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James Wyness

## *if we do nothing*

### **Background**

*if we do nothing* began as a climate change project that set 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 has evolved accumulatively, now functioning as an archive as further data is added over time, exploring for example opinions on possible changes to everyday soundscapes that might occur as tipping points are reached.

In the scientific models the dynamics of climate change's various drivers, for example rising CO2 or disappearing Arctic sea ice, are exploited 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 data.

### **Themes**

The work addresses civilisational issues of adaptation and sustainability by examining the porosity and fragmentation of knowledge and the incommensurability of world views - differences between Western science and myth in defining and explaining the universe. Indigenous environmental knowledge, often seen as inscrutable, irrational or non-rational, is considered as a fundamental form of data (data = something given). Overall the work, by embracing interdisciplinarity and complexity, examines current lines of enquiry and the need for fresh thinking around adaptation, sustainability and artistic endeavour in reframing critical questions.

### **Material elements of the work**

#### ***Current***

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 - 2050)

Interviews and recorded conversations

#### ***In-progress***

Listening Pavilion. Designed and awaiting funding for construction, the Listening Pavilion references two traditions of Arctic architecture, the climate research station and the igloo. It provides an enclosed listening space with loudspeakers, seating for up to five people, wall and shelf space for interpretation and documentation. The pavilion is intended either as a fixed permanent installation or as a touring structure. It's designed to host not only the models described above and any future real-time sonification projects but also works by other artists who examine related concepts, themes and topics. In this context it might function as as a mini gallery, chat room or library.

### **Documentation**

Audio: *The Earth Appeared*, produced for radio, can be streamed [here](#).

## **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 symposiums on eco-art, the aesthetics of sustainability, resilience, and emergence.

## **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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