

# **An Exploration of Water in Sound Art**

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## **Abstract**

Many contemporary sound artists use water as an instrument, metaphor, or medium in their work. This dissertation examines why artists choose to do so and how audiences construct meaning out of sound art based around water.

During this research, which included interviews with three contemporary sound artists and a focus group, four main subjects were identified. Sound artists working with water often draw a parallel between environmental issues and their work. Water is used in sound art for aesthetic reasons and its transformational properties. Furthermore, the thesis illustrates that water in sound art is a very political subject. Through in depths analysis of water in sound art the dissertation discusses the subject of meaning construction by artists and audiences.

## **1. Introduction**

This dissertation will explore the use of water as a medium, instrument and metaphor in sound art. Many sound artists and musicians have focused on water in their practice. Three contemporary sound artists are taken as examples and their use of water is examined theoretically in order to analyse why water occupies such a prominent role in sound art.

Furthermore, different recordings by the interviewed artists were played to an audience in order to analyse how meaning was constructed and if the intended message from the artist has reached the audience. After a short introduction to the subjects of water and sound art, the key subjects: environmental issues, aesthetics, politics and meaning will be explored in the literature review and through the main research in order to explore why water is used in sound art.

### **1.1 Water**

Water is a subject for scientists and it is a primary element of our environment and ourselves. About 71% of the planet earth's surface is covered with water, and the oceans hold about 96.5% of all of Earth's water. (The USGS, 2016) Water also exists in the air as water vapour, in rivers and lakes, in icecaps and glaciers, in the ground as soil moisture etc. An adult human body contains 60% water, certain living creatures such as jellyfish are 95% water based. (NNAA, 2014) Helmreich (2016, p.95) states:

*"Water is not one thing. For natural science water's effect depends on its state (solid, liquid, gas) and on whether it is fresh or salty, still or turbulent, deep or shallow. For interpretative social sciences, water can be sacred substance, life, refreshment, contaminant, grave."*

Water has been used as a symbol in cultures and religious practices for a long time. It is considered a purifier and a symbol of rebirth. Beside the importance of water in different religious rituals, humans highly depend on water in order to survive. Water is part of daily activities and access to clean water increases our well-being and health. Water in all forms (rain, snow, rivers, lakes, the ocean, clouds) has a huge impact on our living conditions.

Water is used in art and Doctor (2015) stresses that the interrelationship between human existence and the power of the sea have long been established as the basis of many celebrated and distinguished bodies of work in the visual arts, literature, music and film. She mentions for example J.M.W. Turner's romantic seascape paintings, the role of the sea and sea voyages in many writings of Robert Louis Stevenson, and Ealing Studio's films, such as the successful: "The Cruel Sea" (1953). It is striking that a lot of artists and musicians in different times focused on the ocean as an important subject in their work.

Niebur (2015) explores the nostalgic depictions of the seaside in radio plays and illustrates that artists struggled to come to terms with the changing significance of the sea in the middle of the twentieth century.

Similarly, Saylor and Scheer (2015) illustrate how changes in how the sea has been used to travel, communicate, work, play and go to war has shaped the way maritime imagery has been conceived, represented and disseminated in British music<sup>1</sup>.

Beside the obvious importance of water as life giving, water plays a significant role in contemporary politics and throughout history. Janine MacLeod (2013) demonstrates the connection between capital and the

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<sup>1</sup> Note that this dissertation does not solely use examples of British music, but a lot of the literature used has such a focus.

ocean. She problematizes that the use of “watery language” naturalizes the movement of capital, portraying it as something essential for life. Chen, C, MacLeod, J. and Neimanis, A (2013) summarize that the political implications of water metaphors are not universally benign.

It becomes clear that water is a highly political subject and this aspect will be discussed in chapter 2 and 6 in this dissertation. Furthermore, water is a highly interdisciplinary subject. However, two main perspectives reoccurring in this thesis are “water as nature” and “water as culture”.

## **1.2 Sound Art**

This dissertation will use LaBelle’s (2006, ix) definition of sound art:

*“Sound art as a practice harnesses, describes, analyses, performs, and interrogates the condition of sound and the processes by which it operates.”*

LaBelle (2006) positions sound art as an interdisciplinary practice bridging the visual arts with the sonic arts. Furthermore, he pronounces that sound art and space have a dynamic relationship, which stands at the core of the practice of sound art. LaBelle (2006) illustrates that subjects such as spatial thinking, environments and location are important for sound art.

Similarly, Hegarty (2007) illustrates how sound art often reflects on its own production. As an example he refers to Paul Kos “Sound of Ice Melting” (1970), where blocks of ice are melting, surrounded by microphones, in the gallery. Sound art often questions the listening itself and the position of the listener.



This dissertation suggests that it is often inherent in sound art to work with water because water is a medium found in many environments and locations. Sound art then reflects upon it, connects people with their environments and questions the listening to it. Additionally, water's sonic qualities are fascinating, for example, sound travels about four times faster underwater than in the air (Helmreich, 2016). There is a lot to explore for artists and musicians working with water in sound art.

Musique concrète, John Cage's work and work from the audio ecology researcher R. Murray Schafer can be looked at as precursors of sound art.<sup>2</sup> One idea behind musique concrète was to draw music and life together by using everyday sounds as its material. (Hamilton, 2007) Water is an element in everybody's life. It is a reoccurring subject throughout this thesis that water is used in sound art because it is an everyday sound.<sup>3</sup>

There are different opinions about the relation between sound art and music. For example, Hegarty (2007) defends the position that the lines between sound art and music have been blurred. This dissertation will work with a broad definition of musical work, which includes sound art. Due to space limitations the further questions about sound art and its differences to music will not be profoundly answered.<sup>4</sup> Sound art is a highly interdisciplinary practice and it is influenced by a musical and an artistic tradition.

### **1.3 Water and Music**

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<sup>2</sup> John Cage's and R. Murray Schafer's work will be discussed further in chapter 2.

<sup>3</sup> See chapter 5 and 6

<sup>4</sup> for more on definitions of music and sound art, see Price (2011), Levinson (1990)

Stefan Helmreich (2016) distinguishes between three modes through which music meets water:

1. A musical composition/performance evokes water symbolically, metaphorically or timbrally, in the arrangement of notes, organization of rhythms or choice of instrument.
2. Music invokes water as a material instrument or sonic element.
3. Music soaks in water: music is immersed in actual water as an encompassing medium within which it is performed, recorded, played back, or listened to.

It is a useful differentiation to start with and all the three modes will be considered in this dissertation. However, some of the sound art discussed in this thesis can be situated in more than one category and the lines between the categories are not as clear as they first seem to be.

This dissertation argues that water and its metaphors has been a popular subject in music of different genres at different times. From Handel's "Water Music" (1717) to Debussy's: "Reflets dans l'eau"<sup>5</sup> (1905), from Deep Purple's "Smoke on the Water" (1972), Drexciya's: "the Unknown Aquazone" (1994) to Alela Diane's "The Ocean" (2009)<sup>6</sup>. These examples are no exceptions. Most musicians, composers and bands have songs connected with water, the ocean or rivers.

In sound art, Harris (2015) confirms that recordings of water have been an important focus for composers, sound and video artists. He refers to works by Jane Grant<sup>7</sup>, Annea Lockwood<sup>8</sup>, Hildegard Westerkamp<sup>9</sup> or Pipilotti Rist<sup>10</sup>, where sounds of water feature as prominent sonic components.

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<sup>5</sup> translated from French: „Reflections in the water“

<sup>6</sup> see: Kanaal van AshwobDarley (2011)

<sup>7</sup> see: Fathom, 2013. (River Tamar Project, no date)

<sup>8</sup> see: A Sound Map of the Danube, 2008. More on Lockwood's work , see: Chapter 2.

<sup>9</sup> see: Talking Rain, 1998.

<sup>10</sup>see: Rain Woman, 1999.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Douglas Kahn and John Cage

One of the main academic works considering the role of water in sound art is Douglas Kahn's: *"Noise, Water, Meat. A history of Sound in the Arts."* (2001). Kahn documents that there has been a long-standing association of water and sound in observational acoustics. Kahn (2001, p.246) describes:

*"The use of actual water entered twentieth-century Western art music through percussion – specifically, percussion tuned by water, or wet percussion."*

He asserts that the first notable use of wet percussion was Erik Satie's use of the *boutelliphone* in *"Parade"* (1918). Later, Kahn illustrates that Italian Futurist Luigi Russolo's manifesto *"The Art of Noise"* (1913) was very influential in the movement of avant-garde art and he was one of the first to recognize the importance of the sound of water. Kahn (2001) explains that for Russolo water represented the most frequent, varied and richest source of noise in nature.

In his book, Kahn writes in detail about John Cage's sound pieces concerned with water. He pronounces the importance of water for Cage because of its unpredictability. Piekut (2013, p.141) supports Kahn's statement about Cage and points out:

*"Cage was fully convinced that, in nature, every process is interfered with by chance, and he set about creating art that imitated its non-ordered manner of operation."*

Kahn illustrates how Cage broke the link between water and percussion with his piece "*Water Music*" (1952). He argues that Cage's approach was very experimental for the time because he included sounds that were from a musical point of view forbidden at that time.

*"To notice an outpouring of this complex of water and fluidity, performance and sound, presumes a previous period that was dry, rigid, inactive and silent. Such a period did not exist... but what did, was a scarcity of sounds made from actual water."* (Kahn, 2001, p.243)

This dissertation argues that Kahn's conclusion comes across a little unilateral and bluntly. Maybe there was no actual water involved in western art music, but water has been connected with music in many cultures for a long time. For example, Griffith (1998) illustrates that the Yaquis, an Indian tribe in Mexico have played the gourd water drum traditionally. The earliest mention of Yaqui music was 1645, but gourd drums probably existed before colonization. On Banks Island, Vanuatu women use the ocean water as a drum and this tradition has been passed on for many generations. (Dick, 2013) Nevertheless, the examples still validate Kahn's earlier statement that water is mainly used as percussion instrument before it's extensive use in sound art.

Kahn (2001) refers to sound artist Annea Lockwood who began recording rivers around 1966. She built The River Archive with many contributors with the intent of recording every river in the world. Lockwood explains in an interview with Tara Rodgers (2010) that she was interested in how sounds and our bodies interact. She explains that she was curious about how the sounds of moving water affect us and therefore decided to record rivers of the world and build an archive. She describes the sound of water as very complex and full of intricate textures, rhythmic patterns and unpredictabilities. Lockwood notes:

*"Water was one of the most interesting plumb because I never yet feel that I can hear every last component of any one stretch of water sound and hold it all together in my mind." (cited in Rodgers, 2010, p.118)*

Beside other musicians, Kahn discusses the importance of water in the Fluxus<sup>11</sup> movement with George Brecht's *"Drip Music"* (1957), Yoko Ono's *"Water Piece"* (1964) or Max Neuhaus's *"Water Whistle"* (1971). His book illuminates many areas concerning how and where water is used in avant-garde art in the twentieth century and gives therefore a useful introduction into the subject. Especially concerning the influence of the visual arts on sonic arts, Kahn's book is rewarding. Kahn (2001) finishes his chapter about water by pointing towards the rise of environmentalism and he proposes that water is no longer looked at as an inert element from practices within the arts. This dissertation will further investigate that argument in the next chapter.

## **2.2 Environmental Issues and Sound Art**

There is a growing amount of literature looking at the environment and sound. Environments are often at the core of sound art and artists reflect upon them. Therefore it is not a surprise that artists choose to work with water in sound art, as water is such a present element in our environments. As one of the first writing in this field, Canadian composer R. Murray Schafer introduced the concept of the soundscape.

Schafer (1977) writes in his influential book: *"Our sonic Environment and the Soundscape. The Tuning of the World"* about how the soundscape of the world is changing and that noise pollution is becoming a problem. He

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<sup>11</sup> Fluxus's was a loose group of artists, musicians and poets intending to integrate life into art through the use of found events, sounds and materials. (Wainwright, 2016)

questions the relationship between humans and the sounds of their environment and he asks what happens when those sounds change. Schafer (1977) states that the general acoustic environment of a society can be read as an indicator of social conditions which produce it and may tell us much about the trending and evolution of that society. To analyse a soundscape Schafer (1977) looks at keynote sounds<sup>12</sup>, signals and soundmarks:

*"The keynote sounds of a landscape are those created by its geography and climate: water, wind, forests, plains, birds, insects and animals."* (Schafer, 1977, pp.9-10)

From this perspective the sound of water is used to document the landscape and in order to review the environment. Later, Schafer (ibid) points towards maritime literature of East and West where the love of ocean has been portrayed. He describes the sea as the keynote sound of all maritime civilizations. He illustrates that snow has been connected with silence in northern literature and how snowmobiles document the transmogrification of the twentieth-century soundscape. Schafer (1977) connotes the importance of symbols and explains, that:

*"A sound event is symbolic when it stirs in us emotions or thoughts beyond its mechanical sensations or signalling function, when it has a numinosity or reverberation that rings through the deeper recess of the psyche.... Of all sounds, water, the original life element, has the most splendid symbolism... They speak of cleansing, of purification, of refreshment and renewal."* (Schafer, 1977, pp.168-170)

As described in the introduction, this dissertation validates the statement that water is used as a symbol and metaphor in different contexts. The

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<sup>12</sup> A keynote is the note that identifies the key or tonality of a particular composition.

connection of water sounds and emotion will be discussed more profoundly in chapter 7.

