DEVELOPING A HYDROFEMINIST ART PRACTICE:

BODIES, SPACES, PRACTICES.

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements of Bath Spa University
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

School of Humanities

January 2022

Acknowledgements

I would like to express gratitude to my supervisory team, Professor Owain Jones and Professor Kate Rigby, and in particular to Dr Ben Parry who enabled me to complete this long journey. Thanks to the many scholars and artists who have challenged and supported me along the way. I would like to say thank you for the love, humour and unconditional support of my son Meredydd, whose critical questions have always, and will always, keep me on my toes. I also wish to thank the Erme Estuary, for being there.

Declaration

Abstract

Developing a Hydrofeminist art practice – bodies, spaces, practices

This research presents primary work that has been situated in the city of Plymouth (UK) – *Benthic Caress* (2017), *Hydrosapien* (2018) and *Manual for Nomads* (2020), supported by three bodies of exploratory work (*Interim, Rhyne & Huish, Field Notes*). Documentation of the work can be found here: https://aquameteor.wordpress.com/

This work is consciously situated within Environmental Humanities and seeks to make a contribution to knowledge by developing the concept of hydrofeminism, through practice. This thesis is foundationally and iteratively entangled with the practice. The thesis is undertaken in an interdisciplinary location of intersecting artistic practices, feminisms, posthumanism and cultural geographies, aiming to fold these entanglements into the emerging field of environmental humanities (Bird-Rose et al 2012). It is done through practice led research, thus extending hydrofeminism from its academic (text based) foundation in the work of Neimanis (2012).

Water, specifically oceans, estuaries, rivers and other 'natural' bodies of water (including puddles) has been the material signifier across the body of work shared here, which is transdisciplinary and which has investigated hydrofeminism using a wide range of creative tools. The creative practice presented here is about water, explored through feminisms, hydrofeminism, transcorporeality, posthumanism and embodiment. *Benthic Caress* was a site-specific and site-responsive immersive experience that offered participants a sonic engagement with marine life using silent disco technologies. *Hydrosapien* was a public performance of a section of Hydrofeminism (Neimanis 2012) that pertains to ecotones, presented by a Silent

Choir and two experimental voice artists. *Manual for Nomads* is a short film exploring community and the climate crisis that brings the languages, codes and methods of communication of differently abled persons together to create new conceptualisations of the ecotone.

The research questions asked whether distinct expressions of hydrofeminism, formed in the confluence of practices, theories and methodologies, could address the following issues:

- In what ways can difference be foregrounded in ways that expand, through a practice that is weighted towards sonic arts, the aqueous metaphors employed with Neimanis's articulation of hydrofeminism?

This question allows me to unpack the central message within hydrofeminism – namely, that difference is, paradoxically, the marker that connects us. That Neimanis does this strategically, through a broad range of aqueous metaphors, amplifies the watery relationality that the term 'hydrofeminism' embodies. Through reference to sonic arts, this question foregrounds the creative explorations of sound art and of D/deafness as sites of multiple differences that my creative practice employs.

- Can creative practices which articulate the confluence of subject, location, and difference, as ecotone, foreground marginalised voices?

If we choose to read '*eco/tone*' as a description of human difference, then *eco* becomes human and *tone* becomes all the specificities of difference that articulate intersectionality. By poetically locating *human* within and of the ecotone, Neimanis embeds the centrality of embodiment within her conceptualisations of hydrofeminism, and clearly links subjectivity to location. However, 'location' is understood as a site of intersectionality – as the body – a body marked by difference. Difference therefore is foregrounded within the concept of hydrofeminism.

- The research asks what is meant by location that is expressed through practice and that is significant in the discourses surrounding our transcorporeal relationality.

This question signposts interspecies relationships and the emphasis upon our interconnectedness with more than human others which is embedded throughout the essay Hydrofeminism, and which situates hydrofeminism within an environmentally focused posthumanism.

It is in the convergence of practices, theories and methodologies that new articulations of hydrofeminism have been shaped, beyond textual analyses. It is through an art practice that in its own transdisciplinarity echoes the watery relationality that is at the heart of hydrofeminism, foregrounding an aqueous imaginary across a range of forms and practices, that a new contribution to knowledge has been forged. It is in the specific and dynamic shaping of each body of work generated through this research that the nuance of, and distinction between, particular insights within hydrofeminism have been advanced. This is particularly evident in my conceptualisations of the ecotone, which I use widely within the context of a

transdisciplinary arts practice, aiming to prise open the term, and the arts practice, to reveal novel insights that can contest familiar ways of thinking about people, place and sensation. My practice has revealed that it is in the coming together of differently abled persons, and in the languages, codes and methods of communication that these combinations bring to the practice, that a space is created for a re-conceptualisation of the ecotone.

Keywords: Hydrofeminism, Transcorporeality, Creative Practice, Transdisciplinary, Ecotone.

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1. The Puddle

It was a puddle that got me started. I was walking with my son near Newbridge on Dartmoor in the summer of 2015 and chanced upon a particularly compelling puddle in a bed of satisfyingly squidgy wet black mud, under dense woodland cover. I began photographing it, much to my son's amusement. The notion of undertaking an artistic enquiry of a puddle was beyond him. It was 'just' a puddle.

Four years later we incidentally and without forethought take the same walk, and he chances upon the puddle. The same puddle. He is very excited to have found the puddle. Challenging as ever, he asks 'is this a hydrofeminist puddle, mother?' My retort is equally as playful: 'it is ecotonic becoming, a transcorporeal embodiment, son.' We smirk at each other, at our shared pleasure in the use of formal appellations to locate an intimate, familial informality, our shared interest in cultural geographies, albeit applied in very distinct discourses. Then we find a spot by the river (Dart) to eat lunch.

Over the years that this research has been conducted, I have come to understand that the puddle is hydrofeminist, it is an ecotonic becoming, it is a transcorporeal embodiment. This thesis charts the journey that has led to these insights, and articulates why it is all these things, and how.

This is a practice-driven thesis that seeks to make a contribution to knowledge, both knowledge-as-practice, and practice-as-knowledge, by developing the concept of hydrofeminism as praxis. As practice-driven work, it is consciously situated within Environmental Humanities; an interdisciplinary area of research, with a focus on environmental literature and artistic enquiry, philosophy, history, and environmental anthropology. The practice and the thesis support each other in an iterative and dynamic relationship. The specific ways in which this practice/research contributes to knowledge is explained in detail and unfolds as the thesis progresses. This work takes an approach to interdisciplinary 'location' as unfixed, mobile and fluid: 'an entanglement of movement, representation, and practice' (Cresswell, 2010:17). These entanglements are of intersecting artistic practices, feminisms, posthumanism and cultural geographies. Practice and research are presented together to fold these complex entanglements into the emerging field of environmental humanities (Bird-Rose et al., 2012). Such creative and mobile entanglements extend hydrofeminism from its academic and text-based foundation in the work of Neimanis (2012) by presenting novel, embodied and experiential ways of engaging with the theoretical premises within the text, through performance, live art, sound art, walking and film.

Hydrofeminism investigates the reciprocal relationship between our bodies and our environments, focusing on watery exchanges as both markers of difference and connectivity. Neimanis posits the notion of our skin as membrane, one which is more elastic and malleable, trans-corporeal, porous and leaky than we might think.

The creative works that constitute the practice element of this research are introduced in this chapter and discussed further throughout the thesis. Briefly, the major works are *Benthic Caress* (2017) a silent disco in the sea, *Hydrosapien* (2018) a silent choir/sound performance, and *Manual for Nomads* (2020) a short film exploring themes of difference, connectivity, communication and the climate crisis. The supporting works are *Field Notes* (2016-2020) short experimental films, *Rhyne & Huish* (2017-2019) creative approaches to walking the Somerset Levels, and *Interim* (2018) a residency focusing on the water crisis in Bangalore, India.

1.1: A Lexicon

In this section I introduce some key terms used throughout this thesis, and anchor them within the context of the aims and objectives of this research. The terms are: hydrofeminism, *ecotone*, difference, marginalised voices, intersectionality, transcorporeality, posthumanism and ethics. I introduce the reader to the creative/research tools I have used in my creative practice and explain how these are deployed within the development of the work, with particular emphasis given to the role of 'transcription' as a tool (in this thesis I use the term 'transcription' to refer to the re-placement of part of a text into a different, creative context). The research questions which this work has sought to answer are then laid out, followed by a short description of the personal journey through feminist philosophies that brought me to this close engagement with hydrofeminism. Finally, I signpost how I position my practice in relation to experimental, and creative geographies, and end this section with a short introduction to my creative practice.

1.1.1: Hydrofeminism

The term 'hydrofeminism' was first introduced by Astrida Neimanis in her 2012 essay of the same name. Neimanis does not define hydrofeminism as a fixed concept but more as a form of

becoming – predicated on difference and on the intersectional realities that individuals and individual species inhabit. Importantly, hydrofeminism links difference to watery relationality, a strategy which seeks to foreground our connectedness despite and because of those intersectional differences. Hydrofeminism uses sexual difference as a point of departure for investigating intersectionalities, not as a resting place or destination. In so doing, hydrofeminism takes the reader beyond the perceived territories of feminism:

> By venturing to feminism's ecotones, and leaping in, we can discover that feminism dives far deeper than human sexual difference, and outswims any attempts to limit it thus. Here is gestation, here is proliferation, here is danger, here is risk. Here is an unknowable future, always already folded into our own watery flesh. Here is hydrofeminism. At least this is what becoming a body of water has taught me. (Neimanis, 2012:112)

Hydrofeminism, therefore, accompanies a range of political, theoretical and creative trajectories, as expanded upon throughout this thesis, which seek to challenge the Cartesian body and to open up our more ecologically focused senses of becoming, placing water at the centre of becoming. In a very literal sense water is at the centre of human and more-than-human becoming as it is fundamental to life. In relation to feminist posthumanism (a term explored further in this chapter), a key starting point in the development of hydrofeminism is that the processes of watery becoming (or being a body of water as Neimanis also phrases it), are always embedded in particular places. Haraway uses the term 'diverse-local' to complicate the relation between location and subject, a provocation that signposts a matrix of material and non-material relations (Haraway, 1991:191). Within this matrix, a wide range of locations are articulated; cultural, ethical, political, and practical. To understand hydrofeminism, the specificity of location is foregrounded, not simply as geographic space but significantly as 'the subject'. In other words, the individual *is* the location.

As well as foregrounding the subject as the location of intersectional difference, hydrofeminism forms part of a range of discourses from a wide field. These discourses offer alternative narratives for what it means to be human, away from the Cartesian model of assuming that the mind and body are distinct, separable and self-determining, and towards a belief that a greater connection exists between the human and the more-than-human than this traditional viewpoint allows. This move towards a more complicated relationship between mind and body, self and other, positions hydrofeminism within discourses that draw on embodiment and corporeality. As Sian Sullivan points out in her essay '(Re)embodying which body? Philosophical, cross-cultural and personal reflections on corporeality' (2016), difference is foregrounded as deeply significant to any understanding and experience of embodiment. Being embodied is always marked by external (contextual) and internal (elective) difference:

> This positioning recognises the mind-full corporeality – the intelligent physicality and materiality – of bodies that is always present as the ground of being; whilst acknowledging that context as well as choice consolidates particular embodied expressions and experiences of this corporeality. It is an affirmation that difference makes a difference in understanding, performing, and manifesting corporeality. (Sullivan, 2016:127)

Hydrofeminism then, asserts that water connects human and non-human, at every level: physical, emotional and metaphorical. Hydrofeminism posits watery relationality as a connection between bodies of difference. Nancy Tuana's 2008 essay, 'Viscous Porosity: Witnessing Katrina', provided a key concept that Neimanis builds upon – namely 'viscous porosity' – a term that acknowledges that bodies are fluid and emergent rather than fixed and inert. Aqueous matter shifts across and between bodies. However, these bodies are not entirely and resolutely porous, creating a dynamic relationship between receptivity and containment, flow and boundedness. Neimanis (2012) builds on this concept to explore how the subject is implicated in the formation of place, and vice versa, revealing entanglements between subjects,

objects, species, ecologies and ideas. By poetically locating human within and of the *ecotone,* Neimanis successfully identifies difference as, paradoxically, the marker that connects us (2012:87). She does this strategically, using a broad range of aqueous metaphors that amplify the watery relationality that the term 'hydrofeminism' describes. Neimanis reveals her capacity for curiosity and provocation in the paragraph above, folding the concept of the *ecotone* into her radical enquiries around ethics and difference.

1.1.2: Ecotone

This thesis proposes that thinking through creative practice as an ecotonic methodology (see Chapter Two – Methodologies as Practice) brings new insights into our relationship to our environments and to each other, and that these can act as a device for thinking about our watery relationality. An *ecotone* is an ecological term that references the transition area between two ecological features. A clear example of this is an estuary, where land and water meet. 'Estuaries, tidal zones, wetlands: these are all liminal spaces where "two complex systems meet, embrace, clash, and transform one another." Eco: home. Tone: tension.' (Neimanis: 2012:87).

Seemingly in opposition, these two terms defined by Neimanis highlight a core component of Hydrofeminism: that through watery relationality we are simultaneously embodied and in tension with the ever-changing contexts of lived experience. This coupling of home and tension also references the themes of difference and connectivity that flow throughout the text Hydrofeminism. Watery relationality is a term used by Neimanis (2012) to highlight the interconnected and mutually constitutive social, cultural and environmental relationships between bodies of water and human bodies.

A key text that has perhaps been influential in bringing the term *ecotone* into and across other disciplines is 'Ecotone Hierarchies' (1993), by James Gosz, a short paper situated within the discourses of ecology. The paper considers the strength of the interactions between adjacent ecological systems, for a hierarchy of *ecotone*s in a biome transition area, whilst also considering the merits of a range of technologies in increasing understanding of these interactions. Gosz states that

> Spatial patterns in landscapes have non-normal, non-stationary, discontinuous, and irregularly spaced parameters. The dynamics of ecotones in landscapes also are likely to be nonlinear, perhaps chaotic, and can behave in ways that are not simple averages of adjacent resource patches. (Grosz, 1993:372)

Here, Grosz makes the point that when considering the spatial geographies of landscapes, *ecoton*es are amongst the most mobile and fluctuating of all landscape features and are often so spatially fluid that attempting to capture their essence through standard techniques is almost impossible. However, its slippery nature has attracted attention from beyond the world of ecological phenomena.

Perhaps one of the first and best-known migrations of the term *ecotone* from ecology to the environmental humanities is Krall's 'Ecotone: wayfaring on the margins' (1994). This first-person narrative focuses upon margins as abundant and dynamic sites of transition, bringing personal, natural and social insights into one frame. Subsequently, Sandilands and Neimanis are two examples of key environmental humanities scholars that have continued to work with this term. Both scholars identify the *ecotone* as an effective strategy for thinking through relationships between nature and culture. In her essay 'Every Grain of Sand' (2004) Sandilands makes the point that we are never, and have never been, separate from the multispecies world of which we are a part (2004:51). Our selves are implicated and entangled in so many ways,

both historically and going forward. Sandilands suggests that the propensity for science to cleave the human from the environmental has resulted in false narratives that failed to register the social and cultural ecologies that impact upon the multispecies environments of which we are a part. Sandilands' emphasis on the importance of the environmental humanities as co-collaborator in our scientific knowledge acquisition remains apposite.

Sandilands was among the first writers to flesh out the corporeal possibility that our materiality echoes the dynamic flux of these unique ecotonic habitats (2004:47). In so doing, she posits the human as a 'complex ecology', one able to negotiate our inter-related embodiment, whilst understanding that this inter-related embodiment is in part shaped by rhetorical constructs that include advertising and aesthetics, education and religion. Rather than shore up our defences against change or challenge to our rose-tinted view of the world we inhabit, Sandilands invites us to be curious and provocative in our scrutiny of overarching structures set up to manage our inter-species relationships, our culturally specific perspectives and our physical selves as we reconsider the world around us and those that we share it with. She suggests that we filter our curiosity through the lens of the *ecotone*.

