

if we do nothing

Background

if we do nothing is a climate change project which sets out to sonify and contrast data from both Western science and the environmental belief systems of indigenous Arctic communities, expressed in story and myth. The project also looks at the *ad hoc* adaptations to climate change made by land users in rural Scotland. In the scientific models the dynamics of climate change's various drivers, for example rising CO2 or disappearing Arctic sea ice, are represented in sound, exploiting sound's potential to afford immediate transformational experiences. Sound, as a phenomenological reality-in-itself, invites audiences to *feel* the movement of data, offering unique perceptions of the abstract complexities of climate change.

Sonification models can fail largely because too many sonic elements are thrown at the listener simultaneously. A listener needs to be able to tell what they're listening to, and why they're listening. I've sought to address this problem by taking care to present models which represent the data robustly and convincingly, which allow for variations, and whose sounds are captivating yet clear. A more reflective, literary, poetic approach is taken with the indigenous texts.

Audio

You can listen to examples of models 1 -3 [here](#).

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Themes

Civilisational issues of adaptation and sustainability are addressed in an examination of the porosity or fragmentation of knowledge and the incommensurability of world views - differences between Western science and myth in their attempts to define and explain the universe. Indigenous environmental knowledge, often inscrutable, irrational or non-rational, is seen as a form of data (data = something given). The work examines current lines of enquiry and the need for fresh thinking around adaptation, sustainability and artistic endeavour in reframing critical questions that address interdisciplinarity and complexity.

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Material elements of the work

- Model 1: rising CO2/Glacier ablation (1880 - 2050)
- Model 2: indigenous stories, their translations juxtaposed with 'authoritative' texts from the UN literature on climate change.
- Model 3: Arctic sea ice (1980 - 2080)

In-progress

- a (near) real-time sonification model streaming data from pollution sensors (comparing urban and rural levels across Scotland) and river level sensors in Southern Scotland.
- radiophonic works examining local rural ad hoc adaptations to the effects of climate change in rural Southern Scotland.
- listening pavilion: The pavilion references two traditions of Arctic architecture, the climate research station and the igloo. It provides an enclosed listening space with loudspeakers, seating for four or five people, wall and shelf space for interpretation and documentation. It is intended both as a fixed permanent installation and as a touring structure. As a fixed structure it will serve primarily to host the near real-time model described above, and also to function as a multi-purpose listening booth, mini gallery, chat room or library. (Appendix 1)
- 'shaking tent' (Appendix 2)
- artist's book, to document the research and development of the project in full.

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Testing and evaluation

The first model was tested at the Sound + Environment conference at the University of Hull in July 2017.

A short version of model 2 was successfully tested and evaluated at the 2017 Balance-Unbalance conference held at Plymouth University (UK) in August 2017.

Two public events held in Dumfries in November 2017 and February 2018 extended the work into the public domain as an open forum to design and plan a series of future events looking at water, land and energy as well as the wider topics of eco-art, the aesthetics of sustainability, resilience, and emergence. This project is entitled *if we did something*

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Partners

Partnerships supported with Professional Development funding from The Artists Information Company, April 2017:-

Jan Hogarth, environmental artist and curator

Shelly Knotts, producer of live-coded and network music performances

Dave Monteith, physicist and mathematician

Matteo Spagnolo (glaciologist, Reader in Physical Geography, University of Aberdeen, UK, Visiting Professor at the University of California, Berkeley, USA) and the Cryosphere and Climate Change Group at the University of Aberdeen.

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Marcin Pietruszewski, composer of electronic music

Neville Rae (Old School Fabrications), artist

Sue Scowcroft, visual artist

Matteo Spagnolo (glaciologist, Reader in Physical Geography, University of Aberdeen, UK, Visiting Professor at the University of California, Berkeley, USA) and the Cryosphere and Climate Change Group at the University of Aberdeen.

Giancarlo Toniutti, composer, morphologist, linguist, researcher

John Wallace, environmental artist, film-maker

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