AMASONIC

A multi-perspective XR sonification of Amazon River tales

TAGLINE

AMASONIC is a 15-30 min XR experience where the user can experience different human and non-human perspectives on the Amazon River gathered by local communities and scientists, while exploring the installation users compose a sonification, translating their interaction and co-existence with the river echoing the multitude of life connected to the Amazon River.

A RIVER HAS A VOICE

A river has a voice. As a body of water, it moves through the landscape, producing all kinds of sounds. As tiny droplets of moisture in the rainforest merge to become a stream, the voice of the river is heard in the forest and talks to other lifeforms. If we follow the water from the moment it spawns into existence born from etheric nebulas in the mountains through the narrow cracks of rock and underground river sections, its journey through the rainforest passing human settlements and industries till it ends up into the sea, we can feel and understand the river as a complex entity with its own voice, personality, relationships and memories.

Not only does the body of water have a voice but so does all the lifeforms that use the river as their habitat. The fish, river crabs, water plants and even bacteria produce sounds in resonance with each other and with the human activity connected to the river. All together they produce an unheard symphony of the interwoven relationships they have with each other. A poetic datafication of interdependencies and interrelationships echoing how the river as a living entity is an agent in the lives and deaths of all connected to the river.

The river tells interconnected tales. Its sound reflects the multiple perspectives of various lifeforms living and dying with the river, the political dimensions of capitalistic exploitation of the water, the cultural tales of ancestors, indigenous tribes or riverside communities dependent on the river, as well as their political fights for access to and survival of the river. The iconic Amazon River is the largest river on our planet, and it faces transcontinental challenges as droughts, oil extraction, infrastructure projects, and contamination. These challenges not only resonate the larger challenges of the Amazon as an ecosystem but also embody the larger challenges any river faces in this time of climate change, ecological crisis, exploitation and postcolonial thinking. It's an iconic metaphor for our current state of living and thinking.

In 2017 the New Zeeland Whanganui River was recognised as a legal body, and with that the river received a political and legal voice. The act fundamentally changed relationship with the body of water, acknowledging it has rights and responsibilities. It shifted the river from an exploitable recourse into an equal entity that has its own will. There is hope for change, if we listen to the river in different ways.

With Amasonic we want to invent new sensorial modes for understanding the life, transformations and dramatic tales surrounding the river. The river produces and reverberates many sounds of human, non-human and mythical entities and with Amasonic we want to echo its reality and many tales. The axis is to converge and create communal knowledge, a new form of inventing and settling scientific research in an aesthetic that can reinforce the life of many mirroring the life of the river itself. With Amasonic we want to create river songs, making tangible that all life is interdepended to the river and to nature in general, and want to celebrate the interconnective web of relationship we have with each other and the nonhumans around us.

A LIVING ARCHIVE OF RIVER TALES

Amasonic is both a scientific project with the aim to collect the many voices of humans and non-humans connected to the river and an XR Art project functioning as local and remote access points to the river songs created out of gathered data and stories. With Amasonic we create a community-based project where we invite local Amazonian communities and scientists to collect tales and data on the river and its inhabitants. Working together we create a living sound archive that will grow in a 5-year project span.

In the XR installation the user can both compose with and access the sound archive by choosing a Human or Non-Human lifeform. By preselecting a perspective, you can listen to the Amazon River tales from a dolphin's perspective, as a water plant, as a fisherman or as an ancestor or even from the perspective of the river waterbody itself.

By physically moving your body through the XR installation and by interacting with sound data points plotted on the Amazon river hoovering as a 3D object in the space, a user will intuitively spawn voices of other lifeforms or entities into existence. By triggering sounds and interacting with the river the user creates a highly personal journey and unique sound experience.

Since the installation is multiuser and can accommodate 8 persons simultaneously at any time, all interactions with the system will also create a collective sound design. This collective river song can be ported as a live audio feed to a bystanding audience, or a website, or to another remote location like a festival, event or museum. The ever-evolving sonification will act like a user generated and adaptive and ever ongoing audio documentary on the Amazon river.