> The critical question, then, is not about erecting and maintaining boundaries of safety around a carefully cherished utopia, but about investigating and challenging the multiple threads of power that twist intricately in our interactions with non-human natures, that shape our cultural and biological minds and bodies, that organize and reorganize the worlds of the non-human creatures with whom we interact. (Sandilands, 2004:51)

Neimanis (2012) builds on the work of Sandilands (2004) to weave these insights into a contemporary feminist understanding. Neimanis's feminism, in its insistence upon an embodied relationship to a watery ethics, alludes to the ways in which both water, and women, have been historically positioned as a resource, and often abused.

From reproductive rights to anti-violence campaigns, for many feminist social justice movements, claiming autonomous control over one's 'own body' has been a hard fought battle: 'get your laws off my body', 'our bodies, ourselves', 'my body, my choice'. So in turning to the posthuman, what might we forfeit by troubling this idea of a body as 'mine'? In decentring the human, what other centres – of action, of responsibility, of gravity – might we lose? (Neimanis, 2017: 16)

This distinction between the work of Sandilands and Neimanis is significant, as the links between social justice and climate justice are now more clearly articulated within contemporary understandings of feminism. Feminism as a form of social justice activism continues to offer strategies and insights that can be helpful in our changing world.

Neimanis (2017) builds upon Sandilands' capacity for curiosity and provocation. Her section on hydrofeminism that gathers the concept of the *ecotone* into her radical enquiries around ethics and difference is very lyrical (Neimanis, 2012:87), and is a section I have returned to again and again in the development of my creative practice. For this reason I present the full quote:

As transition areas between two adjacent but different ecosystems, ecotones appear as both gradual shifts and abrupt demarcations. But more than just a marker of separation or even a marker of connection (although importantly both of these things), an ecotone is also a zone of fecundity, creativity, transformation; of becoming, assembling, multiplying; of diverging, differentiating, relinquishing. Something happens. Estuaries, tidal zones, wetlands: these are all liminal spaces where "two complex systems meet, embrace, clash, and transform one another." Eco: home. Tone: tension. We must learn to be at home in the quivering tension of the in-between. No other home is available. In-between nature and culture, in-between biology and philosophy, in-between the human and everything we ram ourselves up against, everything we desperately shield ourselves from, everything we throw ourselves into, wrecked and recklessly, watching, amazed, as our skins become thinner. (Neimanis, 2012:87)

This paragraph has come to be of central significance in my work (see Denning, 2018; 2019; 2020). It directly references the water bodies which are the geo(hydro) physical triggers within

my site-responsive practice. Significantly, it is also a challenge to become an active water-defender against all the odds, and to marshal one's subjective responses – one's passion – in struggles to attend the water crises brought about by historical abuses and the contemporary climate crisis.

In the body of work presented in this thesis, I sought to develop the concept of the *ecotone* as a methodology, explored in detail in Chapter Two (Methodologies as Practice). This was not a methodology that followed step-by-step objectives, but rather one which seeped into actions, reflections and outcomes. This methodology had more in common with Gosz's (1993) figuration of an *ecotone* as mobile, fluctuating and spatially fluid. In this way, the *ecotone,* as it pertains to the practice presented in this research, is liberated from its grammatical position as a noun that describes an ecological phenomenon. The term can carry multiple meanings and offer new insights into embodiment and affect. The term, freed in this way, also shifts the potential of a methodology from being the scaffold around which ideas are pursued towards a dynamic and responsive strategy that can harness the power of experimentation within creative practice. The term *ecotone* works to imbricate the various languages, codes and methods of communication to generate a hybrid, multifaceted assemblage of meanings.

Simonsen (2007) offers a context for the strategy I have used.

> When the body is seen as 'the geography closest in' – a constitutive social spatiality reaching out towards other socio-spatial scales from local configurations to transnational connections – it is exactly what is at stake…Different (and multiscalar) practices are characterised by different rhythms between which there are both mergings, clashes and interferences. Spatial entities (places, cities etc.) then become loci of encounters, outcomes and multiple becomings. They are meeting points, moments, or conjectures where social practices and trajectories meet up with moving and fixed

materialities and form configurations that are continuously under transformation and negotiation. (Simonsen 2007:179)

Simonsen suggests that when ontology and geography combine within the physical domain of our flesh, we are neither spatially isolated nor culturally confined, and this is important. From the granular to the all-enveloping, at different tempos, on different registers, our bodies and our selves are infused, infected, seeping, enjoined and invaded. External space becomes the site of these ever-shifting and multiscalar ontological infusions between self and other, and represent nodes, occasions and speculations where the social, the mobile and the material all combine to ensure our perpetual becoming. Simonsen's description of the 'geography closest in' (2007:179), echoes Neimanis's poetically charged prose articulating the *ecotone*.

Within my work then, the term *ecotone* does a lot of work. By virtue of its chaotic and irregular, spatially fluid nature, it is difficult to 'capture' when applied as a creative strategy which is then described within the formal limits of an academic text predicated upon the use of written language. Because of these difficulties I have sought to pin the term down by drawing explicitly upon formal strategies within written language. Here, grammar helps me to separate out ideas, actions, and representations.

Ecotone operates as a noun; simultaneously identifying ideas (such as watery relationality) as well as the materiality of the creative practice. *Ecotone* also operates as a verb, whereby the process of making the work and the methodology it uses become ecotonic; bringing the distinct processes of creative practice and creative methodologies together in an active way, so that each process changes the other. In these ways I suggest that my practice has embedded the *ecotone* as a methodological device, and in so doing highlighted hydrofeminist embodiment as

a strategy for having agency within the world. These themes are explored in detail in Chapter Two (Methodologies as Practice) and throughout the thesis as a whole.

1.1.3: Difference

Difference is central to Neimanis's formulations of hydrofeminism, and difference has been a prevailing motif within my creative practice, as will be made clear as the thesis progresses. However, my understanding of difference did not begin with my scrutiny of Neimanis's writings. My articulations of difference are informed by my understandings of feminism in the first instance. Feminism is a complex term, not least because it has been in circulation a long time and has accrued multiple readings and definitions. It is not possible to offer a packaged definition in one sentence of how the term is employed within my practice. The thesis as a whole operates as a critical citation, and a full reading of the text will make this apparent. The term feminism is deployed to reference a multiplicitous movement and a critical approach to issues of social justice, an approach which foregrounds changing structural circumstances affecting people who are categorised as female. Feminism stresses the importance of difference and specificity, acknowledging the crucial intersections of gender identity, sex, sexuality, class, race, ethnicity, dis/ability, and the many forms of alterity which give difference and specificity their significance.

This thesis advances difference from these foundational points of departure, through recourse to Neimanis's work on difference which draws heavily upon the writings of Luce Irigaray and Giles Deleuze. Difference is also explored throughout my work in terms of our multi-species interactions, and these links are developed further throughout the thesis. My understanding of difference is also woven into my articulations of intersectionality (briefly introduced below),

and both of these terms have been impacted by my experience of working with, and developing personal relations with, people who are D/deaf. These considerations are introduced below and explored in more detail in Chapter Two (Methodologies as Practice).

1.1.4: Hydrofeminism and Difference

In *Bodies of Water* (2017) Neimanis dedicates a chapter to the process of exploring conceptualisations of difference through close scrutiny of the work of Irigaray and of Deleuze. The chapter 'Posthuman Gestationality: Luce Irigaray and Water's Queer Repetitions' opens with: 'Negotiating an ethics of embodied difference is a resolutely feminist issue'. The question that follows, is: 'how might we refract these feminist concerns through an ecological, and specifically hydrological, situatedness, too?' (2017:67). Neimanis is clearly signposting a dominant theme within her writing, which is focused upon our inter-species relations. This is a theme that I have worked to articulate through practice.

Critiquing the prevailing notions of ontologies which are confined by their boundedness within the discreet subject, Neimanis instead proposes an 'onto-logic', which resists a totalising answer to the question of *what* is being, and opens it up to relationality, to the 'common *how*, *where*, *when*, and *thanks to whom* that certain seemingly disparate beings share' (2017:96). By locating our embodied selves as bodies of water (materially and metaphorically), Neimanis extends this onto-logical relationality, through aqueous analogies, to include the more-than-human, whilst insisting that a watery relationality does not flush away difference, but is predicated upon it. Through referring to 'gestation' and by extension the 'amniotic' (through and beyond the prism of Irigaray's conceptualisations of both), Neimanis conjures a convincing principle: that difference and relationality can coexist ('both/and rather than either/or',

(2017:99)) and engender each other to reveal the ways in which we are all implicated in each other's materiality. Her words frame my experience of walking on Dartmoor with my son, scrutinising puddles, with alarming veracity: 'The gestational element is woven into the puddle of life that is gestated' (Neimanis, 2017:101)

1.1.5: Marginalised Voices

This short introduction to difference, as formulated within hydrofeminism, brings me to another concept explored in this thesis: marginalised voices. The projects that constitute the creative practice aspect of this research, some co-created with D/deaf individuals, sought specifically to explore our interconnectedness with more-than-human others; in particular, those marine and aquatic species whose agency is massively marginalised by human exceptionalism, late capitalism and the effects of the climate crisis. These marine and aquatic species are the marginalised human and non-human voices I most especially sought to focus upon in my art practice.

The marginalised human voices foregrounded in my practice are those of the D/deaf community around Plymouth. In three works, people using British Sign Language (BSL) participated in the work. About half of these BSL users were D/deaf. Working with people from this community raises questions around intersectionality (introduced in the next section) and ethics. Individuals within the D/deaf community come from a variety of racial, ethnic, religious, socioeconomic, and educational backgrounds. The physical experience of deafness is unique to the individual; while some people are born deaf, others are deafened, which means they lost their hearing after acquiring spoken language. Many variations of the experience of deafness exist, and investigations of differences across difference in relation to my work with

D/deaf people are explored in detail in Chapter Two (Methodologies as Practice) and Chapter Three (Communities of Practice).

1.1.6: Intersectionality

'Intersectionality' is most commonly understood to refer to the ways that marginalised identities combine to form multiple aspects of personhood and social location. Intersectionality is understood as an analytical scaffold that helps us recognise how aspects of our social and political identities merge to generate different modes of discrimination and privilege, identifying a matrix of multiple factors of advantage and disadvantage. However, within *Bodies of Water* (2017), Neimanis demonstrates how thinking about water as a site of intersectionality uncovers the totalising and neutralising tendencies bound up within the notion of the Anthropocene.

> This homogenisation and levelling of human difference […]is characteristic of a more general Anthropocene imaginary, and neatly mirrors the homogenisation of water as abstract, exchangeable and isomorphic, as described by Linton. (Neimanis, 2017:163)

Neimanis makes the point that this process of homogenisation, as a result of the articulations of the Anthropocene, comes at a time when human difference is intensified by the material effects of the climate crisis. Noting that global flows of colonial power are equally as salient in this context as social location, she takes the term 'body burden' and complicates this biochemical marker by reminding us that it is also a marker of social, cultural, gendered and species related inheritance, imbued with 'response and responsibility' (Neimanis, 2017:164)

1.1.7: Transcorporeality

The term 'transcorporeality' is used widely this thesis and explored in further detail in later sections. For the purposes of this study, it is intended to be understood in the way that Stacy Alaimo deploys it as a term that 'emphasizes the imbrication of human bodies not only with each other, but with non-human creatures and physical landscapes' (Alaimo, 2010:18). Alaimo uses the term to bring humans, non-humans and environments into the same frame so that our entanglements are considered more closely. It is another complex term, and my understanding and use of it is best explained in combination with the terms 'feminism' and 'posthumanism'. Stacy Alaimo makes the case for an understanding of transcorporeality to allow us to address our connections with our environment, and the responsibilities that come with those connections. By mobilising the prefix 'trans' to encompass more-than-human others, Alaimo reinforces humans' indivisible connection with our environments. Alaimo builds on Plumwood's resistance to the positioning of 'nature' (Plumwood, 1993), as background, resource or void. 'Trans' also foregrounds movement; across bodies that include those that are not defined as human, and across sites in ways that reflect Neimanis's conceptualisation of location as bodily. Alaimo's intention is to draw our attention to the impact of human carelessness upon nature, by focusing upon the interconnectedness between actions, consequences, humans and the non-human species we share this world with (2008:238). Alongside Neimanis in her elaboration of 'body burden' as more than solely a biochemical marker, Alaimo places emphasis upon the unequal distribution of environmental toxins across human bodies, understood through social, cultural and political mechanisms (Alaimo, 2008).

1.1.8: Posthumanism

'Posthumanism' is a contested term, being taken up by seemingly opposing bodies of thought – those that seek to undermine the traditional boundaries between the human and the

technological, and those that seek to dismantle distinctions between the human and the 'more-than-human', such as Braun (2005), Lorimer (2005) and Whatmore (2006). In this thesis, the term posthumanism references a critical approach as outlined by Braidotti (2018:339), which refuses the nature/culture divide and places emphasis upon relationality and multiple interconnections. Whilst this approach is not blind to technology, our reliance on it, and its physical embeddedness in everyday life artefacts, these relations are not over-determined, and actively resist the contemporary focus within technological innovation (as an overarching urge within capitalism) to feed generations of new financial markets at all costs. The emphases within Braidotti's articulations of posthumanism are instead placed upon an understanding of subjectivity which rejects human exceptionalism. Departing from an understanding of 'Man' as the point of reference for the universal, within the western humanist tradition, critical posthumanism, when focused upon the climate crisis, instead acknowledges the crises as a significant terrain for its formulations of subjectivity. In so doing, the ethics of difference across and between entities/species is foregrounded – an important insight which is investigated throughout this thesis. Posthumanist insights are woven throughout this work, bearing closely upon articulations of hydrofeminism, difference, transcorporeality and ethics.

1.1.9: Ethics

There are two ways in which ethics are foregrounded and explored through this thesis and within the creative practice. Firstly, they are grounded in Neimanis' insistence upon a watery ethics in relation to hydrofeminism. Through this lens, ethics hinge upon a focus on difference and connectivity (as explored in the above sections). Ethics, understood in this way, provide me with a means of investigating our interspecies relations. Neimanis articulates her approach to ethics in ways that are mirrored in discourses surrounding posthumanism and ethics.

Posthuman ethics identifies its trajectory from Spinoza (1677), through Nietzsche's concept of will as a form of liberation or freedom (1844), through Deleuze's scrutiny of Nietzsche's ethical conceptualisations (1962), and Guatarri's work on ecosophies (1992).

A posthuman ethics does not set up an ontological hierarchy, but rather values 'entities' for what they inherently are, always understood in relation to other entities. These relations are perhaps best visualised or perceived as an untidy matrix, in which relations affect the entity in multiple ways across multiple registers, in a mutual process of affect. According to Patricia MacCormack, a posthuman ethics refuses to foreground technological innovations on the grounds that they problematize these relations of equivalence (2018:346). Instead, the emphasis is placed upon difference manifested across life forms, noting that specific relations between specific life forms is always unique, and always embodies particular affects between relations. This is not to say that difference is fetishized, so much as understood in ways that fold into understandings of intersectionality, where articulations of difference impact positively upon those seen to inhabit minority positions. A posthuman ethics provides a tangible scaffold for thinking through relations between humans, and relations between humans and non-human species. This scaffold is of particular relevance to the creative practice presented here, which sought to amplify the marginalised voices of aquatic and marine species, whilst also collaborating with the D/deaf community to realise socially engaged projects that explored these themes.

This set of intentions and the processes involved in realising them through creative practice, brings me to the second way in which ethics are investigated and understood within this work; working with the D/deaf community as a hearing artist, carries with it ethical considerations.

These are explored in detail in Chapter Two (Methodologies as Practice), supported by material in the Appendix, and are threaded through the thesis as a whole.

1.1.10: Tools

Water, specifically oceans, estuaries, rivers and other 'natural' bodies of water (including puddles) has been the material signifier across the body of work shared here, which is transdisciplinary and which has investigated hydrofeminism using a wide range of creative tools. Within this transdisciplinary tool box, most tools are used more than once. However, this is not to suggest that the work is 'shaped' by that particular tool. For instance, within this transdisciplinary methodology, a repeated tool is sound – specifically ecoacoustics (sounds located in environments). Other repeated tools include silence, curation, socially engaged practice, performance, moving image, British Sign Language (BSL), Braille, drawing, walking, talking and mapping. The broader point being made here is that whilst each tool is picked up for specific reasons - to generate content, to broaden understanding, to define a practice, or an action - the creative practice that is presented here is about water, about feminism, about hydrofeminism, about transcorporeality, posthumanism and embodiment, it is not 'about' the tools used to scrutinise these themes. The range of tools, and their applications – such as tools to make with, conceptual tools, methodological tools, and production tools are investigated in detail in Chapter Two (Methodologies as Practice).