Schafer (1977) demonstrates in a sociological survey that people nowadays have a romantic image of the sea. He warns:

*"But modern man is losing touch with the supra-biological rhythms that make the sea so notorious as a trembling presence in ancient art and ritual. Do all memories turn into romance? If so, the sea is the first example."* (Schafer, 1977, p.171)

Why people have a romantic image of the sea is an interesting question and chapter 7 will discuss if audiences still connect such a notion with the sound of water. In contrast to Schafer's methodology with keynotes in landscapes, this dissertation is focusing on sound art using water. Schafer's survey is considering industrial and natural landscapes by themselves without any artists using or editing the sounds.

Harris (2015) argues in his article *"The Materiality of Water"* that there is a lot of recent sound art focusing on water with high sound quality and he emphasizes its function in local ecosystems. He discusses composers Annea Lockwood (2008), Hildegard Westerkamp (1998) and Jana Winderen (2016) in detail. Harris (2015) explains, that these composers make soundscapes, associated with the World Soundscape Project, started by Schafer. It becomes evident that these works connect the use of water with an environmental message.

Dixon (2011) emphasizes in his essay on the liaison between acousmatic<sup>13</sup> music and ecological concern. He focuses on the examples of air and sky but his statement could be similarly adapted to water.

*"Green values are arguably the most powerful means we have of challenging the only other global value system we acknowledge, capitalism." (Dixon, 2011, p. 115)*

This is an interesting string of thought to follow. According to Dixon (2011), green values are a universal concern at this day and age. He later proposes that acousmatic music communicates well with myth and is therefore well suited to represent the air and challenge capitalism. (ibid) This view is idealistic. It is questionable if green values are really rated so highly, after the Kyoto protocol has so far failed to meet expectations. Duncan (2012) illustrates that the attempt to cut emissions of greenhouse gas has not convinced big nations such as America, India or China as they did not verify the protocol at all. Furthermore, Dixon's focus on the air, together with a lot of scientists, leaves us with the knowledge, that we know the moon and outer space better, than the oceans surface.<sup>14</sup> So maybe, it is time, to start to focus on the water.

### **2.3 Aesthetics and Water in Sound Art**

Another explication why water is used in sound art is that water is a highly aesthetic medium. This chapter will discuss different philosophical perspectives on aesthetics, from Kant, Adorno to Danto in order to explore why water is used in contemporary sound art.

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<sup>13</sup> a sound that one hears without seeing its cause (Kane, 2014)

<sup>14</sup> The comparison is often made, that we have more detailed maps of Mars, Venus or the Moon than of the ocean floor. (Copley, 2014)



According to Burnham (2000) Kant stands right in the middle of a complete historical change in the central focus of aesthetics. While formerly, philosophical aesthetics was largely content to take its primary examples of beauty and sublimity from nature, after Kant the focus is placed squarely on works of art. Now, in Kant, fine art seems to 'borrow' its beauty or sublimity from nature. Kant (1960) explains the difference between the sublime and the beautiful:

*"The sublime moves, the beautiful charms. The mien of a man who is undergoing the full feeling of the sublime is earnest, sometimes rigid and astonished. On the other hand the lively sensation of the beautiful proclaims itself through shining cheerfulness in the eyes, through smiling features, and often through audible mirth. The sublime is in turn of different kinds. Its feeling is sometimes accompanied with a certain dread, or melancholy; in some cases merely with quiet wonder; and in still others with a beauty completely pervading a sublime plan."* (Kant, 1960, pp.47-48)

Kant describes how the sublime is a feeling, which can be connected with fear, positive or negative emotions. The imagination facilitates the response, which leads to a judgement of the sublime. Brady (2003) explains that Kant's theory of the sublime anticipates the romantic turn towards nature. She argues that Kant embodies a human-centred attitude towards nature because he sometimes writes as if our freedom and capacity for reason give us dominion over nature. Brady (2003) demonstrates that this can provoke the criticism that his theory of the sublime dualises humans and nature. This dissertation encountered a similar dualistic perspective from other writers during this research and argues that Kant's theory is still influencing the way contemporary artists and philosopher look at nature and humans.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, Brady's

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<sup>15</sup> see chapter 6: Politics

theory helps to explain why people have such romantic associations with the sea, as encountered by Schafer in the last chapter.

Hamilton (2007) illustrates that Adorno takes from Kant the fundamental idea that aesthetics is the domain of the unreal, of images. In the meantime, Adorno focuses on the Hegelian notion of truth-content and he recognizes therefore that the value of modernist artworks lies in their truth and not in any pleasure that they may occasion. (Hamilton, 2007)

Adorno (1973, p.108) writes about the importance of experiencing nature in silence:

*"Die Abneigung, von ihr zu reden, ist dort am stärksten, wo Liebe zu ihr überlebt. Das Wort "wie schön" in einer Landschaft verletzt deren stumme Sprache und mindert ihre Schönheit; erscheinende Natur will Schweigen."<sup>16</sup>*

Silence is a reoccurring subject in the aesthetic discussion about sound art and water and it will be further discussed in chapter 5.

Adorno (1973) states that the most authentic art is modernist art, which reflects in its own fragmentation the fragmentation of society: artists became free of church and aristocratic patronage towards the end of the eighteenth century and their work simultaneously became more autonomous and free of a direct social function. With this change of function, artworks entered the marketplace. The same work might in one era be autonomous and in a later era entirely commodified; its aesthetic value or even the identity of the work can change over time.

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<sup>16</sup> Translated from German: The reluctance to speak of her is strongest where the love for her outlasted. The word „how beautiful“ in a landscape hurts her mute language and decreases her beauty; appearing nature wants silence.

This sociological perspective is completely changing the purpose and circumstances of an artwork. If an artwork does not have a direct social function but it has a social situation, what does it change for the artist? With Adorno's critic in mind, the answer to the question of why is water used in sound art is that there is no direct social function behind it. In a capitalist era Adorno doubts both, the effectiveness and the legitimacy of consciousness raising art. Adorno's "Aesthetische Theorie"<sup>17</sup> (1973) emphasizes on the historical circumstances and the social situation the work of art is produced in, but not on the artwork itself. In Adorno's essay "On Popular Music" (1941) he diagnoses pessimistically the standardization of popular material and critically analyses that mass culture is based on its economic organization. Paddison (1982) interprets Adorno's writing on popular music and argues that he differentiates between:

*"music which accepts its character as commodity, thus becoming identical with the machinations of the culture industry itself, and ... "self-reflective" music which critically opposes its fate as commodity, and thus ends up by alienating itself from present society by becoming unacceptable to it."*  
(Paddison, 1982, p. 208)

This argument requires to critically examine, if sound art accepts its character as commodity or if it is positioning itself as "self reflective" music. As stated in the introduction, LaBelle (2006) defines that sound art inherently focuses on its own reflection. However, this dissertation argues that sound art is often presented in gallery spaces where artworks are commodified. Because of word limits and a different focus this dissertation cannot fully answer the question to what extent sound art is commodified. Concerning water it is striking that commodification is an urgent subject, which will be illustrated in chapter 6. Paddison (1993, p.2) summarizes:

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<sup>17</sup> Translated from German: „Aesthetic Theory“

*"The fundamental problem addressed by Adorno's aesthetics is how to philosophize about art in the absence of aesthetic norms"*

Philosopher Arthur Danto (1981) asks a similar question when he discusses the transition from modernism to post-modernism in his institutional theory of art. After experiencing the exhibition of Warhol's "Brillo BoX" (1964) he writes that the new and curious thing about art in this era is that you can no longer tell whether something is art by looking at it. Danto (1964) coins the term "artworld" to answer the question of what makes an object into art. According to Danto, the "artworld" is a group of people having a discourse of reasons about art. He pronounces that a work of art only becomes art through the art-historical interpretation of the piece of art. He mentions that this discourse of reason varies depending on who is able to participate in it. He explains that artworks are embodied meanings<sup>18</sup> and suggests that "After the End of Art" the message must be a kind of comedy or play, which does not take itself too seriously. Similar to Adorno, he states that:

*"Art does no longer bear the responsibility for its own philosophical definition." (Danto, 1997, p.36)*

This perspective suggests that it is out of the hands of the artist to define their own work philosophically. This dissertation cannot give an extended account of different philosophical perspectives on aesthetics because of limited space. But it should be noted that the subject has raised as many questions as it answered. The focus is suddenly shifted on the audience and how they perceive meaning and message out of sound art, which will be discussed in chapter 2.4 and 7 in this dissertation. It becomes clear, that art and music is always seen in a social context and this context influences hugely the way it is perceived by critics and any exposed

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<sup>18</sup> the subject meaning will be discussed in detail in chapter 2.4 and 7.

audience. The different approaches toward judgment of an artwork help to situate a work of art.

Specially focused on water, there is little literature on the aesthetics in sound art. Helmreich's: *"Sounding the Limits of Life: Essays in the Anthropology of Biology and Beyond."* (2016) is one of the only books discussing the use of water in sound art, but his main focus is on biology. Concerning the aesthetics, he explains:

*"The aesthetic aim in pieces that evoke and invoke water is a sense of immersion." (Ibid, p.140)*

Helmreich thinks critically about how that immersion is achieved in controlled lab-like spaces such as swimming pools and in the ocean. He describes how field recordists like Jana Winderen<sup>19</sup> use the sea as a lab, a recording studio. He states that today, sound artists hope not just to soak in sound but also to facilitate ear-opening accounts of human relations with the water around us. As an example, he points to David Dunn's composition "Chaos and the Emergent Mind of the Pond" (1992) where water is not just a medium but also organically enlivened and cogitating. (ibid) Immersion is a reoccurring subject and it will be discussed in detail in chapter 5.

Another aesthetical reason why water is used in sound art is its symbolic and acoustic dimensions. Water is a symbol of change and it incorporates different forms and stages. It is able to transform and its acoustic qualities are really interesting and constantly changing. However, focusing on

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<sup>19</sup> For more information on the Oslo based sound artist see: Winderen, 2016.

sound art, there is little literature in this area beside earlier discussed Douglas Kahn's "Water Noise Meat".

If different genres are consulted, there is more literature about how the sea and water has been portrayed in music, but most of them portrayed a particular time and place in history and don't engage with aesthetics in particular. For example Lambert (2004) writes about "Franz Schubert and the Sea of Eternity" or Mackenzie (1928) collected "Ballads and Sea Songs from Nova Scotia".

## **2.4 Politics and Water in Sound Art**

This dissertation argues that water in sound art is a highly political subject and its importance will be illustrated throughout this dissertation. But from a literature point of view, there is hardly any literature about the political implications on why water is used in sound art. Even if the scope is widened towards different genres, there is hardly any literature about music and water. This is a surprise, because water is a main subject for many international charity organisations and music plays an increasing important role for fundraising events from charity organisations. "Sing for Water" by WaterAid (not year) or benefit concerts by Music for Relief (2016) are just two random examples where music is used in charity organisations where political issues are discussed, too.

Rosenthal and Flacks (2012) illustrate that music and politics have often been connected through social movements. They importantly note:

*"Music that may not appear to be created, performed, framed, shared or even received as political at a given point in time may nonetheless be seen at some time as political."* (ibid, p.21)

There is literature with political importance about water and sound, where the focus is on environmental issues. For example, Roburn (2013) describes how the ocean background noise continues to rise partly because of increased commercial ship traffic. He illustrates that whales' ability to communicate is reduced because of high noise levels and how naval exercises using sonar testing repeatedly cause the death of whales. (ibid) This example does not involve any sound art at all, but illustrates how important a subject sound is in environmental issues.

Chen, MacLeod and Neimanis (2013) propose in their extensive and interdisciplinary book "*Thinking with water*" to conceive the politics around water because it might help us to bring together issues and concerns too often addressed in isolation. They illustrate how water plays a central role in multi-dimensional issues such as climate change, where conversation across arenas of political engagement is urgently demanded.

Saylor and Scheer (2015) write that the sea has been subject and inspiration throughout British musical history because of the significant place within the nation's creative soul. They claim that few subjects have received as much attention from as many generations of British musicians. Similarly, McLamore (2015) shows that the ocean has a long defined British identity, in terms of both how Britons view themselves and how their country is regarded abroad. He pronounces that sea songs underscored Britain's advantageous position as an island nation. He points to the propagandistic efficacy of such maritime life music, which was recognized already in 1703. (ibid)

This dissertation, would argue that this connection to the sea is not unique and other cultures and countries have their strong relationship to the bodies of water close to them, too. But the examples illustrate usefully

that water plays a part in shaping identities. People identify with the body of waters close to them and identity can be a very political subject.

Simon Frith (1996, p.295) states:

“Music seems to be a key to identity because it offers, so intensely, a sense of both self and others, of the subjective in the collective.”

This dissertation would argue that both, music and water are keys to identity, which will be illustrated in chapter 7. Concentrating on music, Frith (1996) intonates the relevance of musical genres and argues they enable people to experience different identities and place people in different social groups. He concludes that music constructs our sense of identity through the direct experience it offers of the body, time and sociability.