AN AUDIO DRIVEN VR/XR EXPERIENCE

For most of us it's hard to feel an emotional connection with abstract things like climate change, a rainforest, or a river. At the same time, we are fully intertwined with the ecology around us. By opening our kitchen tap we invite the river inside our homes, and sometimes also inside our bodies. By depicting the river as a living entity, we make these intertwined relationships tangible and deepen the understanding on what it means to connect with them.

Let's envision the river as a three-dimensional object or entity. The flat river turns into unexpected shapes, spawning into existence from moist nebula's high on the mountains and from slow silent streams deep in the rainforests undergrowth, it shapeshifts into larger fast-moving streams, fast bodies of water and violent waterfalls, splitting body into hidden underground river parts to end up in almost non-moving cave systems, to eventually dissolving into the slow-moving sea delta. The Amazon not only shapeshifts its bodily shape during its journey, but also its identity end expression.

In Amasonic, the river acts like a 3D bodily interface for exploration of the sound archive. With a VR headset the user can have an overview on the full river and explore it by moving towards them to encounter different stories, songs, interactions and relationships of humans and non-humans have with the river situated on that specific location. The 3D river will be plotted with locally sourced sound datapoints, and the user's physical presence will activate them as sounds, stories or songs. Depending on the users' preselected perspective (i.e. specific species / plant / animal / human: cultural, political, ancestral or spiritual) a particular sound will be accessible to them and others will not.

The installation (hub) is designed as a physical architectural structure inspired by a skate park, where the user stands on a platform around the Amazon River. The entire Amazon River is depicted in a virtual way hoovering above a physical structure designed with several terrace layers. By physically moving within the architectural structure and stepping down to a lower terrace level (towards the middle of the basin) the user zooms into the location and can virtually step into the river as a body of water themselves, blurring the boundaries between observer and observed.

During the experience, a predesigned soundscape will provide an ever-present bedding for all user triggered content to blend in. This soundscape will follow a 10-minute day and 10-minute night rhythm influencing availability of story datapoints and influencing the total sound expression. But this rhythm will also impact visual representation of the river since the sea tide also influences visibility and colour of the water (red or green water, clear and mudded water). Using VR makes it possible to design an experience where we can use an Augmented Reality visual mode, enabling you to see your co-creators, other users and physical surroundings enabling safe navigation on the terrasses. And switch the AR mode to fully enclosed VR episode's / encounters when a user stands still at a certain location for a while.

Amasonic is designed as a step-in step out (sandbox)/ VR / XR installation. Users can just hop on and hop off, depending on their own taste and availability, without necessarily starting at the same time all together. Each individual user will have their own subjective single user audio experience in their VR / Audio headset starting with an introduction and overview of the river system before they embark to a free roam journey within the river system.