1.1.11: Transcription

Transcription is a repeated tool, and a process. This tool when applied in this way forms part of my methodology, as both process and strategy. The ways in which transcription occupies these different roles is scrutinised in Chapter Two (Methodologies as Practice). Transcription

is understood here as a strategy of lifting a particular text or part of a text, and redeploying it in other contexts. The text I have transcribed is the short paragraph about *ecotones* quoted above from Hydrofeminism (Neimanis, 2017:87). This use of *ecotone* is explored in detail in many parts of this thesis, and is a significant aspect of the methodologies employed in this research. The use of tools and of transcription are explored more fully in Chapter Two (Methodologies as Practice).

In this section I have introduced a lexicon to propose the terms used within this research. In the next section I introduce the research questions.

1.2: Research Questions

The research questions ask whether distinct expressions of hydrofeminism, formed in a confluence of practices, theories and methodologies, could address the following issues:

- In what ways can difference be foregrounded in ways that expand, through a practice that is weighted towards sonic arts, the aqueous metaphors employed with Neimanis's articulation of hydrofeminism?

This question allows me to investigate the central message within hydrofeminism – namely, that difference is, paradoxically, the marker that connects us. That Neimanis does this strategically, through a broad range of aqueous metaphors, amplifies the watery relationality that the term hydrofeminism embodies. Through reference to sonic arts, this question foregrounds the creative explorations of sound art and of D/deafness as sites of multiple differences that my creative practice employs.

- Can creative practices which articulate the confluence of subject, location, and difference, specifically as ecotone, foreground marginalised voices?

We can read *ecotone* as a description of human difference. In the *ecotone* paragraph (see pg.8 of this thesis), Neimanis clearly positions the human within the *ecotone*: located in and by difference and connectivity. 'Eco*',* then signifies human and 'tone' stands for all the specificities of difference that articulate intersectionality. By poetically locating the human within and of the *ecotone,* Neimanis embeds the centrality of embodiment within her conceptualisations of hydrofeminism, and clearly links subjectivity to location. However, location is understood as a site of intersectionality, as the body marked by difference. Difference therefore is foregrounded within the concept of hydrofeminism.

- The research asks what is meant by location that is expressed through practice and that is significant in the discourses surrounding our transcorporeal relationality.

This question signposts interspecies relationships and the emphasis upon our interconnectedness with more than human others which is embedded throughout the essay Hydrofeminism (2012) and which situates hydrofeminism within an environmentally focused posthumanism.

1.3: Genealogy

Prior to reading 'Hydrofeminism' (Neimanis, 2012) I was seeking ways to critically develop creative languages and practices which might successfully embody the feminist subject-as-process as a critical testimony, and to ask of those embodiments how they can impact upon our capacity to unsettle or reconfigure the ways in which ecological crises were presented within

mainstream media. Embracing the feminist politics of citation espoused by many, including Ahmed (2013), I feel it is necessary to chart this journey.

What did I mean by 'the feminist subject as process' and how might I frame that now? Initially I drew this term from reading Braidotti's exploration of the nomadic subject (Braidotti, 1994), and Butler's interrogation of sexual difference (Butler, 1999), in relation to location and locatedness, which also led me to consider Massey's conceptualisations of space (Massey, 2005). In this way, the articulation of the research questions came to be framed in the way they were: deeply rooted in feminist critiques of 'subjectivity'. Then, as now, it was not exclusively my experience that these enquires relate to, at least not directly; this research - creative and critical - is not an autobiographical endeavour. Rather, the framing and interrogation of 'subjectivity' takes place within broader frameworks of feminisms and the philosophies they engender. This research has revealed further conceptualisations around subjectivity which draw heavily upon the work of Merleau-Ponty and phenomenology (Merleau-Ponty, 2014), hydrofeminism, as well as transcorporeality. This is further explored throughout this thesis.

I began this research journey, as previously stated, from an ongoing engagement with feminist theory over decades, and I chart this critical genealogy below, signposting these previous theoretical insights as a gateway into the work of Neimanis, Alaimo and others. This critical genealogy is not linear, nor is it comprehensive, and has not been pursued uninterrupted over the last 30 years. Yet I brought to this research journey an embodied understanding of the scrutiny of gender, language, and identity in the work of Luce Irigaray (1977), whose critique of phallocentrism in classical Western philosophy, as well as her critique of psychoanalysis in the work of Jacques Lacan, draws upon Marxism to reveal the othering of 'woman' within

political economy. I also brought a prior engagement with Judith Butler to this research journey; her Foucauldian analysis of sex and gender reveals them to be constructs that require perpetual performance to be maintained (Butler, 1993). Butler argues that sex and gender are contingent and open to interpretation. From previous readings of Doreen Massey (2005) I brought (and still employ) the notion of a 'simultaneity of stories so far' as a way of understanding space and place.

Rosi Braidotti's early work around nomadic subjectivity (Braidotti, 2005), informs my understanding of her later articulations of posthumanism (Braidotti, 2013), whilst the ongoing work of feminist scholar Donna Haraway remains a steadfast companion as I endeavour to 'stay with the trouble' (Haraway, 2016). The works of Irigaray and Butler do not feature explicitly within this thesis, however they have been foundational in the long journey that has brought me to an engagement with hydrofeminism, transcorporeality and posthumanism. It is these three critical frameworks that are central to this research. In particular, Haraway's writing that has provided me with a bridge between this prior immersion in feminist philosophies (signposted above) and the feminisms that saturate this thesis. A watery ethics of becoming asserts the significance of our relations with more-than-human others and proposes a trans-corporeal posthumanism. Haraway (2015) offers a nuanced form of material feminist theory that challenges the distinction between constructions of the human and non-human and posits different conceptions of the material world towards merged and emergent modes of being, and which offers the promise of co-flourishing kinship, as opposed to the toxic nature of much current societal relationships with the natural world. Examples of this toxicity are almost too numerous to mention, but one example is the rotational burning of blanket bog on the North Yorkshire Moors to aid the 'sport' of grouse-shooting. This practice 'wrecks ecosystems, worsens flooding downstream, and helps fuel climate change by causing the UK's biggest

carbon store to go up in smoke' (Evans, 2018) and is indicative of such toxic relationships. Haraway (2015) proposes that the breakdown of the distinctions historically identified between humans and other species opens up space for a kinder world, where the 'value' afforded by humans to those we share the world with (the more-than-human, the soil, the vegetal, mineral and waters) shifts away from 'resource-thinking' and towards nurture, towards co-flourishing.

1.4: Creative practice as Geographic practice

In this section I identify how the key terms and concepts understood and employed within this thesis are woven together to generate a practice that is embedded within geographic practices. Using geographies of creative practice to develop methodologies that foreground situated connections (Hawkins, 2011), this research suggests that social participation and collaboration amplifies the affect of a watery ethics of becoming. These forms of collaborative action engender an emotionally-located (i.e. not simply cerebral or intellectual) response in participants which can trigger and deepen an awareness of our connectedness with the world around us, and this connectedness has the potential to shift our perception of those we share the world with in ways that lead to a more nurturing outlook. These shifts represent a move away from the dominant Enlightenment point of view (now embedded within Western culture as 'common sense') where 'nature' is positioned as a resource, as something to be conquered, as dumb; literally and metaphorically.

In asking how might the politics and ethics of being bodies of water be differently articulated and experienced, the work hopes to contribute, through practice, to current discourses which rethink our watery bodies and our relationships with the increasingly unsettled watery dynamics within our lived environments. Through the development of creative languages and

practices that might successfully articulate embodiment within and across an aqueous imaginary, the research asks of those embodiments how they might impact upon our capacity to address these unsettled dynamics.

In aiming to harness the potential for collaborative action that hydrofeminism holds, and as connected to my understanding of transcorporeality, the research seeks to participate in the shift away from human exceptionalism, and to include audiences in this manoeuvre. This study seeks to draw attention to the ways in which water plays a crucial and highly significant role in both highlighting the climate crisis (an umbrella term that acknowledges multiple crises operating at different sites, scales and temporalities), and in shaping our understanding of how we might act. It does so by consciously experimenting with creative practices that are both responsive to, and critically engaged with, the bodies of theory broadly understood as feminist transcorporeality, of which hydrofeminism is a part.

This textual analysis of these complex relations that articulate hydrofeminism support investigations that are undertaken through my creative practice. As set out by Hawkins (2012) critical-creative practice (e.g. drawing, film) can bring new insights to how the world is known. Practice based critical-creative research operates in differing affective registers and can open up material relations in ways that are different to language-based expositions. Language can, of course, operate within the critical-creative register, for instance, through poetry, prose, fiction and lyrics. There is also the notion that certain forms of theoretical analysis operate on the poetic register as well as within the parameters expected of academic enquiry, and I would assert that the essay Hydrofeminism does precisely this, especially within the paragraph that I have drawn on in the production of both *Hydrosapien (2018)* and *Manual for Nomads (2020).*

The essay is poetically charged, and in its insistence upon an embodied relationship to a watery ethics it calls on the reader to respond with passion to the contemporary climate crisis.

Simonsen has written extensively about embodied geographies (2007, 2013, 2020) and I draw on her work in different ways throughout this thesis. She claims that emotions are not isolated deeds or merely intense feelings (comprehended as things from outside which affect us) but that they are both, simultaneously (Simonsen, 2007:171). Responding to Merleau-Ponty and to his discussion of phenomenology she talks about 'affective space' as the state of mind in which we are at our most responsive to the world around us, a state of mind in which our emotions have the potential for public agency, precisely because they are relational (Simonsen, 2007:177). The ways in which Hydrofeminism has poetic resonance are explored more fully in Chapter Two (Methodologies as Practice) arguing that phenomenology itself sets a fertile ground for critical-creative enquiry precisely because of the emphasis upon affect and embodiment.

In Chapter Four (Bodies, Spaces, Practices) I explore the potential of experimental geography as a set of discourses that might help me to situate my practice. I actively sought to situate my creative practice within environmental humanities, mapping theoretical trajectories through feminisms, ecofeminisms and hydrofeminism. This is to locate that practice in a dynamic space where hybridity and mutation mark the work as methodologically specific. To this end, I have found the literatures of experimental geographies, and the geographies of creative practice, to be of particular use. It is useful because the reference to geography assists me in positioning my creative practice as environmentally focused, and the use of 'experimental' operates to foreground the speculative nature of my creative practice. The experiment in experimental

geography is mobilised as a strategy which foregrounds a critique of modes of thinking and interpretation, with space and with the production of space (Paglen, 2009), but also with ethics and with agency. These are two key trajectories within Hydrofeminism, expressed through reference to watery becomings. The experiment also serves to indicate some of the platforms within which my work has been shared with audiences and participants. These arguments are considered more closely in Chapter Two (Methodologies as Practice).

Figure 1*: Benthic Caress* (2017)

1.5: Introducing the Creative Practice

This research presents six works, of which three have been identified as primary works for examination, and the others as supplementary and exploratory. Three that have been situated in the city of Plymouth (UK): *Benthic Caress* (2017), *Hydrosapien* (2018) and *Manual for Nomads*, (2020) and three bodies of work undertaken in different geographic locations: *Interim* (2018), *Rhyne & Huish* (2017-19), *Field Notes* (2016 - 20). All the work is documented here: https://aquameteor.wordpress.com/

Two of the works, *Benthic Caress* (2017) and *Hydrosapien* (2018) were live events, and two of the works, *Interim* (2018) and *Rhyne & Huish* (2017 - 2019) were experiments in real time. Thus, what is presented here in relation to these works can only be documentation, a point that is further discussed in Chapter Two (Methodologies as Practice). Many of the works are films, or moving image works and ideally they would be viewed on a big screen, however, they are available to view on any connected devices.

1.5.1: Benthic Caress

Benthic Caress (2017) was a silent disco in the sea that brought audiences together to simultaneously experience, individually and intimately, ecoacoustic work by a range of international and regional artists that all pertained to the ocean. *Benthic Caress* (2017) sought to blur the distinctions between participants and audiences, art practice and curatorial practice, humans and non-humans. This blurring aimed to provide direct connection to the more-than-human others below the surface of the water. The silent disco technology provided an intimate listening experience in a group setting, and the wide range of ecoacoustic contributions took listeners on a journey, from the tidal pool itself, along the Dorset coast to Eype, further along the Kent coast to Dungeness, up to the glaciers of Iceland, then through the biospheres of USA, Mexico, and Australia, lingering in the coral reefs of the South China sea before returning the listener to the Cornish coast, via a collective memory of Welsh waters and a sojourn into the surreal world of the Wildlife Discotheque, returning the listener to the tidal pool, and to the present moment of their collective individuation.

Figure *2: Hydrosapien* (2018)

1.5.2: Hydrosapien

Hydrosapien (2018) was a performance of a paragraph directly taken from Hydrofeminism (Neimanis, 2012), hereafter referred to as The Ecotone Paragraph (see page 20 of this thesis). The performance was predicated upon a non-verbal presentation, using a Silent Choir and two experimental voice artists. The Silent Choir numbered about 100, and was made up of D/deaf and hearing people who had come together to learn the paragraph translated into British Sign Language (BSL). The voice artists and I workshopped the paragraph prior to the public performances, and as their role suggests, they used their voices to interpret the paragraph without recourse to words or spoken language. There were two public performances, which were part of Plymouth Art Weekender 2018, and the project constituted the Local Participation Commission, drawing support from Arts Council England. As an experiment in sonic boundaries, *Hydrosapien* (2018) sought to locate silence and noise, as two extreme articulations of a sonic experience; two ecosystems brought together, overlapping, imbricated, transitioning. The performance was intended to embody an *ecotone*: *As transition areas between two adjacent but different ecosystems.*

Figure *3: Manual for Nomads* (2020)

1.5.3: Manual for Nomads

Manual for Nomads (2020) is a moving image piece in which speech and its absence drives the narrative. The protagonist and significant members of the cast communicate through British Sign Language (BSL), placing an emphasis upon hand gestures and facial expressions central to the visual treatment of this film. The sound design relies upon an intimacy in which breathing, grunts, and whispers drive the story forward, within a context of the sounds of an ever-increasing severe weather environment, the weather itself being embedded and manipulated within the sound design. Where there is communication (in either BSL or speech) there are subtitles. Subtitles also run throughout the film in the guise of 'narrator' whose contribution is the weaving pattern of The Ecotone Paragraph all the way through the film. The main protagonist wears a cloak that is embroidered with the same Ecotone Paragraph as quoted above, translated into Braille. The use of these tools is explored further in Chapter Two (Methodologies as Practice). The narrative arc places watery becoming at the centre of the story. Shot in and around Plymouth ('The Ocean City') using professional cinematographers, sound designers and post-production specialists, *Manual for Nomads* (2020) is a step change in my practice. Where previously all my moving image work has been created using a mobile

phone and home editing software (yet still has been screened around the world) *Manual for Nomads* (2020) harnesses the power of high production values to draw viewers into its world.

1.6: Supporting Works

1.6.1: Rhyne & Huish (2017-2019)

Rhyne & Huish (2017-2019) is a title framing a body of experimental work that focused on the Somerset Levels as a specific location for thinking through hydrofeminism as a creative strategy. This body of work was undertaken over the course of two years and used the location to explore my research questions across a range of practices in an open-ended way. *Rhyne & Huish* (2017-2019) actively sought to experiment 'producing without guarantees' (Paglen, 2009) without the pressure of working towards finished outcomes. Much of the work was presented publicly, always as work-in-progress.

Figure 4: *Rhyne & Huish* – a huish waterlogged in a rhyne (2018)

A rhyne (pronounced reen) is a ditch or canal used to transform areas of wetland into pasture. Huish is a habitational name that may refer to small areas of woodland. It is also a surname, most commonly found in Somerset (it is hardly found at all anywhere else in the UK). The range of other work undertaken under the heading *Rhyne & Huish* (2017-2019) included group walks, and a series of drawings, which were exhibited at Space, Dartington, in 2019. One of the group walks did involve walking, whilst the other was a more playful use of the concept:

Thirteen (2019) was a participatory adventure that light-heartedly constituted the first (and only) Feminists' Guide to the Bridgewater and Somerset Canal, and brought together thirteen selected feminist artists and scholars on a barge, following the thirteen mile stretch of dislocated human-made waterway. The number 13 has layers of significance; 'Over the ditch' is a local expression meaning over the county border, and is a saying once used by witches (famously meeting in groups of thirteen, or a coven) in analogy of crossing over into the otherworldly realms. As we navigated 'the ditch' itself – the canal, we lingered in the liminal space between worlds, to explore, through conversation, whether the notion of hydrofeminism has significance for these contemporary wise women, and if so in what ways. The canal offered an accessible Rhyne in this context.