Frith’s argument is further useful when looking at sound art as a genre and it’s context. Sound art is often based in an art context. Again, the question has to be asked who decides what is considered sound art. The fact that only a small amount of artworks ever reach the status for appreciation by museums or art institutions is a political subject. The question of equality and who is represented in certain genres and why has to be considered carefully.

## **2.5 Meaning and Water in Sound art**

During the literature review it became clear that the question of why water is used in sound art is highly influenced by how an audience constructs meaning. That is why in this chapter existing literature on this topic will be discussed.



For the literature review, the book *"Playing for Change. Music and Musicians in the Service of Social Movements"* (2012) by Rosenthal and Flacks and *"Why Music Matters"* by Hesmondhalgh (2013) were very useful and helped to get a profound insight into the subject of meaning and music.

Rosenthal and Flacks (2012) note that very few scholars ask the question of how meaning is conveyed and apprehended in music. They argue that understanding a composer's or artist's intent may be very important for understanding how making art affects the artist politically, but it tells us little in itself about the impact on others. Importantly they note that meaning includes far more than lyrics, and lyrics can be more sonically important than semantically. On the other hand, Rosenthal and Flacks (2012) claim that words are the least ambiguous symbols humans use in songs. In the case of sound art there are not often words involved at all. But the different pieces have titles, which might have the same effect as lyrics in a song.

Rosenthal and Flacks (2012, p.24) summarize:

*"Meaning is conveyed and constructed in many layers and fluid contexts... each audience member constructs meaning somewhat idiosyncratically, transforming a performer's intended meanings in ways compatible with audience members' interests and personal experiences, including ways that have nothing to do with the artist's intent at all."*

This argument will serve as a key during this dissertation when analysing the meaning in sound art. Furthermore, Rosenthal and Flacks (2012) suggest to look for signs that music contributes to the attitudes, feelings and actions of members that would not otherwise be there. They state:

*"Unfortunately, there is no scientific or even consensual way to measure such matters." (ibid, p.25)*

It becomes evident that to research the meaning of music is a challenging affair because the audience's response might not be what the performer intended, and there is no clear scientific way to research it, yet. Additionally, McClary (1991) illustrates that very few people are able to explain verbally how music affects them.

Rosenthal and Flacks (2012) usefully categorize "message" as an intended meaning of the performer, while "content" is the sum of everything the performer transmits – conscious or unconscious. The word "meaning" is used to denote the significance to the audience member. Rosenthal and Flacks (2012) illustrate that the effect on an audience member does not necessarily mirror whatever she takes the meaning to be. Therefore, the effect of music is very difficult to measure.

Emotion is a subject recently discussed by more scholars when looking for the affect of music. For example, Nussbaum (2001) argues that music helps us to understand our emotions better. She explains that music's semiotic indefiniteness gives it a great power to engage with our emotions. Hesmondhalgh (2013, p.11) states:

*"Nearly everyone agrees that music is a cultural form that has strong connections to emotions, feelings, and moods: the realm of affect."*

This dissertation will ask the audience for emotions in the research in order to find out about how audiences perceive meaning. Similar to the affect, there is no clear answer to the question of how we locate content in sounds. Frith (1996, p.102) argues:

*"The meanings we take to be natural and universal, are neither, but are social constructions: musical forms and symbols created by humans at a particular time and place, modified through practice, and eventually used so often that they seem to be natural and eternal.*

It becomes clear that it is difficult to locate meaning in audience responses to music. As a helpful factor when analysing meaning in music, Rosenthal and Flacks (2012, p.14) summarize Adorno's influential argument:

*"(1) The message of music is conveyed not merely by the content, but also (and perhaps more effectively) by its form; and (2) the conditions under which music is produced and circulated – the social, political and particularly economic framework – will significantly shape the music itself and how it is received."*

For this dissertation this point clarifies that the context and form of the sound art is very important for the message received by an audience and this will be considered during the research. This literature review will end with the appeal to look at meaning and music carefully. It is important to consider the context, the performers content and the audience response, when analysing the meaning of music.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1 Qualitative Research: Interviews/Focus Group

Given the lack of academic material written on the subject of water's use in sound art, this dissertation drew on interviews with practicing sound artists using water in their music as well as a focus group discussion and questionnaire. Semi-structured interviews lasting around one hour each were carried out with three sound artists in order to explore the reasons behind the use of water in their work. Due to the constraints of time and a words limit, it was not possible to interview both, musicians that use water and musicians who do not use water in their work.

The preliminary research showed that many sound artists use water as an instrument, inspiration or metaphor. The aim was to find out what their motivation is to use water and what affect water in sound art has on an audience.

Firstly three suitable interviewees were chosen through asking people involved in sound art, as well as online research. These interviewees were all based in the UK and had a strong association with water in their work. Furthermore, gender diversity and availability of the artists for an interview influenced the choice of artists. They were contacted via email and agreed to a Skype interview. Participants were Rob St John<sup>20</sup>, a writer, artist and PHD researcher (cultural geography) at University of Glasgow, concerned with the environment using sound recordings involving landscapes<sup>21</sup>; Kathy Hinde<sup>22</sup>, a composer, visual artist and sound artist working with the relationship of nature and technology, expressed through audio-visual installations and performances<sup>23</sup>; and Mark Lyken<sup>24</sup>,

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<sup>20</sup> see: Rob St John (2016a)

<sup>21</sup> For example Surface Tension (2015): a field recording, photography and writing project exploring pollution, life and biodiversity along River Lea in East London

<sup>22</sup> see: Hinde (2016a)

<sup>23</sup> For example Tipping Point: an Installation as a metaphor employed to talk about balance and the cause and effect of shifting water levels.

<sup>24</sup> see: Lyken (2016a)

an artist, filmmaker and composer, focusing on the interplay between nature and culture through musical sound works.<sup>25</sup>

In *"The Good Research Guide: For Small-scale Social Research Projects"*, Martyn Denscombe (2014) writes that interviews focus on what people say they do and on what people say they believe or what opinions they say they have. Because this thesis was interested in such opinions, feelings and experiences the semi-structured interviews<sup>26</sup> turned out to be a very useful methodological tool. The flexibility in terms of the order of the topics and broad issues discussed were other advantages of this technique. This allowed some of the questions to be changed from one interview to the next as a result of information given in previous interviews. Another reason to choose interviews as a method was that they were effective in obtaining a detailed account from the artists themselves as to why they use water in their work. The insights gained through these in depths interviews covered perspectives broadly characterised by an environmental and aesthetic focus. The Skype interviews were recorded and transcribed in order to conduct an in depth analysis of the content.

In a second step, compositions by the three sound artists were played to a focus group in order to research the work's meaning through an audience. An event was organised at the University of Glasgow in the Audio Lab where 12 laptops were prepared for a listening situation through headphones and a questionnaire provided for the participants. Headphones were chosen as a suitable way of listening and reflecting on the music because it was desired that the participants would focus on their own experience with the music and not the group dynamic during the listening situation. Denscombe (2014) illustrates that it is a challenge for the researcher to design a questionnaire. While listening to the 7

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<sup>25</sup> For example *The Terrestrial Sea*: highlighting the diverse and ever-changing environments of the Cromarty Firth through music

<sup>26</sup> see Appendix 1: Semi-structured interviews

recordings the listeners were asked to describe what they can hear, their feelings and associations with it. The participants were requested to write down how the recordings made them feel and what message they got.<sup>27</sup> The name of the composers and the title of the songs was visible in the computer and participants were provided with a sheet, where the recordings were numbered from 1 until 7 to write down their associations. This decision was made because the thesis did not want to put too much emphasis on the title of the songs as this can influence the experience. Kathy Hinde's "Tipping Point" was shown as a video excerpt in order to meet the audio-visual installation's scope<sup>28</sup>, while Mark Lyken's "Dry Sea" was played from his homepage as a sample track<sup>29</sup> and Rob St John's "Liquid City / The Shellycoat" was played from bandcamp<sup>30</sup>. The 4 other tracks were played on a playlist in iTunes. As illustrated in the literature review, the context has an influence on the audience response, which was considered in the preparation and analysis of the focus group. The second part of the questionnaire included two questions about water: What water means to the participants and what the participants associate with the sound of water. This was the first time the subject water was directly addressed in the focus group, as the invitation to the research was titled "Listening and Reflecting on sound art." This strategy turned out to be useful in the way that the research did not want to pre-punch participants associations with the subject of water. This individual part of the focus group lasted around 40 minutes. After the participants handed in their questionnaires they received an information sheet<sup>31</sup> with a short description of the 7 recordings. This procedure was selected because Denscombe (2014) notes that specific about a focus group is that the group discussion is based on an item or experience about which all participants have a similar knowledge. The focus group discussion took place on the topic of why is water used in sound art, with myself

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<sup>27</sup> see Appendix 2: Questionnaire

<sup>28</sup> see Hinde (2015a)

<sup>29</sup> see Lyken (2016b)

<sup>30</sup> see Water of Life (2013)

<sup>31</sup> see Appendix 3: Focus Group Information

moderating. This group interview turned out to be illuminating and participants could listen to alternative point of views. My role as a moderator was to facilitate the group interaction rather than lead the discussion. As a third point, Denscombe (2014) describes that particular emphasis is placed on group dynamics and interactions within the group as means of eliciting information.

### **3.2 Challenges**

To find suitable interview dates was difficult because of the busy schedules and required high flexibility from the artists and the interviewer. Skype interviews were the only affordable way to conduct interviews as the artists were based in Bristol, Dumfries & Galloway and West Yorkshire. In advance it was challenging to estimate how many participants would turn up for the focus group. Stewart and Shamdasan (1990) propose that six to nine people is ideal, but in small-scale research projects the numbers are often smaller because it can be time consuming and expensive. They suggest that it is better to slightly over-recruit for a focus group and potentially manage a slightly larger group than under-recruit and risk having to cancel the sessions or having an unsatisfactory discussion. Through personal connections and a facebook event page<sup>32</sup>, people were encouraged to come to the focus group resulting in a group of 11 participants. For the amount of data collected and the diversity of answers this was a very good number. After the individual questionnaire, the group discussion lasted around 20 minutes and was recorded on a Dictaphone and later transcribed. Another challenge was to encourage diversity in the participants of the focus group. 9 participants were students, all the participants were between 23 and 36 years old and 8 participants were female, 2 male and one non-binary. A variety of nationalities participated at the focus group with 4 Americans, 2 Irish, a Romanian, Belgian, Canadian, Polish and British participant.

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<sup>32</sup> see: Roth, 2016a

## **4. Sound art Reflecting on Environmental Issues**

*"giving voice to things in the environment that aren't human... Sound has a parameter of a landscape – and you know sometimes a landscape is a watery one." (Rob St John, 2016b)*

Asking three sound artists about why they use water in their work, two highlighted the purposeful connection between their work and environmental concerns, whereas one of them said the use of water was more circumstantial. How and why artists use water to highlight environmental issues will be discussed in this chapter. In chapter 7: Meaning, it will be illustrated how that artist's intent translated to an audience.

Water is an obvious and fundamental element of the environment. Nevertheless, it is a bit of a surprise that sound artists choose to use water to highlight environmental issues. Why did they not choose to discuss air pollution, over-population of humans or the loss of biodiversity? In the process of selecting artists for this dissertation the subject of environmentalism was not a priority at all. It is striking how strongly all the artists feel about their environment and during the interviews it was emphasized more and more as a major subject in most of the works.

### **4.1 Kathy Hinde: Balance & Waterways**

Kathy Hinde's *"Tipping Point"* (2014) is a sculptural and sound installation considering our relationship with water and the necessity of balancing how



we use the world's water resources. The quantity of the water inside each glass changes the pitch of the audio feedback and the brightness of the lights inside the installation. In the process of her work on "*Tipping Point*", Hinde (2013) describes her interest in water cycles and how a small shift in one area may cause a large and dynamic transformation elsewhere: the butterfly effect.<sup>33</sup> In the interview, Hinde (2016c) explains:

*"I wanted to highlight the importance of water ... and how we need to look after it. ... As the water flows it changes the tones and the peaks and it is all completely based on the fact that water is flowing from one thing to another."*

Water in this project is used to tune the feedback, as well as a metaphor to think about our use of water resources. Visually the water shifts while one glass is filled up, another glass gets emptied and sonically that transformation is audible. The name of the sound installation "*Tipping Point*" refers to the fact, that once an issue or idea crossed a certain threshold, it gains significant momentum and in physics, at that point an object is no longer balanced. It is often used when people talk about climate change, water shortage and other environmental issues. In the description of the sound installation on Hinde's blog (2013) this connection is clearly revealed. Environmental issues like shifting water levels are prominent throughout the work and Hinde's message in it calls for more balance in the use of water resources.