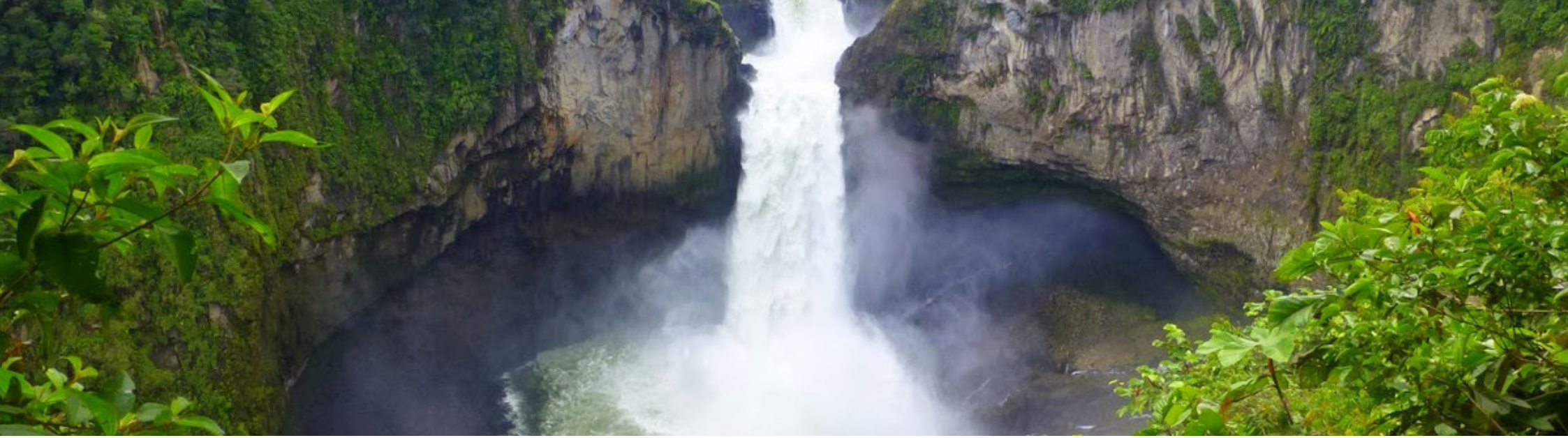
You can see renders of possible set ups here.

PINK DOLPHINS

MANATEES

These sound samples were collected alongside the Amazon River, specifically in the Mamirauá Reserve in North-Eastern Brazil.

We can hear a myriad of sounds from this bustling ecosystem. Primarily of the pink dolphins and manatees (respectively), joined as well by the rhythmic sounds of bugs, intermissions by the chirping of birds, leaves crackling under footsteps, and the water's flow that connects them all.



MARCEL VAN BRAKEL | CO-CREATOR

Marcel van Brakel is a founder and lead designer at Polymorf, an interdisciplinary Dutch art and experience design collective. He also works as an independent artists, writer, librettist and film and theatre director. His critical projects and artistic research on immersive storytelling and embodiment often incorporate emerging technologies, multi-sensory design, and performativity. His body of work reflects on the now, the (post)human condition, and the shifting relationship between humans, technology and ecology, and ranges from interactive performances, music theatre, operas, VR experiences, speculative designs, brain-hacking projects, multi-sensory art installations, and interactive art installations. Marcel was writer director at theatre company Het Witte Vuur, and is currently fellow of the Sundance Institute, New frontiers story LAB, and a senior lecturer of immersive storytelling, trans media storytelling, speculative design, and performativity at the Avans University for Applied Sciences in Breda. He was the lead designer of the award-winning multi-sensory installation Famous Deaths and co-author of the Sense of Smell publication. Famous Deaths won the 2015 Art & Olfaction Award for experimental scent and was selected for the MIT Canon Movements of Innovation and the IDFA Doclab Interactive Documentary Canon. Symbiosis won the IDFA DocLab 2021 Special jury award for best creative technology in the immersive non-fiction category. His work was shown on international festivals and exhibitions such as Hong Kong ArtsCentre, IDFA DocLab, FILE, Tech Open Air, SXSW, Tribeca Film Festival, FOSTGallery, the Cooper Hewitt Smithsonian Design Museum, the Van Gogh Museum, Playgrounds and the STRP Festival. As lead designer of the performative VR project Symbiosis.

DR. CECILIA OLIVEIRA | CO-CREATOR

For Maria Cecilia Oliveira is head of the transdisciplinary research group “Democratic Governance and Ecopolitical Transformations” (EcoPol) at RIFS Potsdam. She is currently working with the EcoPol group on a transdisciplinary case study in the Amazon Basin. Within the Amazon Basin, research areas include rights of nature, environmental crises, indigenous activism, knowledge production, populism, and climate policy development in the context of the Paris Agreement. Oliveira previously led the Implementing the Paris Agreement (2017-2018) and Democratic re-configurations of sustainability transformations (2019-2020) groups. She is also co-president of the Amazon Section of the Latin American Studies Association.