1.6.2: Interim

Interim (2018) is in an annual programme run by Srishti Institute of Art, Design and Technology in Bangalore. Every year, up to fifteen international artists are invited to take undergraduate students through a six-week immersive programme, designed by the artists to a specific theme. I led a particular Interim project through November and December 2018, and consider this short self-defined project as supporting work for thinking through hydrofeminism as a creative strategy.

My programme focussed upon the water crisis in Bangalore. For *Interim* the students and I explored this issue through field trips, studio work, seminars and presentations. We developed collaborative maps of the tanks, using our bodies as sensory data collectors. Tuning into non-visual sensory experience, we developed 'scores', to generate a 'legend' for these maps. We then 'pooled' our ideas onto large collaborative maps, requiring that we negotiate a shared space. These maps became the backdrop for a performance at the end of the studio.

Figure 5*: Interim* – an example of the students' collaborative maps (2018)

1.6.3: Field Notes (2016 - 20)

Field Notes (2016 - 20) is a title framing a body of experimental work using moving image (and sometimes sound) as the primary medium. There are twelve short films (all under five minutes long) in this collection, many of which have been screened in the public domain, in the UK, Europe and beyond, either at academic conferences or as part of wider arts festivals. All the work was produced using a mobile phone and the default editing software on my five-year-old PC. Whilst this approach is not 'lo-fi' it is focused on accessible technologies. I have used these technologies as a 'sketch book', and for this reason they are framed as *Field Notes* (2016 - 20): a strategy to capture immediate data specific to a time and place, positioned as provisional and indicative. Using moving image as a 'sketchbook' approach to experimenting with potential responses to my research questions allowed me to explore a range of responses to bodies of water, in a somewhat descriptive, observational way. I have not included them all on the website dedicated to this research, but have chosen to introduce two moving image pieces from the *Field Notes* (2016 - 20) collection: *Primordial* (2017) and *The Ascent of Woman* (2018).

1.7: The Puddle Again

This thesis extends hydrofeminism as a concept of becoming in three ways. It explores hydrofeminism in particular settings and shows that it is just not one static 'thing'. It does so by using elements of practice which open up some of the affective, material relations of watery becomings in particular places, and also, in doing so, does not seek to present replicable models of practice for future research but rather offers examples of practice that can be drawn upon in the future by others developing other forms of practice, in other situations.

In this chapter I have introduced the overall topic and intention of my research, the research questions and the bodies of practice which constitute the creative-critical elements of this practice-driven enquiry. I have introduced the complex concepts that are bound up within the term hydrofeminism, through recourse to a short lexicon, and shown that together these terms offer methodologies suitable for a scrutiny of the capacity for art practice to intervene in narratives which explore our connectedness to more-than-human others. I have also signalled that important aspects of my creative practice have included socially engaged projects with the D/deaf community, and have introduced the complex ethical considerations which are brought to bear by this collaboration. Alongside these specific ethical considerations is a recognition of the emphasis upon ethics within hydrofeminism and within posthumanism: themes which are investigated in Chapter Two (Methodologies as Practice) and Chapter Four (Bodies, Spaces, Practices). I have included a short introduction to the genealogy of my theoretical approach. I have signposted the usefulness of thinking through experimental and creative geographies when using transdisciplinarity as a methodology, and signposted the *ecotone* as a scaffold for thinking through my practice-led research. I have introduced the subsequent chapters in this thesis whilst introducing the main bodies of work presented as practice which this thesis supports. I have also told you a story about a puddle.

2: Methodologies as Practice

In this chapter the focus is upon how the practice was conceived, developed, produced and documented; it is about the tools, strategies and devices. Here I set out the range of methodologies employed and the rationale behind them.

Tools – such as sound, or moving image are considered for what they bring to each piece of work, and what they allow for in terms of presentation and reception.

Strategies – in particular research creation, are examined in relation to what they allow each work to do within the combined registers of practice and theory.

Devices – specifically the *ecotone*, are scrutinised for the ways in which they make space for new insights that the practice reveals.

2.1: Tools

As previously stated, 'natural' bodies of water have been the material signifiers across the bodies of creative work undertaken in this transdisciplinary research which has investigated hydrofeminism using a wide range of creative tools, many used more than once, in different projects, in different ways.

The term 'tools' is seemingly straightforward – an object which allows certain functions to be performed, such as a pen which allows you to write. However, whilst a tool does not intrinsically operate as a philosophy or a subjectivity, it holds within it narratives that pertain

to philosophies and subjectivities, narratives that are alluded to in its physical form (a fountain pen whose well-used nib suggests stories about the person writing with it). These insights are visible only through processes of consideration and reflection. The pen itself, when considered alongside a range of other writing tools, simply performs a series of well-rehearsed actions. In using the term 'tool' I am, in the first instance, referencing something which performs a series of well-rehearsed actions. Within that bracket there are production tools (the digital embroidery machine that was used in the creation of the Braille cloak is one example), methodological tools (repeated transcription of the Ecotone paragraph for example) and conceptual tools (the braille cloak itself alluding to codes and languages that are always partial and always open to misconception). In this way a tool can be both content (the cloak, the Ecotone Paragraph), understanding (the work these two tools undertake to present particular insights), a term for a practice (non-verbal communication), an action (such as sign language), but can also be applied as a tool (sign language that performs a series of well-rehearsed actions).

These tools are the physical components which shape how each work is crafted. They include sound/ecoacoustics, participation, performance, moving image, British Sign Language (BSL), Braille, drawing, walking, and mapping. Each tool is picked up for specific reasons, to create specific affects, environments and scaffolds for exploring the broader themes of hydrofeminism, transcorporeality, posthumanism and embodiment and these reasons are explained below as each tool is discussed.

Transcription is a repeated tool, and a process. It is understood here as the process of lifting a particular text or part of a text, and redeploying it in other contexts. The text I have transcribed is a short paragraph about *ecotones* that is situated within Hydrofeminism (Neimanis 2012).

This use of *ecotone* is explored in many parts of this thesis, and in particular in the next section of this chapter. It is a significant aspect of the methodologies employed in this research.

> As transition areas between two adjacent but different ecosystems, ecotones appear as both gradual shifts and abrupt demarcations. But more than just a marker of separation or even a marker of connection (although importantly both of these things), an ecotone is also a zone of fecundity, creativity, transformation; of becoming, assembling, multiplying; of diverging, differentiating, relinquishing. Something happens. Estuaries, tidal zones, wetlands: these are all liminal spaces where "two complex systems meet, embrace, clash, and transform one another." Eco: home. Tone: tension. We must learn to be at home in the quivering tension of the in-between. No other home is available. In-between nature and culture, in-between biology and philosophy, in-between the human and everything we ram ourselves up against, everything we desperately shield ourselves from, everything we throw ourselves into, wrecked and recklessly, watching, amazed, as our skins become thinner. (Neimanis, 2012:107)

2.1.1: BSL (British Sign Language)

The range of tools employed in the making of the works allowed for a complex traversing of different modes of communication; on occasion the same tools were used to uncover different messaging possibilities, and this is the case with the use of British Sign Language (BSL). Used across three distinct bodies of work: *Hydrosapien* (2018), *Interim* (2018) and *Manual for Nomads* (2020), each iteration had a discreet set of intentions.

Within *Hydrosapien* (2018), BSL operated as a visual spectacle, as an authentic communiqué with and by the D/deaf community, and as a duet with the experimental voice artists who shared the stage with the silent choir. As a visual spectacle in which, against the backdrop of their black clothing, the chorister's gloved hands stood out, the synchronised movement of 100 pairs of hands, en masse, appeared to me to echo the movement of water. As a method of engagement with the D/deaf community, the message – the Ecotone Paragraph – was adapted, in collaboration with the D/deaf members of the choir, to reflect the way that language is shared

amongst them using sign. This involved a degree of simplification and repetition, and these two adaptations also resulted in a visual coherence across the 30 minute long performances. As a duet with the experimental voice artists, BSL as delivered by the choir had a structure and repetition, in contrast to the voice work, despite both aspects working with and to the same material. In this sense, BSL was the counterpoint to the experimental voice work.

Interim (2018) resulted in a silent performance that incorporated BSL to explore the theme of watery relationality. Students on the Interim programme had viewed the videos from *Hydrosapien* (2018) and were intrigued by sign language, actively requesting to include it somehow in their final performance. The use of BSL not only reflected the fact that English was the students' shared language, but also BSL is much more developed that ISL (Indian Sign Language). BSL has a long history in the UK and was formally recognised as a language in its own right by the UK government in 2003. The launch of the first Indian Sign Language Dictionary was in 2018.

Online tutorials were already available from my laptop, as I had not deleted them following *Hydrosapien* (2018) (which occurred three months previously). The rationale for incorporating a small silent choir into the performance was to foreground the unheard voices of the more-than-human. In this repetition of the use of a tool, the intention was distinct from the rationale behind its use in *Hydrosapien* (2018) but related; both uses aimed broadly to draw audience's attention to our transcorporeal intra-relations within the hydrocommons. This was achieved for D/deaf audiences through the specific text that was signed, but also this intention was spelled out in the publicity for both bodies of work that occurred across social media. Audience

feedback for *Interim* (2018) demonstrated that this intention was clear within the presentation of the work.

Within *Manual for Nomads* (2020), all the characters besides the Commodore communicate through BSL. The tool is used here to convey the sense that all these characters lack access to the dominant language of those who hold power, seemingly the power to engender change. However, this hierarchy is undercut in two ways – firstly in the Commodore's disintegration into a lost and desperate soul as the film progresses, and secondly, through the realisation by Ellen (the protagonist) that being part of a community can engender change. My critical enquiries included a query around the possibility for creative practice that is focused upon marginalised voices to intervene in dominant discourses around issues foregrounded by the climate crisis. The D/deaf communities are indeed marginalised (Khalifa, 2020) and when embodied by the characters presented in *Manual for Nomads* (2020) can be said to advocate for other marginalised voices, of humans in particular.

A seemingly related tool, used only once, is Braille, which is used to convey the eureka moment in *Manual for Nomads* (2020). This is the revelation that the protagonist experiences which allows her to understand that being part of a community can engender change. Braille is the 'key' that unlocks the possibility for positive action by the protagonist Ellen. BSL and Braille are related in the sense that they are modes of communication that do not rely on speech. However, drawing and hugging, for example, also do not depend on speech. It is more that both BSL and Braille are languages associated with disability, and in seeking to amplify marginalised voices these two tools operate as conceptual signs, drawing the attention of audiences to this ethical consideration.

2.1.2: Moving Image

Moving image (film/video) is a tool employed through *Field Notes* (2016 - 2020) and through *Manual for Nomads* (2020). In purely technical terms, *Field Notes* (2016 - 2020) – a collection of filmic sketches – operate as preliminary work for the more technically proficient *Manual for Nomads* (2020). However, the narratives within the various works within *Field Notes* (2016 - 2020) are abstracted and relatively obscure, and in this sense they genuinely are notational. This contrasts with *Manual for Nomads* (2020), in which the narrative mostly follows a conventional strategy to tell a relatively straight forward story. It could be argued that the ways in which the Commodore scenes 'interrupt' the narrative flow does undermine this conventional approach, and this is done intentionally. However, *Manual for Nomads* (2020) is not notational, it is 'worked up'.

2.1.3: Walking

Drawing, walking and mapping are combined tools used extensively within *Interim* (2018) and *Rhyne & Huish* (2017-2019) and share with *Field Notes* (2016 - 2020) a notational quality. It is precisely this notational quality that has led me to situate these three bodies of work as 'supporting works' across this research. Of course, walking–is a discipline in its own right, generating a wide ranging set of discourses and debates, often in relation to psychogeography. Psychogeography describes the effect of a geographical location on the emotions and behaviour of individuals (O'Rourke, 2021). Key thinkers that are often cited as foundational in the creation of this canon include Baudelaire (1863), Walter Benjamin (trans. 2006), Guy Debord (1956), Michel de Certeau (1984), Phil Smith (2010). Rebecca Solnit has also written often on walking, and in *Wanderlust* (2000) she tracks the overlap between walking, culture and politics, including a chapter dedicated to women protesting for the right to wander on equal

terms with men. There are many more contemporary interruptions to this predominantly masculine and ableist canon, some of which are highlighted in Chapter Three (Communities of Practice). Here, I offer a brief introduction to this lively set of interventions.

The artist Morag Rose initiated the Loiterers Resistance Movement (The LRM, 2006 - ongoing) a Manchester based collective engaging in psychogeography as a way of interrogating public space and the hidden stories of the city. Rose's work sits firmly at the intersections of art, activism and disability. The Walking Artists Network, was established by artists Clare Qualman, Viv Corringham, Clive A Brandon, Melissa Bliss (2014), and the members of Walk Walk Walk. From 2012-2015 Qualman led an AHRC funded project to extend the network internationally. Viv Corringham's practice explicitly uses walking as a methodology to produce sound works. Other Walking artists whose work intervenes on the universalising practices inherent in the male writers cited above include Dee Heddon, whose most recent work *Women Walking Towards Women and for Women* (2021) was undertaken to mark International Women's Day, Ursula Troche, whose work *Crossings: Walking as a Migrant* (2021) explored our relationship with place as an openly complex set of situations and encounters, in a contested context. *Her Body Keeps Moving* (2021) by Laurie Thornton seeks to disrupt patriarchal notions of space and womanhood. The artist Helen Billinghurst often collaborates with Phil Smith as *Crab and Bee*, and together they are currently fusing magic realism and myth to extract 'trixxy' stories from their walking practice. Billinghurst's previous work explored the intersection between studio practice and aesthetic walking.

Walking, as an art form and a methodology, encompasses overlapping and disparate discourses across a very wide range of concerns and insights, as these examples above demonstrate. In my

own practice I did not employ these tools as a strategy for taking part in all of these many discourses, so much as to explore and experiment with that aspect of walking which concerns itself with embodiment.

> Embodied accounts of walking research have demonstrated the importance of individual accounts of the lived experience of walking, an attention to a relational-social mode of moving collectively and civically, and an emplaced, haptic, and affective understanding of movement. (Springgay & Truman, 2017:4)

The tools of drawing, walking and mapping were employed as part of a speculative enquiry into embodiment in relation to location, and as such formed a very small part of the overarching creative enquiry into hydrofeminism.

2.1.4: Performance and Participation

Performance and participation are also tools used within the creative practice, mostly in tandem with each other, but sometimes not. The instance where participation is not consciously performative is in the experience of *Benthic Caress* (2017) where simply turning up was enough to participate. It is in *Hydrosapien* (2018) that performance and participation come together most notably (all choir members were self-electing volunteers) and in *Manual for Nomads* (2020), though to a lesser extent (all the actors were paid).

Participation as a tool within *Hydrosapien* (2018) could be said to represent social engagement – a creative practice that draws on pedagogy and social science (Gray, 2015) to inform its ethical underpinning. It is a popular term with arts funders, whose remit is to demonstrate their funds are spent well and are used to reach out to communities, notably those communities who are perceived as being 'hard to reach'. Personal experience of working with the D/deaf

community suggests they do not consider themselves hard to reach, so much as (until recently) entirely ignored (Salisbury, 2015). The D/deaf community, as far as funders are concerned, has historically fallen through the cracks, seemingly invisible to arts and cultural institutions. However, certainly over the course of this research, artistic and cultural institutions have gone further in acknowledging and embedding inclusivity and diversity across all their practices, from inclusion on board membership through to targeted marketing strategies, and including D/deaf and Disabled artists within their understanding of 'who is an artist', rather than solely positioning D/deaf and disabled people as audiences. (D/deaf and disabled artists are considered more closely in Chapter Three – Communities of Practice).