In the following project "*Submerge*" (2015a), Hinde (2016c) describes that after *Tipping Point* she wanted to draw another strand out of the attempt to shift focus on water resources. Therefore she took people out to record and research different waterways in Glasgow. She wanted to discover where the water is located within a city nowadays and how water flows

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<sup>33</sup> The flap of a butterfly's wings might lead to a storm or other event halfway around the globe is a popular image used to introduce the chaos theory. (Williams, 2010)

have changed over time. Hinde recounts how a lot of the streams are completely covered up and fragmented whereas they used to have a prominent role for the city in earlier times. For example, the Molendinar Burn, which flows from Frankfield Loch right through the city centre of Glasgow into the river Clyde. Medieval Glasgow was based along its banks, before it got culverted towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

*"To this day, almost all of the burns run underneath the city – hidden from view ... perhaps forgotten. There are small parts of it that are still visible and accessible – so these are the parts we sought out to record with our hydrophones. It was exciting to study maps to find and follow the route of the Molendinar Burn."* (Hinde, 2015b)

Submerge documents a part of the water related environmental history of Glasgow and problematizes how rivers have been made straight and culverted. Thinking about waterways and their history raises the question of how long the water has been here. How did water flow through a landscape before human's interfered with it? Water carries history and tells history in it's own way. Hinde (2016b) explains further:

*"There is something really sad about destroying the natural flows of the water within a city, this kind of created urban environment, and I think things can be more balanced.... And by going out with people and finding the streams and looking where they went and actually having to break our journey and come back... it was interesting because it was kind of a bit of a pilgrimage to find these places. "*

Hinde (2016b) illustrates how covering the rivers and streams can lead to floods. She explains how the environment is changing and how flooding is partly connected with climate change, but it has also to do with how we are changing our land use and the landscape.

It is remarkable how contemporary the subject of "Submerge" is, and Glasgow is not an exception with its flooding problematic. For example, earlier this year Richard Brown, head of hydrology Sepa<sup>34</sup> told the BBC Scotland, that they measured the highest river levels in 45 years in Aberdeen. (BBC, 2016) An environment report from Edinburgh's government describes causes and prevention of flooding in Edinburgh. On a national level, a general trend for an increased frequency and severity of floods is observed. (Edinburgh Government Report, 2012)<sup>35</sup>

Hinde (2016b) mentions that during "Submerge" there were talks about possibly uncovering some of the hidden streams in Glasgow that cause floods. Asked about her environmental perspective she requires:

*"I think we have to embrace change and differences and its about... again balancing things. I think it's important to know how things used to be... find ways of documenting it or conserving that." (ibid)*

Conservation is another key word in the discourse around environmental issues and water. Sound art can be part of this conservation process by creatively working with water and sound. Sound art is often shown in museums and educational places and can help to raise awareness about environmental issues. Hinde's approach is realistic and very practical because she actually takes people outside to discover the waterways with her. Her environmental perspective is pragmatic because she accepts environmental changes and is focusing on a future where things are more balanced.

Hinde (2016b) summarizes her motivation to work with water:

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<sup>34</sup> Scottish Environment Protection Area (Sepa)

<sup>35</sup> The political implications of this fact will be further discussed in chapter 6.

*"thinking about water... you know it's the most important thing that we need for life... it sounds so obvious but it's so key and it's so much part of us."*

This is an argument found throughout this whole dissertation. As mentioned in the literature review and introduction, water is a key element for human life and this is key to why it is used in sound art, also.

## **4.2 Rob St John: Sonifying pollution data**

Similarly to Kathy Hinde, Rob St John takes water as a metaphor to talk about environmental philosophy. As a PHD researcher in cultural geography he combines his interests in sound and water to think about environmental issues. He is fascinated by the idea of everything being interconnected.

Rob St John (2016b) describes his album *"Surface Tension"* (2015) as partly an experiment in sonifying pollution datasets. Following the bases of composition he worked with field recordings from River Lee in and around London, the most polluted river in Britain. In the process Rob St John (2016b) depicts:

*"It was a really interesting kind of flux – of sound – over the cross of the river – but not in the way that you can necessary follow and say this place is more polluted than another."*

His background in indie music is notable in the record as much as his interest in experimental techniques. In a second step, he left tape loops with little bits of compositions in water baths of polluted water for different periods of time and ended up with disintegrated tape loops. The affect of disruption is a clear element in the songs. But without any description of the creation of the record, it could be taken as any other contemporary indie record.

In another project called "*Water of Life*" (2013) Rob St John collaborated with Tommy Perman<sup>36</sup>, exploring flows of water through Edinburgh. The idea behind the project was to examine the role of water as often an invisible life support system. Rob St John (2016b) recounts that through the project they explored the city in ways they have not done before. He describes his interest in modern environmentalism:

*"There would be no pure nature, no pure culture. Everything will be very mixed up and constantly flux. It is very hard to put your finger on what is natural and what is not. Quite often, environments are constantly changing."* (ibid)

He describes his motivation to record sounds of water as way of:

*"giving voice to things in the environment that are not human... Sound has a parameter of a landscape – and you know sometimes a landscape is a watery one."* (ibid)

It is a really interesting concept that water has its own voice and language. Therefore, sound art can use water as a language to talk about environmental issues.

Rob St John (2016b) describes why he and Perman decided to focus on water in their recording "*Liquid City / The Shellycoat*" during the project "*Water of Life*":

*"water kind of floats all boundaries. It is very hybrid matter. You are going from polluted to clean, from diluted to full of whatever. And we thought using sound is a really nice way to think through all of these hybridities and this blurring and uncertainty."*

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36 For more information on the Scottish musician, see Perman (2016)

A part of this proposition is, that water can change its state and form. It can be liquid, gas or solid, it can be polluted or clean. Water is constantly changing and this translates environmental issues very well. Environments can be healthy or polluted, and the water is one of the first elements showing trace of the condition of the environment. Again, water looked at from this perspective, has its own language. How that language translates for humans is another question and will be discussed in Chapter 7.

Rob St John (2016b) describes how he struggles to achieve simplicity in his music, when he works with environmental sounds:

*"I think there is this really interesting tension that I still have not found a way of satisfactory revolving... between dealing with the massive complexity of the real world... and a more simple sonification that you can follow and actually tells a story perhaps."*

Rob St John mentions Aldo Leopold, Timothy Morton and Jane Bennett as influential in his environmental thinking. Aldo Leopold was an important exponent of an interdisciplinary focus, connecting science, ethics, aesthetics, economy, public policy and conservation practice. (Meine, 2013) Timothy Morton writes (2014) about hyperobjects, which are so huge, temporally and spatially that they cannot directly be seen. Yet they manifest as rain or drought, in the case of global warming, or as frogs and daffodils in the case of evolution. Morton (ibid) writes about how the next stage of history is catching up with the Darwinian and ecological knowledge that has been pressing on humans for the last 200 years. He forecasts serious implications for the practice of political critique and avant-garde art. Morton (2012) states that we enter a new, ecological period that he calls the time of hyperobjects. Morton (2014, p.293) claims:

*„These entities, which I call hyperobjects, are the discoveries of modernity: economic forces, the unconscious, evolution, the biosphere, global warming. First we detect them on our instruments. Then we realise we are inside them. Then they crash into social, psychic, and aesthetic space. This is what ecological awareness actually is.“*

He explains, that in this period a new unpredicted phase of art arrives, which he calls the "Asymmetric Phase". Similarly, Jane Bennett (2009) argues, that political theory needs to recognize the active participation of non-human forces in events.

Two out of the three sound artists interviewed in this research refer to environmental issues in their practice. Water can be seen as a representing force of the environment and of the non-human. This thesis supports Morton's argument, that it is very difficult to grasp the meaning of concepts such as "global warming" for humans. As he describes, people often end up talking about the weather instead, because that is what they directly experience and they can correlate with. Similarly, talking about water is inclusive. Artists might use water, because it is an element all of an audience will know and are confronted with in their daily activities: from having a shower to drinking or washing dishes. Everybody has a relationship with water. So it is easier to talk about the reduction of the waste of water in everyday life than about climate change as a concept. In general, Morton's tone comes across almost satirical, which is one way to talk about environmental challenges. Furthermore it is a difficult endeavour to write about a contemporary change and its future predictions. To summarize, hyperobjects are a helpful and venturesome frame to talk about environmental change and sound art can help to articulate its concern.

### 4.3 Mark Lyken: Between Nature/Culture/Industry

In contrast to the previous two sound artists, Mark Lyken (2016b) describes himself as such:

*"I am not an environmentalist... I am an idiot musician or whatever."*

He argues that his use of water was completely due to context and the circumstances he found himself in at a residency in Cromarty at the Lighthouse Field Station, 2012. He composed 5 pieces of music, working alongside ecologists from the University of Aberdeen. He explains that:

*"When I first began working with ecologists they basically said, oh, we have 25 years worth of this sound research... then I just realized that is a pile of dead media.... They gave me all this different recordings to start with and you think it sounds like nothing is happening."* (ibid)

Lyken (2016c) describes that the ecologists were mainly interested in the graphs and the data and nobody really listened to the collected underwater recordings. The initial idea behind the project and his role in it was to actually listen to the data collected over years and work with it in a different way. In 2014 filmmaker Emma Dove<sup>37</sup> got commissioned to create a visual documentary film to go along with the soundtrack, which was released 2016 as *"The Terrestrial Sea"*.

Lyken (2016c) declares that he has been located quite a lot by the sea and by bodies of water in connection with industry. Similarly to Rob St John, he asks himself the question of what is natural and what is not.

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<sup>37</sup>

See: Dove, 2016



*"In Dumfries, ... none of this is natural. But still... it's nature, but it's not wild. None of it is wild... half of these trees are not native to the UK."*  
(*ibid*)

Brady (2003) explains that it is a difficult task to distinguish between natural and unnatural, nature and culture and nature and artefact. She proposes to differentiate between two approaches: a position that views nature as real and humans as part of nature or the view that nature is not real, but rather a cultural construct and everything is cultural and so humans are exclusively cultural beings, rather than part of nature. (*ibid*) This dissertation analyses the role of water from both perspectives, water as nature and water as culture.

Helmreich (2016) supports this argument and proposes that water materializes as cycling, hybrid substance, both nature and culture. Such a perspective breaks down the boundary between nature and culture. This makes sense because water is capable of taking on many shapes and depending on the society can be representing nature and/or culture together at the same time.

The environment the artists live in reflects in their sound art. Lyken finds himself in a location where there is water all around him, so he works with it for: *"The Terrestrial Sea"*. His message is not focused on environmental issues, but nevertheless such concerns can be discovered in his work. The sound of machines beside the sound of *"natural"* water shows a duality between nature and culture. Where does nature start and culture end? How do we define nature? Lyken's use of water and industry could portray the dominance of the mechanical side in an environment.

He mentions John Cage as an inspiration because he accepts all the sounds. Lyken (2016c) explains how he likes the idea of not excluding

anything, for example noises or ugly sounds. He describes that city noises and countryside noises both can be really loud.

McKinnon (2013) supports Lyken's argument and writes about environmentally engaged sound art. He problematizes the concept of "silence" combined with ecological concerns. He argues that in acoustic ecology the sounds of hi-fi natural environment are valued, whereas sounds associated with the built environment are not. He illustrates that this binary valuation has often been challenged in recent times and for example, many natural environments are terrifically noisy.

#### **4.4 Urgency of Environmental Issues**

An obvious argument for the rise of sound art based around water and environmental issues is, that music reflects history. And water reflects history, too. Helmreich (2016) writes about how ecology is of signal interest in new underwater music. Interestingly he marks:

*"Submarine sounds in art and science now echo concerns not about the Cold War but about global warming." (ibid, p.153)*

This research definitely supports this statement and illustrates how contemporary artists talk about such environmental issues, when confronted with "underwater sounds". It is striking, how a sound might be connected with war in one point of history, and with environmental issues in another. None of the artists mentioned a connection of their underwater music with war. But this dissertation argues that environmental issues carry a political message, which will be further discussed in chapter 6 of this dissertation.

Another reason, why water is used in sound art to talk about environmental issues could be that field recording is a backbone of sound art. Field recordings consider all surroundings, urban or natural environments as their topic. Most environments are full of rivers, lakes, taps, pipes, the ocean or rain, and so water is a very common subject in sound art. This does not say anything about the message from the creator, but it can be seen as one interpretation why a lot of sound artists find themselves confronted with water.

The translation of water's use in sound art into the realm of environmental issues might have to do with the importance and urgency of the subject. For example, the UN had a 10-year focus on water and writes in their Pre-2015 report:

*„Water-related disasters are the most economically and socially destructive of all natural disasters.“*

The report clearly stresses the importance of Freshwater (both surface water and groundwater) to the three dimensions of sustainable development: social, economic and environmental. (UN Water, 2014) With this urgency of the subject it is no longer a surprise that artists decide to focus on water and environmental issues in their work.

The Centre for Contemporary Art and the Natural World (CCANW) as a leader in the arts and ecology movement and based at the University Exeter, is currently building a research group database across Europe with organisations linking the arts with ecology or environmental studies. (CCANW, 2010) This illustrates how the subject is increasingly popular in the academic and art world, too.

A last argument is, that artists use water as a medium to talk about environmental issues because it speaks the language of the environment.

Artists give water “a voice” in order to keep a dialogue with the environment. It might not be clear, what the message is in that case, but to choose water as a language is an important step.

