

Open Sonifications: Bringing Sound and Data to Everyone

Speaker: Jamie Perera, Composer, sound artist and producer **and** Jordan Wirfs-Brock **and** Duncan Geere
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Important Links

<https://opensonifications.net/>

Notes

- Open Sonifications - a manifesto for many ecologies of data and sound
- Sonification = practice sound to represent objects, usually in an algorithmic way (mostly commonly data but can be anything)
- We don't just get knowledge through looking, but also listening
- There are many examples of sonification (e.g. heart monitor, ticking clocking, geiger counter...)
- Facts, emotion, subject matter ~ very powerful
- we want people to treat data as a creative material to understand the world around them
- People are intimidated by sonification because they assume that it requires a lot of coding, but in reality it's quite accessible
- We identify as designers and explorers
- We are encouraging techniques that are not always used – expand the field!
- Extend the ecosystem to become a wider range of approaches
- Data feminism – encourages us to explore the power structures and imbalances in how we explore and present data – we are using this concept
 - Unconventional approaches to make data more visceral
 - E.g. Du Bois, Mona Chalabi, Dear Data Project
- Deep Listening – “listening in every possible way to everything possible to hear everything you are doing”
- Values
 - Intentions - many voices, community engagement, unbounded purposes. The entire world is our data set!
 - Process – we support unusual approaches. Exploration is more important than perfection. DIY aesthetic. Embodiment and transformation.

- Presentation – anything around you can be in an instrument. Delight in disruption. Sound and are inherently biased. Sonification must be critically inclusive.
- Conventional Approaches: accessibility, data journalism, science...
- Lesser-seen approaches: educational, sound art, natural sonifications, musical...
- But there's a whole landscape of what could be. What about speech, cinematic, or lofi sonifications?
- Sonifications shouldn't be exclusive, they should be inclusive. Worth experimenting with new approaches
- What does this mean for you?
 - Sense of playfulness
 - Expressing data in an interesting way
- You can get started just where you are, you can even use your own voice
- Data + instruments + audio recorder → make a sonification!

Q&A

1. Q: Behind the scenes of your collaboration? How you worked together to inform what went into the presentation?

A: at a sonification conference last year, we encountered a lot of conventional practices, and we thought, is this it? There's more! And we used a lot of analog techniques and did this collaboration entirely remotely. We had a lot of productive arguments, for example what is the right language framing, what are our values? We had a desire to create new vocabulary and narrative. We've been exploring a lot of tension in terms of what we want to extend. It's a young community as compared to data viz. Everyone had a unique perspective and set of skills to contribute to this manifesto.

2. Q: have you come across a data set that made a beautiful melody or was particularly musical?

A: (Jamie) Yes, my main work takes years of climate data and turns it into an orchestral work. We tried to compose something with data inspiration, but it turned out that letting the data actually dictate the output was more beautiful. (Jordan): I would jump in with alternative perspective on beauty. With my 2-year old daughter, we practice sonifying "sun" and "shade" as we pass them while diving.

3. Q: i've been thinking about decolonial approaches to data representation. Do you know about any projects for how we can bring in indigenous practices to sonification? Singing for wayfinding?

A: (jamie) decolonization is even more open than that. There are certain beauty standards that exists in the world that are taken for granted. In the western world we tend to reject dissonance. I think challenging that and finding beauty in the process is

a decolonial act. Finding approach that's not necessarily about human, more about data speaking. That's decolonial. Sound is a form that is shared by all of nature. The application of sound is like the more-than-human world getting us to listen. (follow up in channel)

4. **Q:**
 A:

5. **Q:**
 A:

About the Talk

In this talk, we share a manifesto for a new approach to sonification that centres community, real issues, and danceability. Attendees will learn DIY techniques for exploring objects and data through sound -- no special software or musical background required.

About the Speaker

Jamie Perera is an Asian mixed heritage composer, sound artist and producer born and living in East London. His work is inspired by transformation in the Anthropocene, with themes that juxtapose nature, people, places and timescales. He combines electronic production and contemporary orchestration with field recordings, data, and video.

Jordan Wirfs-Brock is a human-computer interaction researcher, educator, and designer. She develops tools and techniques for helping people engage all of their senses to use data as a creative material. She also loves trail running, board games, and baking.

Duncan Geere is an information designer and data storyteller based in Sweden. He helps organisations solving social problems to communicate their data stories, and has worked with organisations like Conservation International, the Gates Foundation, Information is Beautiful and Project Drawdown. He is a co-founder of the Loud Numbers data sonification studio, the Decibels sonification community, and the Elevate dataviz learning community. He's also a generative artist and musician.