Oliveira researches the relationship between democracy and ecopolitics. She focuses on topics such as climate change regimes, environmental justice, ecopolitical transterritoriality, and science and technology studies. Another area of interest is science communication, aiming to connect art and politics through dialogue forums, documentaries, podcasts, performances, and lectures.

Oliveira received her PhD in international relations from the Pontifical Catholic University in Sao Paulo, Brazil, in 2016. She wrote part of her dissertation as a Fulbright Scholar at the Columbia University’s Earth Institute (2013-2014) in New York, on the topic of “Millennium Development Goals: secured life and planetary governmentality.” Prior to that, she completed a Master’s in International Relations at the Pontifical Catholic University in Sao Paulo and another Master’s as an Alban Scholar at the University of Padua, Italy, in Critical Criminology and Social Prevention.

studio BIARRITZ

STUDIO BIARRITZ Founded by Corine Meijers in 2019, Studio Biarritz is now an established production house that specializes in audiovisual projects that cross borders. Studio Biarritz develops its own projects, but we also love collaborating with filmmakers, artists and partners from all over the world to produce stories with a lot of heart that are relevant for our trying times. We cross borders in 1) form, technology and subject matter, in 2) collaboration with filmmakers, artists & partners and 3) in audience reach, distributed on multiple platforms. www.studiobiarritz.nl info@studiobiarritz.nl

LACUNA (VR documentary, 33 min) by Maartje Wegdam and Nienke Huitenga.
A Podium Biarritz production in coproduction with Copper Views Film Productions (NL) and Studio Biarritz (NL).
In premiere @ IFFR 2025.
Selected for Filmfestival Cannes - Immersive competition 2025
https://studiobiarritz.nl/project/lacuna/

FUTURE BOTANICA (an Augmented Reality app, fiction 30 min) by Polymorf
Released during Dutch Design week @MU Hybrid Art House, and IDFA Doclab (in competition) @Droog, in 2024.
USA premiere at SXSW in 2025!
https://www.polymorf.nl/interaction/future-botanica/

FLOATING WITH SPIRITS (cinematic hybrid VR) by Juanita Onzaga (shot in Mexico)
a production of timescapes (BE), in coproduction with Studio Biarritz (NL) and Tarantula (LUX).
In competition at the **Venice Immersive Competition**, at the 80th Mostra Internazionale d'Arte Cinematografica 2023.
Dutch premiere & in competition @IDFAdoclab 2023.
www.floatingwithspirits.com

THE IMAGINARY FRIEND (Interactive VR live action & animation) by Steye Hallema.
in coproduction with timescapes (BE) and Submarine Channel (NL). In collaboration with 4DR Studios (NL), Demute, Wildvreemd, Apvis and Dat!school.
In competition at the **Venice Immersive Competition**, at the 80th Mostra Internazionale d'Arte Cinematografica 2023.
Dutch premiere & in competition Storyspace Netherlands Film Festival: **nominated for a "Gouden Kalf digitale cultuur"**.
www.theImaginaryfriend.nl

SYMBIOSIS, by Polymorf (a multi-user, multi-sensory VR Installation) by Marcel van Brakel and Mark Meeuwenoord. in co-production with Studio Biarritz. Premiered at the EYE film Museum, selection for IDFA Doclab 2021.
Winner best creative technology award – **IDFA Doclab** competition / Immersive non-fiction 2021. Programmed at Holland Festival in Frascati (2022). Selected for Storyspace Netherlands Film Festival (2022). Booked for 3 months (Nov. 2022 – January 2023) in Portland Art Museum – Centre for an untold Tomorrow in 2022. Selected at SXSW (Austin, USA) 2023 and Rio Innovation Week Brazil, 2023.
www.symbiosis.show