## **5. Aesthetics of Water in Sound Art**

*"Submerge – you kind of listening to this space that's underneath and it's inside the water so it's almost... you imagine what it is like to be immersed in water." (Hinde, 2016c)*

This chapter will discuss why artists choose to work with water in their sound art, from an aesthetic perspective. All the three artists made statements about the aesthetic qualities of water for their music. As discussed in chapter 2.4, the artist's intent is only one way to look at the aesthetic value of an artwork. How the audience interprets the content will be looked at in chapter 7. In this chapter the sound works will be positioned through different aesthetical key subjects, which were discovered in this research.

### **5.1 Underwater Music: Hydrophones & Immersion**

When asked why she uses water in her sound art, Hinde (2016b) explains:

*"I think it is really fascinating to listen to water, how it flows. And with hydrophones, it can have a really unexpected sound ... you can get really different qualities of sound, in various spots. Sometimes you get hardly any sound at all."*

Interestingly, all the three artists use underwater hydrophone recordings in some of their works. Helmreich (2016) describes underwater music as a genre of twentieth- and twenty first century composition performed or recorded underwater.

Rob St John (2016b) talks about his first encounter with the use of a hydrophone in a seemingly lifeless and still patch of water – a pond:

*"All this different rhythms and sounds and even melodies going on... with the bubble... insects are kind of pottering around ... and this was a real kind of WOW ... this kind of finding intrigue and beauty and process in environment sublimes... otherwise completely passed over."* (ibid)

Similarly, Lyken (2016c) explains how his first encounter with hydrophone recordings completely changed the way he looked at music. Coming from a background in Hip Hop music, he used to play mostly electronic music with synthesizers. With the hydrophone he started to become interested in field recordings and now uses hydrophones combined with electronic music regularly in his sound art. The question arises if hydrophones trigger a certain aesthetic experience. They allow the artists to listen profoundly to the sound of water, while providing the sensation of being immersed in water.

Hinde (2016c) continues:

*"I think with this listening underwater... I think you feel quite ... is kind of like – I called the piece Submerge – you kind of listening to this space that's underneath and it's inside the water so it's almost... you imagine what it is like to be immersed in water."*

This example illustrates that Kant's aesthetics of the sublime is probably still influencing contemporary artists, when artists choose to call their sound art *"the sublime"*. Furthermore, Helmreich (2016) validates Hinde's argument and shows how in the underwater domain, technologies often are adjusted to deliver aesthetic experiences in line with the way composers imagine submerged sound should sound. As an example, he writes:

*"the notion of water as sublimely immersive can be reinforced in compositions that make use of hydrophonic listening and playback." (ibid, pp.137-138)*

Helmreich (2016) explains how notions of the immersive and sublime continue to saturate audio works. Later he states that the symbolism of water as sublimely immersive medium must be actively realized technologically. Redolfi's *"Sonic Waters"* (1989) are one example of water being portrayed as dreamy, alive and penetrable while using technology in order to make immersion possible.<sup>38</sup> Similarly, Hinde (2016b) describes that she uses technology in order to express her artistic ideas. It is notable that inventions of technology have a major influence on the history of sound art.<sup>39</sup>

As discussed in the literature review, Helmreich (2016) argues that all this water music is in search of is immersion. This research proved Helmreich's statement in some ways, true. Hinde (2016b) expresses that in her work she aims to bring people into a space of close observation of that immersive sound, where they can think about the installation and what it means. Immersion is articulated and a clear statement throughout her work.

Additionally, Lyken (2016c) explains his motivation is to reveal new, ear-opening sounds:

*"I like to bring out the frequencies you can't hear with graphic equalizer ... pitch shifting things. Changing sound. It's revealing those kind of hidden worlds."*

The artists use the ocean and water as source to look for new, undiscovered ground. This is a reflection of contemporary science, which

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<sup>38</sup> For detailed writing on Michel Redolfi's „Underwater Music“, see: Charles (1993)

<sup>39</sup> See: LaBelle (2006) and Théberge (2001)

will be discussed in the next chapter. The subject of water as the unknown is attractive for musicians because it leaves space for imagination and inspiration.

## 5.2 Water as the Unknown

Asked about the sound of water, Lyken (2016c) explains:

*"I guess it's the unknown about it that is interesting"*

This triggers a picture of an artist as a scientist, which is a present subject throughout the research. All the 3 artists work with scientists in their sound art, or in the case of Rob St John even considers themselves as scientists. Hinde (2016b) narrates that her installation of Tipping Point, shown in an attic in Austria had a connotation of a science experiment, similar to Mary Curie's early experiments with electricity<sup>40</sup>. Science and art work together in their exploration and interdisciplinary research of water.

Ball (2009) states that the only clear fact in the discussion around why water behaves the way it does is, that scientists don't agree on their explanations for it. Helmreich (2016) points to the fact that humans have difficulties to locate themselves acoustically underwater because sound waves travel four times faster in water than air. According to Rob St John, a fascination of the sound of water is the unpredictable sounds you find in and around water. Lyken (2016c) likes to introduce elements of chance in his work process. Water is a matching element in that case, with its many layers and the random sounds in it.

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<sup>40</sup> More information on the physicist who discovered Radium in 1898 see: Curie (2016)



For Lyken (2016c), the sound of water captures different pressures and allows him work with sometimes quite subtle, sometimes very dramatic differences of sounds of water pressures. He expounds:

*"It sounds really musical to me... they all have their own pitch, almost odd... some of them sound just like air rushing through other times it sounds like rain."* (ibid)

Because water is seen as the unknown, it stands as a symbol to encourage imagination. Hinde (2016b) explains her aim:

*"The aesthetic quality of the work is open ended where you are encouraging imagination... and creative thought."*

All three artists are fascinated by the unknown, which is connected with the sound of water. In the next paragraph the sound of water will be discussed further.

### **5.3 Small Sounds - Everyday Sounds**

When asked why they use the sound of water, the three artists explain their attraction to simple and small music. Lyken (2016c), states:

*"I try to make small sounds... keep them small... rather than big bombastic."*

Hinde (2016b) explains analogous that she likes to listen really closely to small sounds. Similarly, Rob St John (2016b) wants to bring out elements of the natural world, we might not otherwise notice. It is striking, how all the artists talk about the fascination of small sounds and how they try to in-cooperate this in their sound art. The use of hydrophones helps to

capture small sounds and water is one source of small sounds. This tendency of focusing on small sounds reflects a modest attitude where small things in life are appreciated.

Hinde's work "*Sublime*" strongly articulates the message of appreciation of the everyday sounds. She points towards her interest in everyday life's sounds and explains that they are maybe quiet, small or unnoticed or not played enough attention to. Johnstone (2008) illustrates that contemporary art has been saturated with this reference to the everyday since 1990. Interestingly he points out that this could indicate a political tenor, which points to private lives of those who were usually overlooked in history.

Lyken (2016c) refers to Rolf Julius "*Small Music*"<sup>41</sup> as an inspiration because of his minimalist approach while increasing the awareness of the beauty of the world surrounding us. There seems to be a link between water and small sounds for the interviewed artists although none of them directly articulated this connection. This assumption has to be questioned because water is a massive body and powerful force, too. Why are words like "small", "unnoticed" and "quiet" mentioned often by artists, when they discuss the use of water in their sound art?

This leads directly to the discussion of how water is perceived in society. Helmreich (2016) narrates about one tradition in the history of sound, which recounts that the ocean was once taken to be a place of silence. He proposes, this tone was influenced by Kipling's Poem "*The Deep Sea Cables*" (1896), where he notes:

*"There is no sound, no echo of sound in the deserts of the deep."*

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<sup>41</sup> More on contemporary small music or small sounds see: Castle (2016)

This resonates with the early nineteenth century theories of the deep as a lifeless "azoic zone". In 1953, when Auguste and Jacques Piccard travelled two miles down with "*Trieste*" they described their travel as "*quiet of death*". (cited in Helmreich, 2016, p.138) This dissertation argues that this tradition is still impacting the way people think of the underwater world. Although technology enables humans to realize how noisy the underwater world and water actually can be, people still associate quiet, peace and silence with the ocean, lakes and rivers.

John Cage's piece "4'33" (1934) maintains its importance to this day. The question of the concept of "silence" is still a very contemporary one. Voegelin's book "*Listening to Noise and Silence*" (2010) gives a useful insight into the contemporary importance of silence in sound art and argues:

*"Silence is about listening, listening to small sounds, tiny sounds, quiet and loud sounds out of any context, musical, visual or otherwise."*  
(*ibid*, p.81)

Helmreich (2016) explains that the underwater world was, even in its first scientific manifestations, full of sound. He refers to the musical language, which is used in early experiments in underwater sound propagation. Helmreich (2007) notes that nowadays machines replaced the humans, who used to listen to the recordings in submarines. This dissertation suggests to critically examine what this says about a society. The importance of listening seems to be forgotten and data is collected without even been listened to. With this perspective it is understandable that artists focus on the listening and small sounds.

## 5.4 Transformational Properties of Water

The attraction to work with a subject that is highly disputed is convincing from an artistic point of view. Water has aesthetic properties and there is a lot of room to experiment. Hinde (2016b) points towards the transformational properties of water:

*"I quite like the way you can use these slightly elusive qualities... the properties of water... water exists in ice steam and water... the possibilities of something melting or freezing or boiling and this kind of transformation within the grasp of our everyday life... and this sort of changing... cyclic.. I think it got a lot of poetic connections and it can have a lot of metaphors."*

The properties of water can embody different stages and water's flow is changing depending on its environment and it changes its environment, too. Symbolically speaking water covers many layers and allows different perspectives and interpretations. Water is often connected with metaphors of the unconscious, memory, change, birth and life in general. Nelson (2014) points out that many artists, musicians and poets are inspired by water and its metaphors. Therefore, Hinde is not the only artist enchanted by the metaphors of water. Additionally, Hinde (2016b) highlights the visual properties of water and explains that it can be very beautiful to use reflection, refraction and the movement of water.

Water is a diverse material to use for sound art and it includes many interesting sonic and visual qualities. Artists are enchanted by the metaphors you can draw from water as much as the possibilities of using water's different properties.

## **5.5 Personal Connection to Water**

Both, Hinde (2016b) and Lyken (2016c) mention their personal and positive connection to water through swimming or just being near water. They are aware of the rivers, lakes, the rain or the ocean being close to their working or living places and they appreciate that.

Rob St John (2016c) outlines that he uses water as an instrument by recording it and editing it. Similarly, Lyken uses water recordings and processes them digitally. He specifies:

*"I have become aware that they all recall different things... they all have different tonal qualities and they have their own frequencies... so when you layer them up... I think of them as an instrument in that sense..."(Lyken, 2016c)*

Clearly, there is not one sound of water, but many different ones, depending on the location, stage and property and the combination the water is used with.

## **5.6 Emotions and Water Music**

Lyken (2016c) discusses how emotions are part of his music. He explains, that they might not be explicit, but they will be carried with the sound.

Truax (2012) argues that sound based art has a strong potential to communicate concerns about social, cultural and environmental issues. He appeals that the artists role need to be re-defined and expanded, if not replaced by other roles such as sound designer or acoustic ecologist. He pictures it as artists who have the common desire to creatively engage with the world through sound. This statement involves a less abstract and more real-world involvement by artists.

All the interviewed artists see themselves as communicators and water is part of their communication. Hinde communicates her message quite directly, whereas Lyken is more cautious about giving a clear message. He sees his work more as documenting other people's perspectives. Rob St John (2016b) explains that not having a clear message is more interesting for him than getting too close to a politician's role where one perspective is explicitly promoted. Hinde would be the closest to producing artwork, which refers to real world issues like Truax appeals for.

Rob St John does not state an explicit message, but he is very clearly placing himself as an artist into the category of being an environmentalist and sound artist. Lyken does not claim to send a clear message to an audience at all, but refers to the documenting nature of his sound art. And Hinde states quite clearly that her sound art and installation is about things that she feels strongly about and her focus on balance and the everyday sounds.

## **6. Water and Politics in Sound Art**

This dissertation argues that a key reason why water is used in sound art is that water is highly political and there is a lot to be said on the subject of water as an intrinsically political issue. Music and politics have always been connected through social movements and this chapter will discuss how and why sound art using water is political.

None of the artists initially referred to politics as a reason why they use water in their sound art. When asked directly, they had different positions.

### **6.1 Politics and Environmental Issues**

Rob St John (2016<sub>b</sub>) explains that in some of his projects there is an implicit political message. In general, his intention is to give a multi-layered, sometimes ambiguous set of prompts rather than one particular unified message. He states:

*"You can't get away from being political in everything."(ibis)*

He sees his political message connected with his intend to talk about natural environments and how he prefers them to be more diverse and healthier. Therefore, the political and the environmental issues are going hand-in hand in Rob St John's work.