Participation in regard to *Hydrosapien* (2018) was a strategy for massing together 100 people to present a performance. This motivation for using participation as a creative tool was to enable the creation of a large choir, for visual impact, as an aesthetic. My experience of participation as a creative tool was that the possibilities for collaboration it engendered helped shaped the project in ways that allowed for a sense of ownership by all involved. This insight also necessitated a certain letting go by me. Plainly then, participation requires compromise, not of the overarching premise of the work, but in the ways a group of people arrive at the presentation of that premise.

2.1.5: Sound

Sound – sonic compositions –are important tools in the three main bodies of practice presented alongside this thesis: *Benthic Caress* (2017), *Hydrosapien* (2018), and *Manual for Nomads* (2020). Sound is also a recurring tool in the three supporting projects that formed part of the process *Interim* (Bangalore), *Rhyne & Huish* (Avalon Marshes) and *Field Notes* (various

locations). Sound and ecoacoustics are explored in detail, especially in relation to the work of Leah Barclay, in Chapter Three: Communities of Practice. However, as tools, the sonic compositions within this research merit further consideration.

Just as there are many terms within the visual arts which highlight a relationship to and with the natural world, there are a number of terms proliferating within the Sound Art communities aimed at framing this focus also. Gilmurray (2017) argues for the term Ecological Sound Art, Barclay (2020) and others use the term 'Acoustic Ecology'. Other terms used include Soundscape Ecology (Krause et al 2011), and Ecoacoustics. All these terms, however, signpost an engagement with the natural world through sound, and many artists worldwide are making this engagement without getting too caught up in terms. The differences articulated through these terms are at best nuanced, but mostly very minor. A common feature across these genres (or sub-genres) is the creation of work which offers the possibility of heightened awareness and personal connection to aspects of environmental life. Where these works excel is in providing a 'sonic window into the underwater ecosystems which exist largely independently of human beings, encouraging our awareness and respect, and reminding us that we are not the centre of the universe' (Gilmurray, 2017:36).

Gilmurray draws on Morton (2017:37) to consider our interrelations with more-than-human others, and cites Morton's term 'meshing'. Both draw upon Ingold (2007) to frame these relations in this way. However, as Springgay and Truman point out, these relations are more muddled and chaotic than these theorisations suppose.

> Whereas some theories of embodiment propose an understanding of an individual and undivided self (Ingold, 2011), transcorporeality posits humans and non-humans as enmeshed with each other in a messy, shifting ontology. Transcorporeality cleaves the

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nature–culture divide and asserts that bodies do not pre-exist their comings together but are materialized in and through intra-action. (2017:3)

The sound theorist Salomé Voegelin draws our attention to the dynamic aspect of ecoacoustics (my preferred term). She identifies the difference between what is, and what is happening, and it is this difference which is dynamic (2014:162). Voegelin foregrounds the pluralities, multiplicities and mobilities that can be heard within this dynamic, stating that this sonic experience positions the listener as a posthumanist subject 'who lives in equivalence and reciprocity with her environment and understands her role as one of responsibility instead of superiority' (Voegelin 2014:141). Sound, as a tool within my creative practice then, serves to transport the listener into the sensory space where such a transformation might be possible, it seeks to facilitate the possibility for a transcorporeal experience, an embodied immersion in the watery relations that are so central to an understanding of hydrofeminism.

> Sound slices through the visual frame and organisation to propose others: temporary, invisible, and ephemeral re-framings that demand our participation and re-frame the listener also. (Voegelin 2014:22)

2.2: Strategies

2.2.1: Research Creation

> Research-creation generates new forms of experience; it situates what often seem like disparate practices, giving them a conduit for collective expression; it hesitantly acknowledges that normative modes of inquiry and containment often are incapable of assessing its value; it generates forms of knowledge that are extra-linguistic. (Manning, 2016)

Research-creation can be described as the complex intersection of art practice, theoretical concepts, and research. It is a particular set of perspectives on the inter-relations between

practice, theory and research, and has informed my approach and understanding of how to think about methodology since I first came across the term in 2018, at a keynote lecture given by Natalie Loveless, Associate Professor at Alberta University, at the GALA conference hosted by Concordia University, Montreal. Loveless has continued to develop work centred on research creation since 2010, with her latest publication 'How to Make Art at the End of the World: A Manifesto for Research-Creation' (2019). Research creation is framed as a scholarly activity that understands art practices to be research methods in their own right. Loveless advocates for creative experimentation, especially within the Academy, as a strategy for infusing and embedding pedagogy and politics with a sustainable and responsive model for social and ecological justice. Other writers who have developed work around the concept of research-creation include Erin Manning (2016), Springgay and Truman, (2014, 2018) and Zaliwska (2016). Interestingly, all these writers are based in Canada, and would seem to represent a geographically specific zeitgeist which is beginning to impact upon the arts and humanities in the wider world.

There are of course, other approaches that allow artists to explore the relationships between creative practice and research methodologies, and a brief overview of some of the significant contributions to this discussion are outlined below. MacLeod and Holdridge (2005) undertook an early study of artists engaged in doctoral research, which has been pivotal for many artist-researchers seeking to position themselves and their practice within universities and research centres. MacLeod and Holdridge identified three relatively mobile and often overlapping categories of approach or position: Type A engages in research to reinvigorate or provoke a step-change in their practice by exploring theoretical insights that are new to them; Type B already works in academia and is pursuing a more rigorous theorization and methodological engagement to their practice; Type C is an artist seeking to illuminate novel aspects of their

practice through an alternating poised and counter-poised process of art-making and writing. However, the terrain of academia, for artist-researchers as well as all those working within the Humanities in the UK has changed greatly in the subsequent years since MacLeod and Holdridge (2005) categorised the various approaches. Artists undertaking doctoral research are no longer novel, and institutions and artists alike have grown and adapted to meet these changes and challenges. Perhaps this approach of categorisation is also no longer viable, when one considers geographers who bring creative practice into their research, for example: Henni Mirjami Lantto's (2019) creative exploration of fluvial geosemiotics, including her photo essay on the San Pedro river archive, or artists undertaking their research within science-based disciplines, for instance Sonia Levy's work with a team of marine biologists in the development of *For the Love of Corals* (2018).

A seminal text for artists undertaking doctoral research through practice is *Practice as Research* (Bartlett & Bolt 2007). This book has been updated a number of times and remains a foundational text in this discipline. There is an emphasis upon ways to 'prove' within the sphere of the Academy that one's practice constitutes research at doctoral level.

Estelle Bartlett (2004) continues to explore the relationship between artistic research and practice. Bartlett draws on the 'meme' as a lens through which to articulate the inter-relationship between theory and practice. She is clear that the cultural artefact is not a meme. However, she makes the point that a cultural artefact is 'a vehicle by which the meme, an idea or internal representation is externalised' (2004:2). Bartlett then positions the artist/researchers' thesis as a 're-versioning' of the practice and a reflective discourse on important aspects of the process of 'unfolding and revealing'. However, reflection on a process that takes place within academia and is therefore consciously married to a theoretical

excavation of contextual material is more than a process of unfolding and revealing – the artist-researcher understands, explicitly, the tangled relationship between their reading and their making, rendering the notion of a revelation no longer as pertinent is it was when this article was written.

What remains true is that the thesis is where the artist-researcher explains why and how the specific processes they undertook within the context of doctoral research have generated new contributions to knowledge. Whilst it was never the case that the unique and subjective creative outputs alone constitute new contributions to knowledge, it is now firmly understood that creative practice can and does generate novel insights that have impact beyond an artist's own oeuvre. When Bartlett and Bolt first wrote 'Practice as Research' in 2007 this was not widely accepted.

Suze Adams (2014) gives clarity to a broadly accepted understanding of what constitutes practice-led research: 'the active exploration of critical concepts in practice: a process that draws on phenomenological experience as well as conceptual understanding, a process continually open to question, re-negotiation, re-interpretation and ultimately re-presentation' (2014:1). Practice is situated as a critical and creative developmental tool – one which cannot and does not claim to offer any predetermined outcome. Instead, practice is articulated as the vehicle through which to experiment and interrogate embodied insights, and to critique the capabilities of trans-disciplinary methodologies alongside and in dialogue with the theoretical concepts which underpin them.

Adams also references her focus on the work of Nigel Thrift, a human geographer renowned for his work on non-representational theory. Thrift articulates non-representational theory as a

tool which allows us to engage in the imperative to shift our gaze so that we might comprehend the dynamism of embodied experience. He invites us to 'undo what we think of as theory' so that we might engage with the vitality of embodied knowledge alongside theoretical abstraction, asserting that non-representational theory stems from 'the simple [. . .] observation that we cannot extract a representation of the world because we are slap bang in the middle of it' (Thrift, 1999: 296–297). Thrift is clearly writing from within geography as a discipline and a discourse, not directly referencing creative arts practice. However, these insights offer a steppingstone into what is now understood, through and from quite different discourses, as research creation.

Research creation can be understood as the matrix within which art practice, theoretical concepts, and research imbricate and infuse each other. It is an experimental practice that cannot be anticipated or predicted in advance. It is a trans-disciplinary and hybrid form of artistic practice which is informed by other discourses, for instance the environmental humanities. Research creation is attentive to process. I believe that in positioning my research journey within the framing of research creation I am better able to tell the truth of that journey than if it remained framed by the term 'practice-led'. This more conventional term suggests a linear progression through the processes required to develop a body of creative practice in response to the research questions. The processes are far from linear, the relationship between practice, theory and research is not one of cause and effect. Yet they are no less apposite or pertinent because of this. Therefore, the strategy of positioning my methodologies within research creation is appropriate.

Embodiment and affect are two intra-related terms that this research also focuses upon. Considering these phenomena through the lens of research creation offers further insight into the ways in which creative practices are well placed to explore and experiment with them.

> A focus on affect shifts the perception of a body as a bounded entity to bodies as assemblages and processes where movement, choreography and time play active roles in the differential relations that 'reveal the imperceptible dynamism of matter' (Blackman, 2012:5). Instead of perpetuating an idea of art as separate from thinking, the hyphenation of research creation engenders 'concepts in-the-making' which is a process of 'thinking-with and across techniques of creative practice. (Manning and Massumi, 2014:88–9)

As a speculative practice, research creation invents tools, strategies and devices that foreground relations. Erin Manning (2014) has put together 'Ten Propositions for Research Creation' which place research creation at the heart of thinking and working through ethical approaches to creative engagements with a transcorporeal understanding of the world. Thinking about these propositions through the prism of worlding (Barad's general assertion that 'relata do not pre-exist relations' (2003: 136–7)) the usefulness of research creation when scrutinising and responding to hydrofeminism is clearly visible. By this I mean that research creation as a set of intentions uncover the potential for Neimanis's 'watery relations in the hydrocommons' to propel creative practice into affective space within these discourses, beyond illustration or data-visualisation. Research creation allows creative practices to be part of the world created by these discourses, not simply a reflection of it.

> A challenge of writing and thinking-with more-than-human methodologies, and their experimental, material practices, is how to attend to their fleeting, viral, multiple, and affective intensities without reducing walking and art projects to mere background. (Springgay & Truman, 2016:262)

Research creation also usefully provides a bridge between my own insistence upon an art practice that is transdisciplinary, and an art practice that engages with transcorporeality. As

Alaimo (2012) makes clear, transcorporeality undermines any investment in human exceptionalism, not least because the 'trans' in 'transcorporeality' is focused upon assemblage, affect, movement and intensity, making the notion of an atomised and individuated self uncomfortable and impossible. Similarly, an art practice predicated upon transdisciplinarity is better able to engage with assemblage, affect, movement and intensity as a means to engage with hydrofeminism, posthumanism and transcorporeality - all discourses which foreground embodiment.

In relation to my practice, *Benthic Caress* (2017) could be said to offer participants the most direct experience of embodiment, and generated an opportunity for understanding 'worlding' from an embodied perspective; standing in the waters of the Atlantic Ocean listening to sonic creations focused upon marine life, participants were given an active role in that specific instance of 'worlding'. In this way *Benthic Caress* (2017) was an articulation of research creation.

> This threshold is 'at the interface or intersection of self and other, material and immaterial, human and non-human, inside and outside, such that processes which might be designated psychological (are) always trans-subjective, shared, collective, mediated, and always extending bodies beyond themselves' (Blackman, 2012:23). It is this porosity or mediation between bodies, movement, affect, and place that trans theories add to embodiment and walking. (Springgay & Truman, 2017:12)

To summarise, framing my practice as research creation generated new forms of experience which were extra-linguistic and speculative. Questions emerged out of the practice which gave space for complication and nuance, and which led to the development of the *ecotone* as a device in further work. (The *ecotone* is explored in the next section). Research creation is useful in thinking through and articulating through practice the related notions of embodiment and affect, and in generating specific and dynamic articulations of transcorporeality, thus research

creation is an effective methodology when thinking about developing a hydrofeminist art practice attuned to bodies, spaces and practices.

2.3: Devices

2.3.1: Ecotones (and ecotone as methodology)

I place the concept of an *ecotone* within the context of a transdisciplinary arts practice, with the aim of opening up the term, and the arts practice, to new understandings that can challenge conventional ways of thinking about people, place and sensation. In this section I explore the uses of this paragraph, and the impact and potential for thinking through my work, and in thinking through watery becoming, through the prism of an *ecotone*. Within my practice the term *ecotone* has been given a flexibility, to allow for an expansion of practice, conceptually and creatively. I use it as a noun, to explore conceptual possibilities (such as intra-active becoming) and I use it creatively, in the materiality of the artwork (film, performance and so forth). I also use the *ecotone* as a verb – a move that allows the process of making the work and the methodology it uses to become ecotonic. The term *ecotone* also operates as a pronoun where it performs the function of a 'character' within *Manual for Nomads* (2020) (the character of the narrator, present as subtitles). I believe that affect-as-*ecotone* is another prism through which to make sense of embodiment, and I believe that *ecotone*-as-methodology highlights embodiment as a strategy for having agency within the world. The *ecotone* serves as a complex metaphor for Alaimo's notion of 'intra-active becoming'. These insights are explored in detail in Chapter Four - Bodies, Spaces, Practices, which draws out the relationships between the creative practice and theoretical perspectives.

In the mobilisation of the *ecotone*, from ecological attribute to creative metaphor, particularly within *Hydrosapien* (2018) which harnessed the impact of BSL, articulated in text with the aid of grammatical structures, I have presented the shaping of silence as a text that could be read. This has been achieved by re-presenting the actual communicative ability of BSL within an artwork that performed Hydrofeminism (the essay) into words, presented in this thesis. This manoeuvre is mirrored by the presentation of Hydrofeminism as a performance of vocal sounds, unanchored from linguistics.

Gosz's (1993) text 'Ecotone Hierarchies' is often cited to highlight the ecological framing of the term *ecotone*. The language employed in Gosz's text highlights parallels within the formation of the subject, intra-subject relations and intra-active relations within a transcorporeal understanding of the world, and is therefore referred to often.

An *ecotone* is of course an ecological term, a transition area between two biomes. It is where two communities meet and integrate. We increasingly find the term slipping beyond the languages of Earth Sciences and popping up across the Humanities over the last five years or so, from disciplines such a poetry and sound studies, and of course into the broad range of work that goes on under the title 'Environmental Humanities'. In their essay 'Ecotones: Encounters, Crossings, and Communities' Lacroix et al state that 'an "ecotone" may also indicate a place where two communities meet, at times creolizing or germinating into a new community' (Lacroix et al 2014).

Within this research I use the *ecotone* as a device. I have used it obliquely (as in *The Ascent of Woman* (2018)), but also explicitly, most especially in *Hydrosapien* (2018) and in *Manual for*

Nomads (2020). In *The Ascent of Woman* (2018), the *ecotone* as a physical location is used but only referenced visually, in the fact that the protagonist is literally rolling around within an *ecotone*, and sonically, as the sounds of water, a human, some cows and some tadpoles combine to create a unique and imbricated sound track. However, it is also the case that the human figure within the film embodies an ecotonic becoming in her transition from her watery environment to her newly found terra firma.

Within *Hydrosapien* (2018), both the choir and the voice artists 'recite' the paragraph from the essay Hydrofeminism (2012) that speaks directly about *ecotones*. In *Manual for Nomads* (2020), this same text is embroidered (in Braille) upon the cloak of the protagonist, whilst the paragraph also moves across the screen in the form of a subtitled narration.

