s larger investigation of socially engaged, ethically responsible art. We plan for the final artistic installation to travel to different locations, be accessible to disability communities, and tell the intertwined stories of environmental racism, colonialism, eugenic imaginaries, and the priorities of market capitalism, while helping people deeply connect to the living world.

Bass Connections Team Applicants

We are looking to form a dynamic, diverse and interdisciplinary creative research team. Ideal candidates are students with backgrounds, skill-sets, and interests in history, ecology, technology, disability and visual studies. All should hold a willingness to be self-reflective, flexible thinkers, challenge one’s own assumptions, hold open curiosity, and bring your whole-self to the research.

Summary

Our research will approach the ecological crisis as a complex, multifaceted existential problem that demands that we question some of the deepest assumptions in our culture. The fierceness of our imagination to dream into the future will be anchored by a depth of commitment to historic memory, as we integrate technology, sound, music and community in the creation of the installation prototype.

Questions?
Contact Dr. Jules Odendahl-James jao@duke.edu
Bass-Open Team Website - Applications due by February 11 @ 5 p.m.

You can learn more about this project’s underlying principles and approach in “Animate Earth,” from the Winter 2021 issue of Orion Magazine, a publication focused on environmental and social justice.

Article: https://orionmagazine.org/article/the-animate-earth