Similarly, Hinde sees the political connection of water with issues based around environmental change. She declares, that water is political, but not dominantly. In terms of her sound art Hinde (2016<sub>c</sub>) states:

*"I probably would never describe my work as political... to be honest."*

It is surprising how cautious Hinde is with a political statement because her work points clearly towards many issues, which are connected with politics. When she calls for a more balanced use of water resources, political stakeholders are at the forefront to promote the same goal. As mentioned earlier, many NGO's like WaterAid, Water Links Worldwide, CARE or Water Global focus on water as a main issue. (global crisis solution centre, 2006) The same institutions are often involved in music events and festivals to promote their interests.<sup>42</sup>

## **6.2 Neutral Body of Water with conflicting demands**

Similar to Hinde, Lyken (2016c) explains that his sound art doesn't have an explicit political message:

*"Not explicitly... not for me. Both Emma and I in the works so far we've tried to be neutral. As neutral as we can be... because I don't want to push my agenda on anybody because it's not informed enough. I don't know. I don't have the answers."* (ibid)

It is interesting that Lyken pronounces neutrality as a goal in his work. To be neutral is in itself a very political statement because it implicitly takes on a distant role of documentation, which is very important in order to start negotiations between different parties. Furthermore, this dissertation argues that an artwork can never be neutral. Depending on the context, where the work is shown, the people involved in it and the material used in the work, an artwork is always political. Even if the work is not clearly positioning itself in a certain context, it still says a lot about the circumstances. The reader of the artwork might put the work into a very political context. This dissertation claims that neutrality does not exist in a

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<sup>42</sup> see: Aubrey and Shearlaw (2005)



political context because every party does have a direction they aim for and they act in favour of their interests. To be political and to be neutral are two concepts which are incompatible.

At that point it is right to ask the question: is water neutral and why is it taken to be so? Water takes physically and visually the shape of its surroundings. A river flows depending on the ground it is set. And on the reverse side, water and ice have an impact on their surroundings called erosion. Water is interconnected, constantly influenced and influencing. Therefore, water is not a neutral and not a passive element at all.

Sonically water inhabits the sound of the surroundings, too. Water makes a different sound, depending on the temperature and the sound changes if water is in contact with air, metal or wood. The sound of expanding water, for example the process of freezing ice is very different from the sound of vaporising water into steam. Water is always in transformation because water itself and its surroundings constantly change. Water is constantly affected and affects constantly.

Lyken (2016c) explains, how in his work other people's perspectives are portrayed. He argues that it is hard to be objective and even if he tries to be unbiased, his own opinions obviously still filter through. So he comes to the conclusion:

*"It's definitely political... but it's not implicit in the work."*

Lyken's difficulty in positioning his sound art politically is understandable. His "terrestrial sea" is made in a location, which is and was confronted with many different interests and positions over the years. Lyken (2016c) explains that the field station and a deep water channel running through the Cromarty Firth were built as an important military naval base used

during the first and second world wars. He points out that the location is easily defendable and was always a location of conflict. He describes:

*"Because of the same deep water channel it became really important for the oil industry and the same for tourist industry. So I find myself in this place where there is a massive body of water that has conflicting demands... you know... it is a conservation area. It has become more about... I don't know if it is necessarily about the water or if it is about what happens in it... on it and around it."*

Water from this perspective, is a neutral body, which allows different active parts to act upon it. As argued before, this dissertation questions the neutrality of water. But history has portrayed water for a long time as neutral. This probably has its origin in the chemical explanation:

*"Pure water is neutral because the total electric charges of the atoms and ions that compose it are equal and opposite, so they cancel each other out. Water that isn't pure, such as drinking water, may contain other elements that can affect its acidity." (Helmenstine, 2015)*

So it can be argued that water is used in sound art because it is looked upon as a neutral body from different perspectives, such as physics and chemistry. But if looked at from a sociological, political or historical perspective water has never been neutral. Water is highly demanded by different parties and rivers, oceans and lakes often raise conflicts between different groups and their interests. Water from this perspective is still a passive neutral part, whereas humans are forcing their interests upon it. This human centred view can be problematic and recent incidents such as the tsunami in Japan 2011<sup>43</sup> and flooding in almost every country in the world have clearly shown that water is not just playing a neutral part in human history.

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<sup>43</sup> see: Maier-Borst (2013)

### 6.3 Gender

As illustrated in the literature review it is important to ask the question who is represented in a certain genre and why. Sociologist Theweleit (1987) points towards a great number of instances in literature, where there was a concurrence of water and women in male texts. He notices how water, fluidity and flows were used to douse the spark of female agency. Although his research is not sound-based, he finds

*"a specific (and historically relatively recent) form of the oppression of women through exaltation."* (ibid, p.284)

Theweleit (1987) describes how there is a tendency of "irrealization" and women are reduced to principles of flowing, distance, vagueness and endless enticement. Again, in this example, water becomes more politically and historically relevant. It is an important question, to bear in mind, what water portrays and why it portrays it in various societies.

Strang (2013) problematizes the conceptual bifurcation between culture and nature and the idea that civilization has separated humankind from ecological processes. She explains how this relation is often gendered, positioning culture with active masculinity and nature with passive femininity. She notes:

*"At times it has also been heavily racialized, aligning notions of culture with primarily Western, more cosmopolitan ways of life, and conflating notions of (unspoiled/unformed) nature and (innocent/primitive) indigeneity."* (ibid, p.185)

The issue that nature and culture are looked upon as dualistic has already been discussed in chapter 4. Here this issue suddenly raises important questions of gender and race. Water is able to portray this issue. But what is the connection between the female and water music? Is it related to myths and stories about mermaids, connecting a female figure with the unknown waters? Who is writing these stories? This dissertation argues that water has a controversial relationship with femininity and interestingly mostly men are discussing that relationship. Beside Theweleit (1987) and Kahn (2001), a recent example is Harris (2015) who writes about women and water.

Strang (2013) draws a parallel between the separation of culture from nature and the literal and metaphorical abstraction of water from its social and ecological location. In a next step she argues that this disconnected view supports the attitude where it is possible to act more competitively, treating nature in adversarial terms and allowing the privatization of resources and their use. This leads directly to the next subject: is water a commodity or a human right.

#### **6.4 Water as a Human Right/Water as a Commodity**

As water is so important for humans and the environment, history has shown that access to clean water is not always secured. The debate on whether water is a human right or a resource open for trade has been held since the beginning of the capitalist era. Only on the 28<sup>th</sup> of June 2010 the United Nation Assembly explicitly recognized the human right to water and sanitation and acknowledged that clean drinking water and sanitation are essential to the realisation of all human rights. (United Nation, 2014)

On the other hand, companies such as Nestlé dominate the market of sold drinking water. Schnell (2012) documents the controversies of the company's working practices:

*"Families seeking out an existence in the slums spend half their budget on canisters of water in Lagos (Nigeria), while the upper class purchases the sold bottled water "Nestlé Pure Life".*

McGee (2014) reports for The Guardian that Nestlé was able to bottle 265 million litres of fresh water in the last year and pay nothing for it. Strang (2013, p.206) explains:

*"Along the rivers of the world, groups are increasingly competing for water."*

She describes that culture and nature are separated in contemporary society and suggests that this originates in the provision of an illusion of fixity and permanence. She problematizes this notion of culture because it is concerned with active creativity and "human-centred (and male-centred) ideology of control in which the world is surveyed as an array of resources and materials for constructing artefacts, rather than consisting of flows in which humans participate. (Strang, 2013) This is a very interesting and provocative point and notions of culture and their meaning for society have to be looked at carefully. Culture and nature might not be as dualistic as Strang seems to portrait it. Water is a good example here, because it can be looked at as culture or nature. And there is no line dividing culture and nature clearly, as illustrated in chapter 4. But in an economic perspective water is suddenly looked at as a commodity. This is problematic as humans are dependent on water for their lives. It makes no sense to put a price on water from a humanistic perspective. Therefore, Strang's point should be taken seriously and a less human-

centred and money orientated ideology could benefit a world where resources are less exploited and more appreciated and cared for.

Worster (1992, cited in Chen et al., 2013) argues, that water has a particularly intimate relationship with political and social power. He elucidates how the achievement of domination over watercourses coincided with an intensification of social domination.

Chen (2013, p.277) writes:

*"Water is much more than a resource. It is a socio-natural force – an active agent of overflow, creation, and destruction."*

This argument is convincing and an attitude of thinking of water as a commodity to invest in becomes more and more problematic from that perspective. These examples show, how water is a controversial and highly political subject.

## **6.5 Water connects/Cross-Cultural/Identity**

Lyken (2016c) points towards a more positive co-notated reason, why water is used in sound art:

*"Stories that revolve around water regardless where you are in the world seem to translate really well... so people from other countries seem to respond really well to film and sound pieces around water because I guess, it is really universal, isn't it?"*

It makes sense that people relate to water easily because of its presence in the world. Everybody has a connection to water. Water can therefore inhabit a role of facilitating cross-cultural communication. As proposed in

the literature review, water and music can help to shape or connect identities.

## **6.6 Submarine's Contribution: Hydrophone**

Helmreich (2016) states that maritime military research history entwines with musical history during World War 1, when composer were sent from the military to listen to the submarine engine to identify the key. The earliest hydrophones were manufactured in 1901 by the Submarine Signal Company of Boston in order to capture submarine vibrations in the audio register, so humans could listen to them. Therefore, submarines used to listen very carefully to the sounds, partly because if they would have missed the faintest signal during the Cold War, it might have had disastrous consequences. And it was through such field listening, that "whale- songs" were discovered. (Helmreich,

It is an interesting example of how music reflects history and history reflects music. Musical progress was facilitated through the advancement of technology. And technology was facilitated through political circumstances. Underwater music would not be the same without hydrophones. This is another connection between water and the political. All the 3 artists interviewed in this research use hydrophones for their sound art.

This dissertation argues that politics and sound art are closely linked with each other. Sound art offers a suitable platform to discuss political issues. The artists discussed in this dissertation are not claiming such a role. Nevertheless this chapter has illustrated the many dimensions in which water is connected with the political. Sound art inhabits a role to communicate political issues concerning water in a subtle way.

Furthermore, conferences such as “Sound Studies: Art, Experience, Politics” (2015) at University Cambridge illustrate that sound can be clearly linked with politics and it is definitely being discussed in academic circles. (CRASSH, 2015)



## **7. Meaning**

In this chapter reactions from the audience to the recordings by the three sound artists are analysed. As illustrated in the literature review it is very challenging to measure and analyse meaning and there is no clear scientific method to do so. In this research people were asked to note down their feelings while they were listening to the songs. Furthermore they were asked about the message they received. There is obviously a danger that people might not consciously get a message and meaning can also be constructed without the person being consciously aware of it. Nevertheless, this research relied on the method of asking the audience about their experience. Participants of the focus group were asked to write down their associations with the sound recordings. The collected material will be examined and analysed in order to find indicators how the participants constructed meaning and what message they received about water. Furthermore it will be discussed if and how the audience received the message intended by the artist. The names appearing in this chapter are pseudonyms for the eleven participants of the focus group.

### **7.1 Kathy Hinde: *Tipping Point & Hogganfield Pond***

The audio-visual installation *Tipping Point* by Kathy Hinde received no concordant reaction from the audience. For example, Ellen wrote:

*"Maybe the message to this piece has to do with the relativity of speed and how the time signature fast/slow can change our experience of things. Changing."*

This seems like a very interesting interpretation because *Tipping Points* refers to that moment in time when something is not in balance anymore.

Change has been a reoccurring subject when referring to water and its transformational properties were mentioned by the artist. However, a clear parallel to the message from the artist cannot be drawn in this case. Sarah describes her experience:

*"I feel suspended in the moment, for a very deep inhalation, but without any desire to exhale."*

This statement indicates that the sound installation has affected Sarah in an almost physical way. Heather's interpretation is the closest to the artists intended message about balance:

*"gathering momentum, pitch, precarious, cooperation, balance, dams and sluice gates, harmony, linked engines, medicine?"*

3 members of the audience associate the recording with "space" and 3 listeners associate it with "being underwater". The piece Tipping Point therefore allows a significant diversity of responses from the audience. Christenson and Roberts (1998) suggest that video viewing can be an important component of meaning construction, too. In the case of Tipping Point, this might have affected the audience as this piece was shown as a video. Tipping Point is supposed to be experienced as a live installation. The way this research was able to show this work (through headphones, watching the video excerpt on the computer) definitely influenced the audiences reception to it and probably did not feel as real. Furthermore this piece is an audio-visual sound art piece and not solely focusing on the sound.

The next short recording of the "Hogganfield Pond", as part of Submerge's outcome got a more congruous response from the Questionnaire. 8 participants recognize "insects" in various forms from the recording and

relate it with the “*outdoors*”. The name of this piece probably indicates that association. On the other hand, Kim associates the recording with “*radioactivity*” and Laura thought:

*“It sounded like a radiator warming up”.*

This dissertation suggests that in this case, the environmental subject might have reached the two audience members unconsciously. Radioactivity, for example is a highly environmental subject and the warming up of a radiator could with an extreme interpretation stand for global warming, generally. Nevertheless, the clearly stated environmental message from Hinde does not reach the audience consciously. Only after reading the short description of the piece, people see the connection of the two pieces with environmental issues.