Hydrosapien (2018), embodied ecotonality in three ways: through the bringing of D/deaf and Hearing people together to create a third, unique entity – a Silent Choir; through a muddying of the distinctions between noise and silence; and through shifting the concept of an *ecotone* from physical entity to methodology. An important aspect of my methodology is the experiment, pursued as a means of finding ways to articulate critical thinking and affective response. Kullman (2013) states that the very articulation of experiment is an intrinsic re-thinking of the idea of method – as in methodology – a view which underpins my insight that the methodologies employed in my art practice hinge upon an approach to experimentation which can be understood as ecotonic.

Thinking about the ways in which sound and its absences – as exemplified by the use of BSL in *Hydrosapien* (2018) – can foreground complex issues around who is speaking for whom (or

from where do we speak?), the notion of the *ecotone* again has potential. It muddies the notion that activism is defined as protest, when in fact forms of community collaboration that 'stay with the trouble' (Haraway 2016) also operate as activisms. The Canadian sound artist Andra McCartney (2014) considers ethical questions about working with soundscapes, and draws upon ecotonality as a metaphor for asking difficult questions about what 'belongs' to a soundscape, what are the ecologies of sound? She reminds us that 'Ecotones are particularly full of life and danger' and continues:

> What would it mean to listen for the characteristics of ecotonality in a soundscape rather than searching for single clear signals devoid of problematic noise? Instead of banishing sounds that overlap and rub up against each other, what would it mean to pay attention to how sounds overlap, in whatever context? (Andra McCartney, 2014)

This inclusion and acceptance of the 'noise' that occurred outside of the choreographed aspects of *Hydrosapien* (2018): the grunting, slapping of gloved hand against gloved hand amplified an intentionality embedded in the performance.

Central to the articulation of my practice as experimental geography is the foregrounding of the *ecotone* as a device. This insight results from thinking of an *ecotone* as a noun, as well as an ecological feature. *Ecotone* operates as a noun when describing the artworks, the performances, the materials and concepts. Then, as a performance, *ecotone* becomes a verb: the process, the methodology. In considering the work in these ways, framing Methodologies as Practice (the title of this chapter) becomes clear.

Manual for Nomads (2020) fuses aspects of Hydrofeminism and experimental geography in its intention to embody ecotone-as-affect. It does this in a number of complex ways. In broad

terms, the film's overarching themes are concerned with knowledge production, power, communication, and community, in relation to responses to the effects of climate change. It is the most narratively explicit work I have created to date. However, in exploring ecotone-as-affect in relation to embodiment, I believe the film carries this theme in implicit ways.

> Yet our bodies are neither stagnant, nor separate, nor zipped up in some kind of impermeable sac of skin. These bodies are rather deeply imbricated in the intricate movements of water that create and sustain life on our planet. We all feel these movements viscerally, in the superabundance, acute paucity, or mere banality of the rain, sleet, snow that dominate our weather reports. (Neimanis, 2017:65)

I am advancing ecotone-as-affect as another way of articulating embodiment, and I am advancing ecotone-as-methodology, foregrounding embodiment as a way of moving with agency within the world. It is appropriate that Ellen, the protagonist in *Manual for Nomads* (2020), comes to understand the power of community, and her place in it, through touch, when she realises that the braille embroidered onto her cape is a coded message which validates emotional responses as both affective and effective. This panel of embroidery uses a tactile language to translate most of the paragraph within the essay Hydrofeminism that concerns itself with *ecotones*.

In this section I have closely scrutinised the impact of the concept of the *ecotone* across my practice, demonstrating that in liberating the term from its grammatical position as a noun that describes a physical phenomenon, it can carry multiple meanings and offer new insights into embodiment and affect. The term, freed in this way, also shifts the potential of a methodology from being the scaffold around which ideas are pursued, towards a dynamic and responsive strategy that can harness the power of experimentation within creative practice.

2.4: Conception, Development Production, Documentation and Ethical considerations – The Practice

The title of the research project: *Hydrofeminism – bodies, spaces, practices* makes clear that the focus is a creative enquiry into hydrofeminism – a theoretical premise introduced into discourse by Astrida Neimanis in 2012, in her essay of the same name. In this essay, Neimanis claims that water connects human and non-human beings across physical, emotional and metaphorical boundaries, and proposes watery relationality as a connection between bodies of difference. Neimanis explores the entanglements between subjects, objects, species, ecologies and ideas. By using the concept of the *ecotone* as a lever, Neimanis identifies difference as that which connects us, a reflection borne of her radical enquiries around ethics and difference (2012:87).

There are two ways in which ethics are centred through this thesis and within the creative practice: firstly, in Neimanis' emphasis upon a watery ethics as key to Hydrofeminism, identified as difference and connectivity. Ethics, articulated in this way, provide me with a scaffold for considering our interspecies relations. This set of motivations and the methods involved in articulating them through creative practice, leads into the second way in which ethics are investigated and understood within this work: working with the D/deaf community, as a hearing artist, carries with it ethical considerations. As socially engaged projects, both *Hydrosapien* (2018), and *Manual for Nomads* (2020) brought participants into the creation of the work and in doing so foregrounded the social model of disability – that people are disabled by barriers in society, not by their difference. The social model helps to understand Neimanis's use of ethics within Hydrofeminism (2012), in which difference is seen to be a shared experience even though our particular difference might be unique. This collective experience of difference connects us, and has the capacity to engender a relationality that can impact

positively on bodies, spaces and practices. This approach rejects the pathological or medical model of deafness (and disabilities more generally) as that which deviates from the norm. Historically dominant, the pathological model is bound up with problematic attitudes which negatively affect many people, marginalising the voices of many. Parallels can also be drawn across the historical politics of race and gender, where the 'norm' is the white, Western male. Gruesome historical accounts of the pathologising of femininity and of blackness are not difficult to find. Further, this problematic model can be seen to have parallels with historical abuses of environments and of non-human species, especially when considered through the lens of evolutionary theories expounded by Descartes and others who denied speech, language, rationality and consciousness to animals (Allen, Colin & Trestman, 2020:3). The themes of relationality across difference are explored in detail throughout this thesis.

In this section I document and reflect upon the practice-based, aesthetic, artistic and ethical decision-making that shaped the three main bodies of work: *Benthic Caress* (2017), *Hydrosapien* (2018) and *Manual for Nomads* (2020). Significantly, I consider the ways in which each piece was documented, the rationale for those methods of documentation, and the impact of these documentary processes. For each primary body of work I also explain the processes I undertook to ensure that the individual projects met ethical guidelines. Analyses of how these individual works articulated my research questions are presented in Chapter Four (Bodies, Spaces, Practices) and Chapter Five (Conclusion).

Figure 6: Tidal Pool, Devil's Point, Plymouth (2020)

2.4.1: Benthic Caress

2.4.1.1: Conception

The site where *Benthic Caress* (2017) was hosted is exceptional – a rectangular pool jutting out into Plymouth Sound, with Drakes Island just beyond it, and the ocean horizon framed by the ubiquitous presence of massive naval ships. Upon seeing it for the first time I felt compelled to devise a creative response to this remarkable feature in the land/sea scape. Its physical position is precisely that of an *ecotone*. It took some months for me to identify the right idea to take forward, but eventually I struck upon the notion that the silent disco concept could be re-purposed and re-sited, to coincide with Plymouth Art Weekender 2017. Despite not choosing to offer listeners dance music, thus thwarting the expectation of a disco soundtrack, one of the contributors to the soundtrack were called 'Wildlife Discotheque' – a trio of experimental artists working with sounds from the natural world. I consider the contributors to *Benthic Caress* (2017) and the significance of curation as a methodology further in this section. However, in terms of conception, it seemed obvious to me that the soundtrack needed to marry the shore to the sea so that viewers felt part of the expanse of ocean in front of them. I had, for some years, hosted a monthly show on Soundart Radio called *Sonic Drawings* which explicitly

broadcasted ecoacoustic compositions from a wide range of practitioners, and so I was already within that world. The opportunity to host an edition of *Sonic Drawings* as a live art experience elevated these monthly broadcasts onto a different platform. *Sonic Drawings*, started in 2014, acted as a form of dynamic literature review though I was not conscious of this at the time.

2.4.1.2: Development

The pragmatics and logistics involved in the development of *Benthic Caress* (2017) are explored in detail in Chapter Four, in the broader context of reflection and interrogation of the work. *Benthic Caress* (2017) was my first foray into live art in a public space. Therefore the logistics presented a considerable learning curve and were particularly time-consuming. The concept was simple, the production (discussed below) was straight forward, and the event itself went entirely according to plan.

2.4.1.3: Production

The production of *Benthic Caress* (2017) hinged upon curation of sound works selected by open call. Curation as an element of practice is an approach I have used on a number of occasions. Curation as a medium of artistic practice has a long history and the hybrid role of artist-curator works to develop creative practices, research methodologies and critical strategies, including those of Bal (2012), Crisci-Richardson (2012) and Jeffery (2015). Jeffery positions artists' curation as a creative praxis that blurs disciplinary boundaries (2015:7). It is within these frames of reference that I have brought curation into my practice –initially as producer of *Sonic Drawings*, the monthly broadcast of Soundart Radio I hosted between 2014 and 2017. Each broadcast had included some of my own compositions. I had also engaged in curation through Fringe Arts Bath, in 2016 with *Liquid*, and in 2017 with *Primal Soup*, both

hosted at Cleveland Pools in Bath in June of each year. *Liquid* brought together artists using sound and moving image from Budapest and SW England, all working to watery themes. I had completed a residency at Arts Quarter Budapest the year before, focusing on geothermal pools, and used this connection to bring these artists together, through open calls in both countries. The show toured to Budapest the following year. *Primal Soup* focused more specifically on work that considered inter-species relations with aquatic life. Again, the selected works came from an open call and predominantly used sound and moving image to explore these themes.

Therefore, I brought to *Benthic Caress* (2017) considerable experience of curating, producing and presenting sound works with an emphasis upon ecologically focused watery relations. I was familiar with the material of most people working in the UK in this sphere, and invited three sound artists with an international profile to headline the eventual sound track – Chris Watson, Jez Riley French and Leah Barclay. Through the impressive marketing machine of Plymouth Art Weekender and through *Sonic Drawings* radio broadcasts, social media and other platforms I generated a call out for artists in the SW to contribute work, through a selection process. I selected work that had a clear emphasis upon ecoacoustics (in preference to more machinistic or musical compositions). I sought to generate a sixty minute sound track and this framework was easily fulfilled. I sought to broaden the audiences for SW artists – by including internationally renowned sound artists in the programme.

2.4.1.4: Documentation

Because I conceived of *Benthic Caress* (2017) as a live art experience in the public domain, and perhaps because this was the first time I had undertaken work of this nature and scale, I overlooked the opportunity to document it properly – by which I mean commissioning a professional photographer.

On the day, documentation was undertaken by myself with my mobile phone. I had asked for and been granted the permission of each attendee as they entered the site. Once I had pressed 'play' on the silent disco set-up I was free to move around and mingle with participants, and I was also wearing the necessary headphones (not least so that I could trouble-shoot if necessary). This approach had benefits. Very quickly it became apparent that participants were 'lost' to the experience and not bothered by my roaming documentary activities. I was with the participants inside the experience and better placed to witness and record their embodied response to the work as a consequence. I used stills and video, and later edited them into a short video using excerpts from the curated soundtrack. It can be viewed here: https://aquameteor.wordpress.com/benthic-caress/

2.4.1.5: Ethics

Benthic Caress (2017) was wholly developed and delivered by myself. I liaised with Plymouth City Council for use of the site – completing risk assessments and a method statement (see Appendix). The data collected through this curatorial endeavour consisted of the name and contact details of the artists. I also asked for a short description of each piece of work, and a 50 word bio, from each artist. I kept the contact details on my home PC for communication purposes, whilst the other details formed the substance of the programme that was given to participants, to guide them through the listening experience and to help them identify which artist made which piece. This information is not used in my academic work.

A tidal pool is (usually) a man-made pool which fills up with each high tide. Because the tide is high twice in any twenty-four hour period, the water is refreshed and does not become

stagnant. The event was scheduled to occur at low tide. However, to conform to Health and Safety requirements, I liaised with Plymouth City Council to empty the pool an hour prior to the event (it has a massive plug which they unlocked. They also swept the pool of debris – seaweed and small stones).

The event incurred costs, which led me to decide to sell tickets through a designated Crowdfunding platform. Crowdfunding works by inviting individuals to make 'pledges' (payments) in return for 'gifts' (tickets). In this way, the audience was self-selecting. I was able to access Plymouth City Councils' City Change Fund, which pledges 50% of a target for each project, once that project reaches 25% of its target. As an online platform, payment mechanisms are built in. I did not have access to the personal contact details or the financial details of those who participated as these are managed by the platform. I had only their names, and the amount of tickets purchased. This data remains with the Crowdfunder site https://www.crowdfunder.co.uk/funds/plymouth-city-change

At the time of the event (September 2017) I was aware that the work would form part of my PhD, yet as I was approaching the research from a practice-led position I needed to undertake the practice before understanding fully how it might respond to the research questions. My work is iterative and generative. It is iterative in the sense that the three major works presented in this research all respond creatively to a specific paragraph from the text Hydrofeminism (Neimanis, 2012). It is generative in the sense that all the work created for this research generated critical and creative insights into the theoretical premises I sought to investigate.

However, as I was developing and delivering the event, I knew that my focus would be on providing an embodied relationship for participants with the marine life that the soundtrack foregrounded. It was not necessary or desirable to garner specific feedback from participants, to hand out questionnaires or to collect their data, as the emphasis was upon setting up the possibility for embodiment, not measuring response. It was never intended to be framed as a social experiment, so much as a creative journey. My academic work relating to this project has been based on my reflections on this event, including my observations of the participants as they negotiated this semi-wild space whilst immersed in the sounds of marine life.

I did take photographs of the event, and as participants entered the event. These images have formed the basis of documentation of the project for research purposes and as a record of the event that sits on my website. The event was the work, the photographs were the documentation and there is no further use required for these images as the work existed only on the day that it occurred.

This particular work considered and prioritised ethical considerations from the point of view of our inter-species relationships via the use of recordings of marine species. The ways in which we as a species use the sea as a dump (for marine plastics, toxic chemicals), as a resource (for commercial, large-scale fishing, for natural gas) and for militaristic experiments (military sonar) indicates that we have much work to do to create balance between the rights of marine species to live well in their environment, and our right to benefit from this environment. *Benthic Caress* (2017) sought to offer participants greater connection with marine species so that these issues might form part of their future considerations of the marine environment.

Ethical considerations for participants were focused upon access – which is explained below. The works – sound recordings of marine life – were suitable for all age ranges, and indeed some children did participate. The event did draw big crowds who stood and watched it from an elevated position on the road above the cliffs. The popularity of the event was not anticipated, and as the crowds were not participants, I had no control over their attendance or over any safety issues generated by their presence.

Accessibility issues were compounded by the physical nature of the site. The site juts out into the sea at the bottom of some steep cliffs made of boulders. There are stone steps leading down, but physical mobility is required to navigate them. The only remedy would have been to relocate the work, yet in its very inception, *Benthic Caress* (2017) was site-specific and site-responsive, rendering such a decision a betrayal of the intentions of the artwork. Similarly, exclusion issues could be said to be apparent in the choice of medium (sound) thereby excluding deaf people and those with hearing issues. However, it was always conceived of as a sound installation, and to change this would be to create a different work entirely.

2.4.1.6: Reception

Comments made by participants of *Benthic Caress* (2017) reveal that the experience moved them in positive ways. References to 'wellbeing' and 'mindfulness' abounded in conversations with participants after the event. One participant (an artist) subsequently made a series of postcards showing a drawing and a poem. The poem reads:

> **Hippocampus Hippocampus**
> Looking out to Drakes Island, the shape of your body reminds me
> Why our first sunlight day at work on water,
> We carried swiftly over currents, to be here with you.
> Safely over years, resting our bones as we hold smooth beach stones
> In our hands, remembering the silent disco
> With bare feet in wet tidal pool of oceans expanse

Offering then a much needed spell of silence
Felt with warm sunlight on face.
(Emma Bush, 2018)

Figure 7: *Hydrosapien* – close up of choir. (2018)

2.4.2: Hydrosapien

2.4.2.1: Conception

The formation of *Hydrosapien* (2018) as an idea occurred in response to a series of unrelated

encounters which foregrounded sound and its absence in different ways. These are explored in

detail in Chapter Four. These encounters included collaborative experimentation with voice as

a metaphor for marine species, and a brief encounter with BSL in use. I immediately saw how

these two components could form a creative work which might critically investigate

Neimanis's Ecotone Paragraph beyond textual analysis. The three elements of sign language,

vocal sound and the Ecotone Paragraph came together in ways that seemed to bring to life two of my research questions:

In what ways can difference be foregrounded in ways that expand, through a practice that is weighted towards sonic arts, the aqueous metaphors employed with Neimanis's articulation of hydrofeminism?