## **7.2 Rob St John: *Surface Tension & Liquid City***

Ellen’s reaction to “*Surface Tension*” is:

*“It feels like change flowing over pain. The message seems to reflect to me that new growth can be felt lightly over deep suffering.”*

This is quite a fascinating interpretation of a recording that consciously deals with pollution. Pollution can be looked at as the suffering of the environment. Additionally, Ellen uses the word “flowing” in her description, which is clearly related with water. A watery language is quite common by most of the audience members throughout the whole research. This dissertation argues that people often use watery language when talking about music. Water and music both raise sometimes strong

and intense feelings and emotions in people. Nora describes the recording as:

*"A synchronisation between nature and music."*

5 out of the 12 Listener's write: "water", and 4 write: "nature". The audience is obviously thinking about water in general and about nature, while they are listening to the recording. This does not mean that they are thinking about environmental issues, but it is the first step towards that direction. Calum interprets:

*"I get a messages of reflection and importance."*

It would be interesting to ask, how Calum landed at that feeling of importance through listening to the recording. Five listeners are connecting the recording with "relaxing or calm". This is not a surprise, as the sound of water is often perceived as "relaxing" in our society. The earlier discussed romantic image connected with water sounds is still recognizable in people's reaction to sound art with water. On the other side, four participants mentioned the feeling of "being lost" while listening to "Surface Tension". This does not necessarily indicate negative feelings, for example, Sarah states:

*"I felt lost, but also calmed by the experience of being lost."*

The recording has a contradictory message for most of the listeners. On the one hand, the song triggers memories of comfort and relaxation and enjoyment while having a melancholic, sad undertone. The statement of Sarah summarizes this feeling very well. The environmental aspect of the piece has not reached the audience at all. But in a more subtle way, participants associate different emotions with the piece. The emotions spread wide from the feeling of "joy", over to "ominous", and from the

*statement of "it makes me feel free" to the feeling of "sadness".* This dissertation argues that water triggers and expresses very different feelings. Water can mirror ambiguous feelings and the audience picked up on that variety of emotions.

The field recording "*Water of Leith at Harperigg*" from the Project "*Water of Life*" mostly receives reactions about the water or river or associations with water. Sarah notes:

*"Like being on the bottom of a drain pipe, during a storm. In the guts of a city."*

Kim, in contrast writes:

*"I can hear mountain spring water, meditation very relaxing."*

Mountain spring water and a drainpipe in the guts of a city are very contrasting images. The fact that people have such completely different associations with one song confirms Rosenthal and Flack's (2012) statement that meaning is constructed by each audience member, transforming the artist's intended message in ways compatible with audience members own interest and personal experiences. Therefore, it is no surprise that "*Water at Leith at Harperigg*" made two people feel like going to the bathroom, while two other listeners were reminded of their childhood.

Additionally, Rosenthal and Flacks (2012, p.92) explain that audiences are not homogenous:

*"Significant differences in taste and/or interpretations have been found by gender, race, nationality, political persuasion, and class."<sup>44</sup>*

An important factor for audience reception of a piece is their associations with it: they might remember the place they heard the song first and connect a specific experience with the song. (ibid) This research illustrates these arguments very well as many audience members talk about very specific experiences when listening to the sound art. Furthermore, when asked about which recording was their favourite one, different participants had very different preferences in the sound recordings.

The Recording *"Liquid City / The Shellycoat"* from *"Water of Life"* is less connected with nature and more with electronic dance music and upbeat sounds by the audience. Nora states:

*"upbeat, faster, happier the beat is enticing you to dance, makes me think of festivals."*

This comment validates the statement by Willis (1990) who argues that rhythm points towards the importance of the body in music. Four audience members write down the word *"dance"* and four people write *"upbeat"*. Dancing in this context is connected with the rhythm and beat in the song.<sup>45</sup>

Walser (1993) argues, that genres have the power to organize the exchange of meaning. In his view, genre is a strong pointer laying the basic framework that guides audiences interpretations.

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<sup>44</sup> for example Ramet, 1994

<sup>45</sup> The subject of „dancing“ has gained recent attention in popular music studies. See: Hall (2013), Thornton (1995) or Buckland (2007)

This research supports that argument and with the example of "*Liquid City / The Shellycoat*" many audience members were derived messages from the genre electronic music or dance music.

Two participants describe the song as "*artificial*", two describe it as "*electronic music*" and Zora associates it with "*the background of a videogame*". Again, very different feelings, from "*happy*", "*annoyed*", "*dreamy*", "*anxious*" to "*excited*" are mentioned. This dissertation suggests that the different feelings are due in part to the different experiences the audience members associate with electronic music.

In the case of sound art as a genre, this dissertation argues that there is a strong focus on meaning embodied into it. The context sound art is usually shown is a formal, silent space, often in a gallery or official art space where people focus on their experience and reflect on it. Small audiences, which take the sound art serious, are typical.

### **7.3 Mark Lyken: Dry Sea**

Surprisingly, this piece gets the clearest interpretation concerning environmental issues from one member of the audience. Al writes:

*"natural and artificial blended together in quite a beautiful way. I think it is a piece about the environment, the human intervention into the natural."*

Three listeners associate the recording with "*a submarine*", two listeners note "*metal*", two others mention "*mechanics*" and two listeners write about "*the sea*". This indicates that the content of the piece is quite clear. The sounds Lyken uses are taken from a submarine and a couple of

listeners recognise this source. The associations from the audience are relatively similar because they write: "ghostly" (2), "spooky", "eerie", "the unknown" (2), "submerged" (2), "ominous", "oppressing", "scary" (2), "underwater"(2) "unpredictable". Lee explains, how the recording triggers memories of:

*"experiencing new strange surroundings"*

And Laura clarifies:

*"I associate it with the fear of the unknown.... I get a message similar to my feeling: the sea is unpredictable and always in control."*

This indicates that the recording is connected with an image of the sea as a powerful force. Lyken uses water in his recordings, but edits the field recording sounds heavily. In this example, the intended message by the artist concerning the "unknown" has reached the audience. As the piece is the longest (10:44) it was interesting to observe that certain audience members got really impatient while they were listening to the song. This dissertation argues that the length of a recording does influence the reaction of listeners remarkable.

## **7.4 Environmental Implications**

What seems notable over the course of this research is that most of the audience members only consciously picked up on the environmental aspect of the sound art, after reading the description of the pieces. There are no lyrics in the songs but the written words remain important. One member of the focus group discussion summarizes:



*"there is never water alone... there is always another object, which is a non-natural object or a person or something. So I think it's in a way about the relationship between water and other objects. And the other way around... the effect of other objects on one another. So I think all of them had this sort of environmental theme going on... reading the descriptions as well."*

Asked directly, only two from the twelve listeners picked up on the environmental aspect of the pieces before reading the descriptions. It is a challenging goal to bring an environmental message to an audience in sound art because when it is listened to as music it demonstrably triggers mostly personal emotions and not concerns about the environment. The context is very important because it has an effect on how people listen to the sound art. If sound art is shown in a museum people will receive a different message from when they hear the song played in the background of a bar because they are engaged with the work on different levels.

Hinde (2016c) demonstrates how she often facilitates and influences the way her work is perceived:

*"I try to talk to people when they see work... it's interesting with Tipping Point people do pick up on the sort of environmental aspect... I think because of the title and obviously, I have a little bit of text with it."*

Rob St John (2016b) explains:

*"I am always very mindful of making websites and sound maps ... if you get into a project, it can spread out, I guess... into a constellation of information, you can engage with it on a quite simple quick level but you can really spread your wings within the project if you want."*

All the titles of the songs are related to water, and that likely influences the audience's reaction. Frith (1996) suggests that for the audience, the meaning of the song can be extracted from the title or chorus only, as long as they are interesting enough to draw the listener's attention.

In this research, the titles of the sound art works alone did not clearly indicate a message about environmental issues for the audience. However, after reading the description, all the participants saw a clear connection between the artworks and environmental issues. The written word seems to influence the audience reception heavily.

## **7.5 Aesthetic Implications**

The aesthetic qualities of the sound art translated well to the audience. From the message about the unknown, to the different qualities of water, many intended subjects reached the audience. The only subject in this category, which was hardly mentioned by participants was the "*small sounds*". The listeners were discussing how important water is for life, and how they take it for granted. Furthermore, the audience members related the use of water in the music with their personal connection to water, and therefore interpreted the everyday life subject into it. In their reaction to the sound art, emotion had a special importance for the audience. That is why in the next subchapter this subject will be analysed in more detail.

Furthermore, Rosenthal and Flacks (2012) point out that the performer is often more important than the material performed, and that the message received depends highly on what the receiver thinks about the sender before the performance.

## 7.6 Emotions, Water and Sound Art

Conor explains during the focus group discussion:

*"I feel like water is very typically associated with emotion... the qualities of sound... it makes its really metaphorically rich, especially when you think about the deeper ones and some of the darker ones... you are thinking you are getting to the bottom of the ocean... you get to the deep and unconscious which is kind of like where I feel those songs put you in."*

McClary (2011) follows the theory of body notions in the musical understanding, which, as she suggests, play an important role in the social aspect of the music perception. In other words, responsiveness to the songs is not only based on the lyrical content, but is also strongly determined by listener's physical and emotional reactions. This dissertation clearly supports that statement because all the audience members wrote about their emotional reactions while listening to the sound art. In different pieces some participants mentioned physical reactions to the songs, too. The emotions evoked were not always very similar to each other, but some of the participants still associated similar emotions to the same pieces. When asked directly during the focus group discussion, 9 out of 11 participants raised their hands and stated that they thought the sound art was connected with emotions. Therefore, the importance of emotion in sound art that uses water is a clear outcome of this research.

Emotion is as important a subject for music as it is for water. The participants were asked about what water meant to them, in the end of the questionnaire. 9 wrote down "life" and 8 participants connected water directly with "emotions" or a certain "feeling".

After listening to the different recordings, the participants were asked what they associate with the sound of water in general. A lot of the participants had similar answers to that question: "rain" (3), "ocean" (4), "streams"(3), "beach" (4), "calm" (4), "relaxing"(4). Lee explains:

*" The sound of water takes me home and comforts me."*

Most participants associate positive feelings and memories of their childhood with the sound of water. Only Heather mentions, that the sound of water can mean destruction, too. She explains that she has pleasurable and non- pleasurable memories of the sound of water. Hadhazy (2016) explains that the sound of water is often perceived as relaxing or calming because humans interpret these sounds as non-threatening. He illustrates that even if watery sounds are played relatively loud, people still don't wake up from their sleep because the loud water sounds can additionally drown out other sounds that are more abrupt.

## **7.7 Political Implications**

The audience did not directly recognize a political message in the presented sound art. When asked directly, only two audience members said they were thinking about political implications while listening to the sound art. After reading the descriptions of the pieces they were more aware of the political implications and the connection with environmental issues.

This research confirms the proposition that water is important and connecting people from different cultural backgrounds. The participants from the focus group represented seven different nationalities and all the

participants agreed that water is a universal and connecting subject for them. Most of the participants had a strong relationship with water and they felt personally connected with it. Water as a subject in sound art has an appeal to different people from different nationalities.

Nora explains during the focus group discussion:

*"I like the idea of the social importance of water in cities now... In Brussels, for example, they put sand everywhere beside the canal and now there is a beach thing and it brings everybody together..."*

This supports the statement from the literature review that water can play a major role in constructions of identities.

Ellen recounts:

*"I guess I had a feeling though... like I just heard people say soon the wars will be not over oil but it will be over water."*

The two statements clearly indicate that the participants were associating political implications with the sound art.

Femininity was not a subject the participant of the focus group would have connected with the sound art and the water, at all. This is interesting as eight of the eleven participants were female.

The argument by Adorno, discussed in the literature review, stating that the message of music is conveyed not only by the content but also by its form and the conditions under which the music is produced and circulated, is key finding of this research. This argument highlights: That when used

in sound art, the characteristics of water have an influence on the form that sound art takes.

Furthermore it was another finding, that audiences sometimes construct completely different interpretations, which in some cases are completely removed from the artist's intended message.

The argument raised in the literature review about the social influence being so great, that even the way we hear things has a social component was another key to the findings about meaning. As Rosenthal and Flacks (2012) explain, we understand meaning in music as part of a tradition we're taught and only rarely purposefully and consciously.

## **8. Conclusion**

This research answered the question of why is water used in sound art from different angles and perspectives.

The literature showed that musicians have used water in their practices at different times and for different reasons. There is little literature specifically talking about sound art and the use of water in it. When referring to different disciplines such as environmental studies, aesthetics and politics a variety of explorations of water and music were found, but most of them were not focusing on sound art.

The findings indicated by this research illustrate that contemporary sound artists often use water to articulate ecological concerns. Morton's hyperobject theory presented itself very useful in order to understand big environmental concerns, such as climate change and it explained well, why artists rather use water in order to talk about big environmental issues. Sound artists further argued that they use water in order to give the environment a voice. Theoretically there is literature illustrating the turn of sound art and music towards environmental issues. The fact that water is constantly changing seems to translate environmental issues very well, from an artist point of view. Water is therefore used as language. But the audience did not recognize such a connection. The environmental message did not reach the listening audience. Their focus was much more on their own emotions while they were listening to the different sound recordings. The sound recordings triggered very different associations and feelings. For example, the same recording was described as a mountain spring and a drainpipe in the guts of the city by two different audience members. This verified the argument by Rosenthal and Flacks (2012), that every participant constructs their own meaning in to the sound recordings, depending on their own personal history.

Water's cross-cultural importance was a reoccurring subject in this dissertation. Everybody has a relationship with the sound of water. Audience members were reminded of their childhood and associated the sound of water with relaxation and comfort. The sound recordings did not trigger associations with political issues for the participants. However, this dissertation illustrated such a connection and made clear that a commodification of water leads to conflicts around water. The neutrality of water was questioned and the connection between scientists interested in water and artists working with water was documented. Furthermore, it became obvious how the environmental and political issues are closely related to each other. A general lack of literature surrounding the subject of political implications of sound art was discovered and could be part of further research.

Water's many symbols and metaphors were a dominant subject throughout this dissertation. The question of who decides on these metaphors and what does this say about a society is an open-ended one. It became clear that water is not one thing and can inhabit many layers, it can be seen as culture or nature and it changes its meaning depending on the society and their values. It is notable that water is able to transform and it is constantly changing itself and the environment around it. This point fascinated sound artists and audiences.

The discussion around aesthetics showed that contemporary sound art is confronted with commodification as much as water. Adorno's writing on aesthetics and his critique on the cultural industry was a backbone of this dissertation. The question of how to philosophize in the absence of aesthetical norms is as relevant today, as it was fifty years ago. Nevertheless, this thesis illuminated that the three sound artists pursued similar aesthetic goals. They were interested in underwater sounds and immersion (using hydrophones) and they were talking about the use of



water as representing the everyday or small sounds. Furthermore the transformational properties of water were explored and the unknown about water seemed to fascinate artists and audiences alike.

For the meaning and audience reception it became clear, that the social aspect and context in music is very viable for the interpretation of sound art. It would be interesting to further research the connection of genres and how they generate meaning.

Artists might use water, because it is an element all of an audience will know and are confronted with in their daily activities: everybody has a relationship with it.

An argument for the rise of sound art based around water and environmental issues is, that music reflects history. Water resources and global warming are urgent subjects in contemporary society and sound art, as an interdisciplinary practice, is taking responsibility in articulating issues concerning the environment.

Aesthetics, immersion and the sublime are both reoccurring subjects throughout this thesis. The proposition is made that hydrophones and other technologies, used by all the three interviewed sound artists, facilitate the sense of immersion.

This dissertation suggests to critically examine what it says about a society when artists are suddenly concentrating on small, everyday sounds. Water is recognized as a powerful element in the world, but still, we find sound artists using it point towards small sounds.

This dissertation problematizes the use of water as neutral medium and challenges a human-centred perspective where water is looked at as a passive element.

The argument raised by Adorno, stating that the message of music is conveyed not only by the content but also by its form and the conditions under which the music is produced and circulated, is a key finding of this research. This argument highlights that the characteristics and form of water influence the use of water in sound art. This dissertation suggests that further research into this subject could reveal interesting findings.

To conclude this thesis the simple argument raised at the beginning and throughout the whole research is highlighted: Artists and audiences confirmed the assumption that water is used in sound art because it is important for life.

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## 10. Appendix

### 10.1 Semi-structured Interview

#### Semi – structured Interviews with Sound Artists

- What role does water play in your work?
- What is the message in your work / a particular piece?
- How do you use water in your work? As an instrument?
- Why do you use water?
- In what context is your work usually shown?
- Who is your audience? What is a common reaction to your work?
- What is the role of nature and technology in your work?
- Who influenced or inspired your work?
- What is a problem when working with water in sound art?
- Murray Schaefer developed the concept of soundscape and described that the environment is changing and our society is exposed to more noise etc. His view was quite pessimistic and he explained that the soundscape has a huge influence on our society. Do you agree with him?
- Do you have a favorite environmental philosopher or ecologist?
- How does the environment you live in influence your work?
- Some people have a quite romantic connection with the sound of for example a beach or a waterfall. Is that ever a problem for your work?
- Why did you start fieldrecording?
- What is the difference between sound art and music?
- What is your favourite sound?
- What is your main interest in your work?
- Do you think your work is political?
- Is water a political subject?
- I will play different tracks of recordings with water to a group of people and afterwards ask the participants what they hear and what it means to them in order to research the meaning of water in sound art. Would it be okay if I use some of your recordings in that Focus Group?
- Thanks a million for your time and help! I will send you the dissertation, when I it is finished.

## 10.2 Questionnaire Focus Group

Questionnaire for Focus Group (answered in written form individually)

- Describe what you can hear in the recordings and what do you associate with this recordings?

Recording 1:

Recording 2:

Recording 3:

Recording 4:

Recording 5:

Recording 6:

Recording 7:

What does water mean to you?

What do you associate with the sound of water?

## 10.3 Information Focus Group

Focus Group – Information

Thank you very much for your participation for the Focus Group on Listening and Reflecting on Sound Art for my master dissertation on „Water in Sound Art“.

The Sound Art and Music files you heard were from the following Artists:

**1. Surface Tension Single. Rob St. John 3:40**

Surface Tension is a field recording, photography and writing project by Rob St. John exploring pollution, life and biodiversity along the River Lea in East London.

**2. Water of Leith at Harperigg – Water of Life 1 :18**

Water of Life' is an art-science collaboration between Tommy Perman and Rob St. John exploring flows of water through Edinburgh.

**3. Liquid City / The Shellycoat – Water of Life 4:32**

Water of Life' is an art-science collaboration between Tommy Perman and Rob St. John exploring flows of water through Edinburgh.

**4. Dry Sea (Sample Track) - Mark Lyken 10:45**

Soundtrack for the film „The Terrestrial Sea“ by Mark Lyken and Emma Dove. They worked alongside the Ecologists at the University's Lighthouse Field Station in Cromarty between 2012 and 2014. THE TERRESTRIAL SEA highlights the diverse and ever-changing land and seascape of the Cromarty Firth through music and film.

**5. Tipping Point – Kathy Hinde 4:59**

Tipping Point invites us to consider our relationship with water, and the necessity of balancing how we use the world's water resources. The installation is created using a delicate combination of glass, water, audio feedback and lighting. Glass vessels filled with water are balanced by mechanics and bespoke computer software, which listens to microphone feedback produced by the acoustic qualities of the vessels themselves. The glasses are arranged in pairs and interconnected, and as one glass fills, the other empties.

**6. Submerge – Kathy Hinde 4:14**

Submerge explores Glasgow's once treasured and now forgotten streams (burns). A network of waterways weave through the city like veins. Over time, many of these burns have been routed underground through concrete pipes, culverted out of sight, fenced off, and hidden from view.

Submerge culminated in an interactive installation shown at the Rennie Mackintosh water tower at the Lighthouse centre for architecture and design for Sonica festival.

Feel free to participate in the following discussion about the previously heard Sound Art.

If you have any more questions feel free to contact me under:

Sonja Roth

[2225112R@student.gla.ac.uk](mailto:2225112R@student.gla.ac.uk) or my supervisor: [j.markey.1@research.gla.ac.uk](mailto:j.markey.1@research.gla.ac.uk)

You will get a digital copy of the dissertation when it is finished and your name and any information given will be anonymised.

## 10.4 Consent Forms

### CONSENT TO THE USE OF DATA

University of Glasgow, College of Arts Research Ethics Committee

I understand that \_\_Sonja Roth\_\_\_\_\_ (name of researcher)

is collecting data in the form of a semi-structured interview

for use in an academic research project at the University of Glasgow.

The subject of the research is the question of why is water used in contemporary sound art. Therefore, sound artists are interviewed about their use of water in their work. Recordings from this artists are played to an audience (focus group) in order to observe what message the audience receives and how meaning is constructed.

The interview will be held in public space or in a space agreed upon with the interviewees. (for example, Skype) The interview will be recorded and stored on a password saved platform (dropbox) and the recording will be destroyed after transcribing it.

The information that you supply and that may be collected as part of this research project will be entered into a filing system and will only be accessed by authorized persons of the University of Glasgow or its agents. The information will be retained by the University and only be used for the purpose of research. by supplying such information you consent to the University storing the information for the stated purposes. The information is processed by the university in accordance with the provision of the Data Protection Act 1998.

#### **I give my consent to the use of data for this purpose on the understanding that:**

- • ♣ My name and other material likely to identify my artistic work will not be anonymised.

If you wish to be anonymised tick this box here

- • ♣ The material will be treated as confidential and kept in secure storage at all times.
- • ♣ The material will be destroyed once the project is complete.
- • ♣ The material may be used in future publications, both print and online.

Signed by the contributor: \_\_\_\_\_ Date:

**Researcher's name and email contact: Sonja Roth: 2225112R@student.gla.ac.uk**

**Supervisor's name and email contact: John Markey: j.markey.1@research.gla.ac.uk**

## CONSENT TO THE USE OF DATA

University of Glasgow, College of Arts Research Ethics Committee

I understand that     Sonja Roth      
(name of researcher)

is collecting data in the form of  
a focus group interviews and a questionnaire.

for use in an academic research project at the University of Glasgow.

The subject of the research is why is water used in contemporary sound art. Recordings from the interviewed artists are played to an audience (focus group) in order to observe what message the audience receives and how meaning is constructed.

The focus group will be held in the audio lab at the university of Glasgow. The participants will be asked to listen to 6 different pieces on headphones, individually, while filling out a questionnaire. Afterwards they will be given information about the previously heard sound files and asked as a group about their experiences.

As an artist you have the right to withdraw your participation which would mean your songs are not being used for the focus group. Furthermore, you have the option to see the dissertation, once the first draft is made. If there are any disagreements, you can still refuse the participation.

**As a copyright holder I give my consent to the use of my music/sound art for this purpose on the understanding that:**

• • ♣ My name and other material likely to identify my artistic work will not be anonymised.

If you like it to be anonymized please tick the box here:

• • ♣ The material will be treated as confidential and kept in secure storage at all times.

• • ♣ The material will be destroyed once the project is complete.

• • ♣ The material may be used in future publications, both print and online.

Signed by the contributor: \_\_\_\_\_ Date:

**Researcher's name and email contact: Sonja Roth: 2225112R@student.gla.ac.uk**

**Supervisor's name and email contact: John Markey: j.markey.1@research.gla.ac.uk**

## CONSENT TO THE USE OF DATA

University of Glasgow, College of Arts Research Ethics Committee

I understand that  Sonja Roth  
(name of researcher)

is collecting data in the form of  
a Questionnaire

for use in an academic research project at the University of Glasgow.

The subject of this research is the question of how meaning is attributed to contemporary sound art. You will be asked to listen to 6 different audio recordings from 3 different sound artists on individual headphones in the audio lab at the university Glasgow. During the process of listening you will be asked to write down your observations on the different pieces on the provided questionnaire. The questions will be focused on your experience and involve personal reflection. If you don't feel comfortable answering a question, you can leave the questionnaire blank. If you don't feel comfortable about the setting you are allowed to leave the audio lab at any point. The information you supply will be entered into a filing system and will only be accessed by authorized persons of the University of Glasgow or its agents. The information will be retained by the University and will only be used for the purpose of research. By supplying such information you consent to the University storing the information for the stated purposes. The information is processed by the University in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998. The analyzed data will be anonymized and the dissertation might be published online or be accessible over the university library.

### **I give my consent to the use of data for this purpose on the understanding that:**

- • ♣ All names and other material likely to identify individuals from the questionnaire will be anonymised.
- • ♣ The material will be treated as confidential and kept in secure storage at all times.
- • ♣ The material will be destroyed once the project is complete.
- • ♣ The material may be used in future publications, both print and online.

Signed by the contributor: \_\_\_\_\_ Date:

**Researcher's name and email contact: Sonja Roth: 2225112R@student.gla.ac.uk**

**Supervisor's name and email contact: John Markey: j.markey.1@research.gla.ac.uk**



## CONSENT TO THE USE OF DATA

University of Glasgow, College of Arts Research Ethics Committee

I understand that \_\_Sonja Roth\_\_  
(name of researcher)

is collecting data in the form of a  
taped focus group discussion

for use in an academic research project at the University of Glasgow.

The subject of the research is the question of why is water used in contemporary sound art. In this focus group you might answer questions about what message you as an audience received from the previously heard Sound Art. You will be asked a couple of questions and your participation in the group discussion is entirely voluntary. Anything mentioned in the focus group will be anonymised. The participation could have an impact on your perception on how you listen to music and on the use of water in it. You are allowed to leave and withdraw your participations at any point, as well as retro-perspectively.

The data is being collected as part of the research project concerned with the use of water in sound art. The information you supply and that may be collected as part of this research project will be entered into a filing system and will only be accessed by authorized persons of the University of Glasgow or its agents. The information will only be used for the purpose of research and will be stored in a password saved dropbox folder during the research. Once, the dissertation is finished the data and recordings will be destroyed. You will be provided with an example of the dissertation.

### **I give my consent to the use of data for this purpose on the understanding that:**

- • ♣ All names and other material likely to identify individuals from the focus group will be anonymised.
- • ♣ The material will be treated as confidential and kept in secure storage at all times.
- • ♣ The material will be destroyed once the project is complete.
- • ♣ The material may be used in future publications, both print and online.

Signed by the contributor: \_\_\_\_\_ Date:

**Researcher's name and email contact: Sonja Roth: 2225112R@student.gla.ac.uk**  
**Supervisor's name and email contact: John Markey: j.markey.1@research.gla.ac.uk**