Hydrosapien (2018), seemingly embodied the argument that Neimanis makes throughout Hydrofeminism. Namely that difference is, paradoxically, the marker that connects us. This paradox is carried through into an interrogation of sonic arts in which the apparent polar oppositions between a Silent Choir and an Experimental Voice Duo perform The Ecotone paragraph together. The performance that I visualised generated a liminal space where "two complex systems meet, embrace, clash, and transform one another."

The second research question also seemed to be articulated through my idea for *Hydrosapien* (2018):

Can creative practices which articulate the confluence of subject, location, and difference, as ecotone, foreground marginalised voices?

'Location' is embodied as a site of intersectionality within the performance – as bodies marked by difference in terms of their relationship with and expression of sound, therefore foregrounding the marginalised voices of both the D/deaf choir members, and (through the performance of the Experimental Voice Duo), the non-human others that inhabit watery environments. Now all I had to do was produce the event.

2.4.2.2: Development

The two main insights gained through the development phase were regarding BSL. I was surprised to learn that many hearing people were able to use it and that some were particularly fluent. This enabled the Choir to be made up of deaf and hearing signers, bringing them together in what I came to learn was a rare occasion, and in doing so bucking the trend to ghettoise individuals and communities based on 'difference'. The second insight was to do with the nature of BSL. Rarely is direct translation from text to BSL possible, not least in terms of academic texts. This is because BSL is a mixture of alphabetical symbols, symbols for words or actions, and exaggerated facial expressions. There is no BSL word or facial expression for hydro, or sapien, or feminism for instance. Therefore, an aspect of the development involved working with a hearing Teacher of the Deaf to create a short poem that encapsulated the messaging within the essay Hydrofeminism, in broad strokes, which the choir could learn in BSL.

2.4.2.3: Production

Hydrosapien (2018) opened the first night of Plymouth Art Weekender to an audience of 800. Through the processes of social participation the performance encapsulated aspects of collaboration, most markedly so in the unannounced intervention of the interpreter, who acted much like a conductor of a conventional choir on the night. However, as well as solely guiding the choir through their movements, the interpreter also generated unique signs, movements and facial expressions for the sounds made by the Experimental Voice Artists, brilliantly fusing these two distinct elements, and thoroughly embodying an ecotonic becoming in the process.

As with *Benthic Caress* (2017)*,* the event *was* the production, and any record of it should be considered documentation.

2.4.2.4: Documentation

On the suggestion of Arts Council England, I commissioned a local community film-making CIC called Fotonow to document the development and production of *Hydrosapien* (2018) as a novel strategy to meet their evaluation expectations. The professionalism and approachability of the team at Fotonow made this added dimension to the project an easy experience to navigate for all concerned. However, I was surprised (and, at the time, disappointed) that they had not considered a full and proper documentation of the performance itself as part of their brief. They did film the performance (as well as behind-the-scenes before and after) but they did so within the same documentary register as they had inhabited throughout rehearsals. I was able to work with post-production specialist and artist Katy Richardson after the event, to extract and edit aspects of the performance into a two minute artists short. Upon reflection I feel I have secured excellent documentation of *Hydrosapien* (2018) and the added benefit of a semi-abstracted artist's short film, both of which are distinct from each other and work well within their own terms of reference.

2.4.2.5: Ethics

The Silent Choir for *Hydrosapien* (2018) numbered about one hundred and was made up of D/deaf and hearing people who had come together to learn the paragraph translated into British Sign Language (BSL). Participants were self-selecting. I recruited choir members using three mechanisms: advertising through Plymouth Deaf Association, through Plymouth School's

Hearing Support Centre, and through social media. These adverts, or invitations to participate, described the event and gave dates and my contact details. Rehearsals took place at the Duke of Cornwall Hotel, four times prior to the performances.

Adults attended the rehearsals at the Duke of Cornwall Hotel. At the first rehearsal I handed out comprehensive information about the project, including practicalities and intentions regarding the performance (logistics such as where and when, as well as an overview of how I envisaged the final performance to look). I passed around a form asking for contact details (and sharing mine) so that any change of date or venue could be passed on. A number of the Deaf participants in the choir chose text as their communication preference, for obvious reasons. I stated that this project formed part of my PhD, and briefly explained what I was researching. I explained that photographic and video documentation would occur throughout the project and explicitly sought their consent for this. All participants gave their verbal consent – they knew that the work led to a public performance and were comfortable (excited even) to be seen to be taking part. At each of the four rehearsals I repeated all this information. Communication was verbal, and at all times I was accompanied by a registered and qualified BSL Interpreter.

The Hearing Support Centre is based at Eggbuckland Community School (a secondary school) and linked to Eggbuckland Vale Primary School. Together they form Plymouth's provision for Deaf children of compulsory school age, and pupils are integrated into mixed classes. The Head of the Centre guided me in ways to engage the children and their families and was keen for both schools to be involved. It was his suggestion that I commissioned training videos that could be shared so that individuals could rehearse at home, and these videos also guided our group rehearsals. I commissioned Fletch@BSL (https://www.fletchbsl.co.uk/) as she is very

popular with Deaf children and adults alike as she performed on stage with Ronan Keating from Boyzone at the Wembley Arena, London, to sign 'When You Say Nothing At All', and has continued to sign a wide range of popular music. Fletch and I liaised through email, I described the project I was undertaking and its connection with my PhD. I sent her the text which she transcribed into four very short videos in which she presents the words in BSL. I paid her for these videos and bought the copyright. It must be emphasised that these videos are for training purposes only – so that individuals can learn one text in BSL.

Children who joined the choir did so through their schools. Their teachers shared the information I had prepared for adults, and each participant was self-selecting. Guided by the Hearing Support Centre, I generated consent forms which were handed out to parents by the teachers and returned to me once signed. (Copies of the blank forms and transcripts of the verbal explanations of the project can be found in the Appendix). I visited three of the four schools to join in their rehearsals (which typically took place as a lunch club activity and attracted both Deaf and hearing pupils). As teachers who work with Deaf children, they are qualified in BSL to the highest level, and acted as interpreters during rehearsals. Alongside the Eggbuckland cluster, I also visited High View School (Efford, Plymouth) whose Music Teacher had become aware of the project and wanted her pupils to be involved. This school has no Deaf or BSL provision, though they do offer a Makaton as a lunch club activity. (Makaton has been shown to be useful for all sorts of people including those who struggle with understanding concepts, those who have poor literacy skills, including grammatical knowledge, and those with English as an Additional Language. However, it is not BSL and uses different signs entirely). Again, I followed guidance from the teacher regarding consent forms, and ensured that all families were aware of every aspect of the project, including its use in my PhD. The fourth school that became involved was Liskeard Primary School. This was as

a result of the BSL interpreter I employed throughout the project, whose children attended the school at the time. Rebbecca Aust (the interpreter/parent) works closely with the school and liaised with the head teacher around permissions and consents. The head teacher and her own children took part in the final performance.

The voice artists and I workshopped the paragraph prior to the public performances, and as their role suggests, used their voices to interpret the paragraph without recourse to words or spoken language. These workshops took place at Goldsmiths, University of London. Both voice artists are acclaimed in their field. We met three times, to explore my creative intentions and to develop the creative relationship between the two artists who, whilst aware of each other's practice, had not worked together before. Both voice artists were aware that *Hydrosapien* (2018) formed part of my practice for this research and were excited by the inclusion of the project within a PhD and gave verbal consent for their involvement.

There were two public performances (26th and 27th September 2018). *Hydrosapien* (2018) involved recruitment and rehearsals over a six month period with 100 members of the public. Silent choirs are not a new phenomenon, and *Hydrosapien* (2018) was not the first project to bring D/deaf and hearing people together to perform using BSL. Also called signing choirs, they are a popular way to bring D/deaf and hearing people together in schools, church congregations and beyond. One unpredicted outcome of *Hydrosapien* (2018) has been the development of an independent silent choir, instigated by members of *Hydrosapien* (2018), called Hands in Harmony, who over the last year have performed in a wide range of contexts online due to the pandemic, but prior to this have also performed within and beyond Plymouth.

Hydrosapien (2018) generated a lot of data including contact details and consents from participants and video recordings of rehearsals and performances, including interviews. The former is stored securely in my home (as hard copies, boxed) and the latter exists online on my website. I am still regularly in contact with many members of the choir, and with the interpreter, as we continue to work on other projects which exist outside of my PhD, and because friendships have been forged. The most recent example of work relating to these connections is a talk I gave at Plymouth Arts Cinema in early June 2021, focusing on D/deaf artists working with moving image, as an introduction to the Amazon Original film *Sound of Metal.*

In the same way that *Benthic Caress* (2017) was not a social experiment, *Hydrosapien* (2018) did not set out to analyse Deaf people, deafness in its many forms, or D/deaf culture. Through the process of creating this work I did become far more informed about D/deaf culture. My initial motivations for engaging BSL users, some of whom are Deaf, was to repurpose BSL as a creative language that could be enjoyed as a performative element within a public artwork, either literally by audiences fluent in BSL, or metaphorically, by audiences with no insight into BSL. If I had simply wanted a choreography involving hands, I need not have used BSL. However there are a number of reasons why I opted to use BSL:

- It allowed for multiple readings of the choreography (as 'dance' and as 'text')
- It challenged the familiar exclusion of deaf people from arts events
- It questioned the issue of who was the intended or assumed audience
- It brought deaf and hearing people together
- It supports the campaign to make BSL available at GCSE level, by making it visible to wider audiences, and by including Deaf activists in the Choir.

However, I learned more about D/deaf culture through the process of making this piece than I brought to the project at the outset. For this reason, it was clear that *Hydrosapien* (2018) would be a collaboration with the performers rather than a closed, complete and discreet performance

that the performers delivered for me, to my instructions. The ways in which *Hydrosapien* (2018) was shaped by Deaf members of the choir include the development of a 'poem' that acted as a synopsis of the paragraph from Hydrofeminism, because it was easier to translate into BSL, the commissioning and sharing of training videos, and the suggestion that choir members wore brightly coloured gloves as part of the performance, to draw attention to the mass of signing hands.

From the outset, all choir members (who met in Plymouth) were aware of the intention to bring the experimental voice artists (who met in London) together with them for the final performances. The development period of both aspects ran parallel to each other, and I was able to share short videos from each rehearsal to all involved (the voice artists also saw videos of the signing rehearsals). It was clear to all that the paragraph from the Hydrofeminism essay was a shared starting point for their contributions. All participants were aware that *Hydrosapien* (2018) formed part of the practice element of my PhD submission and that I would be reflecting on the work, not on the contributions of individuals, or Deaf people as a distinct group of people, but on the ways in which the work articulated aspects of my research and specifically the research question: *Can creative practices which articulate the confluence of subject, location, and difference, as ecotone, foreground marginalised voices?*

2.4.2.6: Reception

Hydrosapien (2018) triggered shifts in subjective experience for participants. A number of the choir members were teachers, some with pupils from hearing communities, and some of whom work at linked schools supported by a shared Hearing Support Centre. Four schools were

involved in the Silent Choir, holding lunchtime rehearsals for their pupils. Vicky, a teacher at Eggbuckland Vale Primary School sent this email message:

> The rehearsal this week was very enjoyable, and I am beginning to understand how the performance may look. Yesterday I taught two of my profoundly deaf 7 year old children (BSL signers) the first verse after a discussion about what a poem is (words which describe an idea and a feeling but not a story!) And in very simple terms we began to discuss climate issues. In response to this they each drew a picture which I have attached for you to see. I was truly moved by the power of your poem, translated into sign to teach these children about the environment. Thank you for enabling this learning experience for these children.
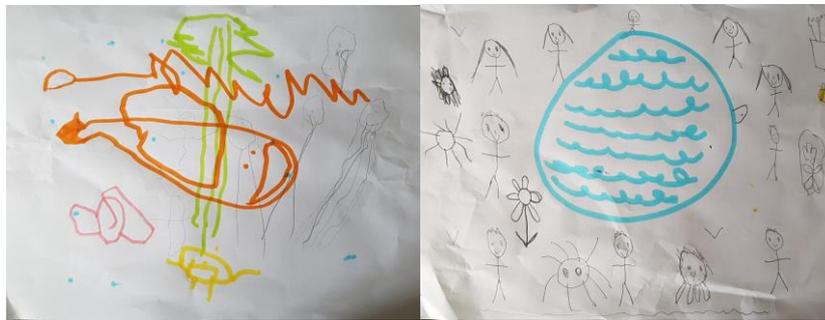
Figure 8: Artwork by 7 year old profoundly deaf children made in response to *Hydrosapien* (2018)

2.4.3: Manual for Nomads

2.4.3.1: Conception

Manual for Nomads (2020) was conceived as a consequence of three threads interweaving. The first thread was a desire to move beyond the notational use of moving image exemplified by the short works made on a mobile phone which make up *Field Notes* (2016 - 2020) (https://aquameteor.wordpress.com/field-notes-2/). I sought to understand more professional film making strategies.

The second thread was a desire to continue working with D/deaf friends I had made during *Hydrosapien* (2018), wanting to give a platform and an opportunity to Bailey in particular (the young woman who plays Ellen in the film and who is, in the real world, a D/deaf activist). Conversations with Bailey had impressed upon me the need for, and the barriers faced in efforts to make a GCSE in BSL a mainstream choice for young people in compulsory education, and this is what Bailey advocates and lobbies for. Working with Bailey and the other D/deaf individuals who acted in *Manual for Nomads* (2020) presented an opportunity to amplify marginalised voices in a distinct context that was more accessible than the abstractions presented within *Hydrosapien* (2018). In developing a narrative, and one which pivoted upon the agency of community within the context of climate change, I was able to broaden my intention to amplify marginalised voices to include humans (as opposed to a focus upon the more-than-human worlds explored in *Benthic Caress* (2017) and *Hydrosapien* (2018).

The third thread was a desire to communicate to a broad public. I felt I was able to amplify my intentions to a broader public by using narrative film as the vehicle (as opposed to abstracted performance/live art experiences presented through *Benthic Caress* (2017) and *Manual for Nomads* (2020).

2.4.3.2: Development and Production

As the process of development and production progressed it was clear that they were one and the same. The process required learning new methods to communicate my ideas and intentions to those involved with me in the production. These methods included creating storyboards, shot lists (a textual version of each frame within the storyboard), character back-story, and scripts. Rehearsals provided the mechanism for developing character identities as well as providing

translation of the scripts into BSL. Rebbecca Aust, the interpreter I worked with for *Hydrosapien* (2018), supported this process in person during rehearsals. Shooting for the film occurred over four days in four separate locations in Plymouth. Guided by a skilled cinematographer (the artist Marcy Saude), the shot lists were supplemented by footage which took advantage of the locations and the natural light in afforded by the weather. However, the bulk of the development and production of *Manual for Nomads* (2020) occurred in the editing suite under the expert guidance of the artist Katy Richardson. Here I was able to transform ideas into reality. A significant visual/aesthetic intention was a focus upon the colour red within any given sequence that it occurred. This sounds straight forward but is technically complex. The colour red is symbolically used across art forms in many ways, as suggested by Bucklow (2016) Lamb and Bourriau (1995). My intention was to use it to signify 'community': the protagonist wears a red cape, the pilots who offer her community wear red hazmat suits and helmets, and inhabit a red lifeboat. However, it was not simply enough to film these and trust that the hue and saturation of this colour would be foregrounded. The attenuation of this colour occurred in the editing suite.

2.4.3.3: Documentation

Whilst I took personal photographs of each aspect of production as they happened, these were mostly for personal use, though some were shared as social media posts. The finished piece of work *is* the documentation in this context, with post-production being pivotal to the crafting of the finished presentation. The challenges faced in the editing suite were focused upon three main concerns: a. ensuring narrative flow; b. confining the narrative to reasonable time limits; and c. turning footage shot on a sunny January day into a sequence that evoked stormy weather.

The final production was screened at Jill Craigie Cinema at the University of Plymouth for invited attendees only – these were crew, actors and technicians involved in the production and was intended as a 'sign off' event. Once all involved were happy with the finished work I was then at liberty to show it in the public domain. I subsequently entered it into a small selection of film festivals, and it won Outstanding Achievement Awards in four categories: Debut Film-maker, Films on Disability, Short Films, Women's Films, at the Tagore International Film Festival 2020.

Manual for Nomads (2020) was submitted as part of my PhD submission as an online experience. This was solely due to the impact of the pandemic; my original intention had been to invite my examiners to view the work in the small cinema on the Newton Park Campus at Bath Spa University, in the knowledge that the viewing experience in front of the big screen is far more impactful than viewing work on a domestic device. I was also motivated to screen the work in a cinematic context as a strategy for emphasising the centrality of practice to this research. The pandemic prohibited this from happening.

2.4.3.4: Ethics

Manual for Nomads (2020) draws upon my previous work using BSL and introduces the use of Braille as a tool for foregrounding the convergence of the languages, codes and methods of communication of differently abled persons which reveal 'a different actuality linked to and infected by new possibilities' (Voegelin, 2014:31). It explicitly uses Neimanis's Ecotone Paragraph and unlike previous works, it is presented in narrative form. I worked with eight non-actors, three of whom were Deaf, and fluent in BSL. Two others were also fluent in BSL, whilst two more learned their BSL 'lines' using YouTube videos. Only one character had a

speaking part. Again, we used the Duke of Cornwall Hotel in Plymouth for rehearsals (an in-kind contribution from the hotel), and a professional BSL interpreter was there for each session.

I remembered Bailey (who plays Ellen) from the *Hydrosapien* project: an articulate teenager, a D/deaf activist and a keen performer. I felt that she would be great in this role, if she was willing. I contacted the head of the Hearing Support Unit (who also plays a character in the film) and asked his advice. He put me in touch with Bailey's parents. We met up, with Bailey present, and discussed the film – who else was involved, its message, its intended outcomes (as part of my PhD, as a page on my website, and as an entry into film festivals). We talked through the practicalities of location, script, costume, other actors she would work with (four of whom she knew already) and payment.

Once the editing was complete and the film was finished, I invited all cast, crew and their family members to a private screening at the Jill Craigie Cinema at the Arts Institute Plymouth (another in-kind contribution). One of the cast was the head of the Hearing Support Centre at Eggbuckland Community School, who brought along all the teachers of the Deaf within his unit, using the screening as an INSET (in-service training) opportunity. This screening was presented as an opportunity for feedback and discussion around all aspects of the film, and in particular the portrayal of Deaf individuals within the narrative. It was an opportunity for anyone involved in the production to veto any aspect of the completed film, and a forum for discussion around the issues that the film raised. Whilst the discussion was lively and informative, everyone gave their verbal consent for the film to enter the public domain.

The data generated for this project are mostly in the form of email exchanges between myself, the cast, crew, editing team, and venue organisers. Film production data (sound and image recordings, shot lists, storyboards, and the completed film), alongside the communications, are stored on my home PC. The finished film is also available on my website.

This chapter has marshalled the components of this research which can be described as tools, strategies or devices, with particular attention paid to research creation, to the *ecotone*, to the ethical considerations each work triggered, and to the conception, development, production and presentation of each work. These are all positioned within and as methodologies as practice. The next chapter considers communities of practice, linking my creative work to that of other artists whose work bears a close relation to the themes foregrounded within Hydrofeminism.

3: Communities

3.1: Communities of Practice

This chapter casts the net across a range of artistic practices which have directly and indirectly informed my own artistic research. The chapter also provides further contextualisation of aspects of my practice, by identifying specific elements and core themes which have been explored, albeit differently, by a range of individual artists. This includes three artists whose work pertains directly to watery relationality (Sharrocks, Barclay, Parker & Moore), D/deaf & Disabled Arts Practices –specifically the work of Sue Austin and the moving image works of a number of D/deaf artists in particular, and a range of Walking Artists, with a focus upon feminist and disabled artists working in this genre.

The selected artists that this chapter pools together all muddy the waters in their transdisciplinary practices, fusing social action, curation, collaboration, live art, moving image and sound works. I have sought to consider artists whose work imbricates with the work I have produced within this research journey. These imbrications include works of a watery nature that speak to forms of feminism, artists whose work has formed part of my own practice where curation is used as a creative tool, works that are situated within sound art and/or within D/deaf arts, moving image works, and works which use walking as a methodology, and which also speak to, or articulate, forms of feminism, as well as works which utilise and challenge notions of disability.

Whilst the intentions of these artists do not consciously draw upon Hydrofeminism as a resource for their actions, I have selected these artists, and their works, because I see both a direct connection with the arguments within Hydrofeminism, and a direct connection with my

own practice. These connections are explored in detail within the scrutiny of these works as given below.

I use the term 'communities of practice' strategically. 'Communities of Practice' is a term coined by Lave and Wenger (1991) to articulate a learning environment that happens outside the classroom. They first used the term to describe learning through practice and participation, which they named situated learning. The term 'communities of practice' allows for an immersive, connected, scrutiny of an artists' output. The term highlights the fluid, often interconnected dialogues that artists now participate in through a shared visibility on social media platforms and bears witness to the ways in which we are all engaged with and informed by each other's work. 'Communities of practice' is particularly pertinent in this chapter, given that some of the artists whose work I reference are ones I have worked with, sometimes through a curatorial lens[1] and sometimes through collaborative practices[2].

Watery relations are a ubiquitous theme within Environmental Humanities scholarship, activism and creativity, and this chapter generates watery relations between the artists who form this community of practice that I have identified. In this next section I closely consider three artists whose work pertains to this theme. I then introduce the work of Sue Austin, a disabled artist whose work is situated under water, and a number of D/deaf artists whose moving image practice opens up discussion about D/deaf arts activisms within this medium. I

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[1] Leah Barclay contributed a section of the sound track to Benthic Caress (2017) a curatorial production for Plymouth Art Weekender 2017. Amy Sharrocks' work 'SWIM' (2007) was included in my curatorial selection for the exhibition 'Liquid' as part of Fringe Arts Bath 2017. Kayla Parker's work was selected for Benthic Caress (2017) and for Liquid (2017)

[2] I continue to collaborate with 4 of the 13 artists who participated in *Thirteen* (2019), though our work is outside the context and submission of this thesis.

address Walking as an art practice, considering artists who use walking as their practice, as women and as feminists, and/or as disabled artists.

Amy Sharrocks (19/05/2009) - Water from the Thames, collected at the end of the WALBROOK River Walk

Figure 9: *Museum of Water*, Amy Sharrocks
(Image used with permission)

3.2: Amy Sharrocks – Museum Of Water (2014- ongoing)

Amy Sharrocks is a live artist, sculptor and film-maker who co-creates with people to create works in which their own experience, communication and expression are a vital part. Her work is attentive to the impact humans have on each other and the world. For a number of years she has been bringing people, and water into collaborative relationships: floating boats on swimming pools, swimming across London, dowsing rivers and gathering donations for *Museum of Water* (2014 – ongoing). *Museum of Water* (2014 – ongoing) is a collection of over 1000 specimens of water, donated by people from all around the world, in different contexts, brought together as a peripatetic display of the ubiquitous nature of our shared relationship with water. *The Museum of Water* (2014 – ongoing) was in Somerset House, London, for the summer of 2014, co-commissioned by Artsadmin, and has since toured to over 50 locations worldwide and been visited by over 65,000 people. The Museum has spent two years in The Netherlands and Western Australia and was nominated for European Museum of the Year 2016. The first major survey of Sharrocks' work took place at Leamington Spa Art Gallery & Museum 2018-19, an acclaimed exhibition which collected photographs, sculptures, drawings,

sonic and live works together from over a decade of making. Sharrocks writing has been published extensively, in academic journals, magazines and books. She is an activist for women's rights and co-curator of *Walking Women*, a series of events in London and Edinburgh across 2016, and Daylight, a newspaper which brings focus to women's art, thinking and speculations, which launched at the Wellcome Collection in October 2018.

For the purposes of this research I will focus upon Sharrocks' celebrated work *Museum of Water* (2014 – ongoing) – an international and ongoing project. I believe that *Museum of Water* (2014 – ongoing) is vibrant articulation of key arguments within Neimanis's work on Hydrofeminism.

Neimanis situates hydrofeminism within the confluences of posthumanism and transcorporeality, and her work can be broadly understood as a means by which climate justice and social justice come together through reference to water. In these ways, hydrofeminism simultaneously situates the global and local within a frame of equal significance. It also pools these seemingly disparate locations within the broadest yet simultaneously most immediate temporal locations, and in so doing flags up the diverse temporalities of climate change, in ways that could be described as polytemporal – a term that refers to a world-view that embraces the overlapping rates of change that our world experiences, especially the huge, powerful changes that are mostly invisible to us (for instance, geological change).

> A posthuman feminism reminds us that the waters that we comprise are both intensely local and wildly global: I am here, and now, and at least three billion years old, and already becoming something else. (Neimanis 2017:39)

Each exhibit is a donation of water from a specific person from a specific location (be that geographic or, as is often the case, autobiographic), and in these very direct and straightforward ways, location and co-curation become central tenets of the work. Curation occurs each time the work is displayed; the ways in which audiences are introduced to and guided through the exhibits is carefully considered for each venue.

Curation is central to the mechanism of *Benthic Caress* (2017) also, in ways that are located, geographically, and biographically, the latter particularly so in the contributions from Andrea Wright, whose voice is a significant aspect of her work. *Benthic Caress* (2017) takes the stationary listener on a journey through time and space, whilst the *Museum of Water* (2014 – ongoing) takes the collections on journeys that introduce new audiences to the work each time it is displayed.

Within *The Museum of Water* (2014 – ongoing) the wet residues of a melted snowman sits alongside 20 year old evaporated snow from North Eastern United States; outflow from a burst pipe in London is catalogued alongside bathwater enjoyed by a new born baby; healing waters from Lourdes, Mecca and the Ganges are given equivalence to a muddy puddle from Birmingham; bodily waters – spit, urine and breath from different international locations – jostle with ephemeral donations such as condensation from a Falmouth window, water from the last ice age, and 'bad dream water'. The specificity of time and place, as foregrounded by the individual donations which make up the collection within the *Museum of Water* (2014 – ongoing) speak to Hydrofeminism because of their specificity of time and place, because despite being entirely different from each other donation, together they are clearly connected.

Together, the donations in the collection offer a provocation to understand that 'as bodies of water […] we are all (perhaps unwittingly) collaborating, all of the time.' (Chen 2013:19)

Museum of Water (2014 – ongoing) also explicitly talks about location as crucial to an understanding of why water matters in contemporary geopolitics. *Museum of Water* (2014 – ongoing) pursues a peripatetic relationship with specific and recent water crises, commencing in a year which saw catastrophic flooding across parts of the UK (2014), and continuing whilst the American water crises of Flint, Nestle and DAPL brought further attention to global water management and sourcing.

Each individual donation in the *Museum of Water* (2014 – ongoing) also offers an example of embodiment – in literal ways and in metaphorical ways. There are donations which recall rites of passage such as births, birthdays, weddings and baptisms, and donations which speak of more esoteric yet universal experiences such as 'water under the bridge', 'a taste of home', 'the point of no return'. There are donations which act as mementos for significant relationships, and some which contain visceral autographs such as toothpaste spit, saliva, breath or urine, and DNA. The specimens form a collective record of our daily lives, lived with water, negotiating the porous and inter-related materialities between bodies, embodied experience and experience of place. Co-creation of the entire collection as a peripatetic museum has never been more vividly realised, nor more consciously; the methodology behind a museum's presentation, a museum that now contains over 1000 specimens.

Sharrocks is acutely aware that collating and presenting the *Museum of Water* (2014 – ongoing) in different locations over a number of years demands unending, thankless, and ultimately

unsuccessful efforts, given the tendency for water to evaporate, but also in terms of amassing material objects (containers) in a world already overflowing with material objects. The materiality of the containers offers Sharrocks a visual metaphor, through shape, size, colour, of the ways we feel about water. The artist understands that over time all that will be left is the materiality of the containers, whilst the waters themselves will be traces, memories and absences. However, she asserts that the *Museum of Water* (2014 – ongoing), like much of her work, is a piece of Live Art. In citing this work as Live Art, I believe that the artist is doing (at least) two things: firstly making explicit the accepted notion that the audience brings unique meanings to the work, and that together (the work and the audience) are held in a live dynamic. Secondly, I believe that the artist is referencing the fact that the work, by its very nature, will change over time (mostly through evaporation) and with each iteration (due to the context of its display). Indeed the *Museum of Water* (2014 – ongoing), alongside us as sentient beings, is in dynamic process. This should cause us to reflect, suggests Sharrocks, for if its eventual evaporation makes us feel uncomfortable, then we are all drawn together in efforts to conserve it.

> In this Museum, movement and loss are instigating forces.
> (Sharrocks (no date) Museum of Water https://museumofwater.co.uk/)

Sharrocks resists the temptation to think of water as an abstract idea. She also asks what it might mean to practice politics in more watery ways. Waters are embodied in specific materialities and by this enacting of water relationality, through the careful curation of donations in which geographic contiguity is not a pre-requisite, the artist is enacting a radically inclusive politics. This aqueous ecopolitics has the potential to broaden our perception of whom or what a stakeholder could be. Much has been written about water as a conduit and a signifier of social relations between humans (see Waitt 2018). *Museum of Water* (2014 – ongoing) opens up these discourses for a wider public, triggering consideration and conversation around what

(and how) we share, broadly, as a species, and how our differences – cultural, ethnic, geographic – are shaped by and help to shape our relationships with water. *Museum of Water* (2014 – ongoing) presents water as an archive of oral histories and embodiment (Waitt 2018), as an accessible portal into complex discourses, communicated through materialities that do not require induction into sets of complex theoretical notions but which, rather, highlight the everyday-ness of our embodied relations with water. In this way, *Museum of Water* (2014 – ongoing) physically manifests the concept of a hydrocommons acting as a platform or, more appropriately, as a milieu, by which we understand our shared and embodied relationship with water. Hydrocommons, as used by Neimanis, refers to the simple fact that water connects us. Water as a channel and a signifier of social relations between humans is central to the narrative of *Manual for Nomads* (2020), where paradoxically, in aiming to navigate extreme weather, the protagonist finds community and social relations which empower her, aboard a water-borne vessel. Watery relationality is explored in different ways across my work and in Sharrocks' work, yet is foregrounded in both. Sharrocks' work, alongside all three main bodies of my work presented in this research aim to critically and creatively highlight how our differences are shaped by and help to shape our relationships with water.

3.3: Leah Barclay - Ocean Listening (2016 – ongoing)

Figure 10: Leah Barclay (2018)
(Image used with permission)

Leah Barclay is an Australian sound artist whose work fuses art, science and technology to generate innovative approaches to recording and disseminating the soundscapes of aquatic ecosystems to inform conservation, scientific research and public engagement. Her work explores ways we can use creativity, new technologies and emerging science to reconnect communities to the environment and inspire climate action. Barclay creates complex sonic environments that draw attention to changing climates and fragile ecosystems. These works are realised through immersive live performances, interactive installations and virtual reality experiences drawing on environmental field recordings, live streaming audio and spatial sound diffusion. Her work has been commissioned, performed and exhibited to wide acclaim internationally by organisations including UNESCO and the Smithsonian Museum. Barclay's work is multi-platform in nature and involves long-term engagement with communities ranging from remote river systems in South India to pacific island communities in Vanuatu. She leads several large-scale research projects including Biosphere Soundscapes, an interdisciplinary venture exploring the changing soundscapes of UNESCO Biosphere Reserves and River Listening, which examines the creative possibilities of aquatic ecoacoustics in collaboration with the Australian Rivers Institute. The design of these interdisciplinary projects are responsive to the needs of the collaborating communities and involve the development of new technologies ranging from remote sensing devices for the rainforest canopy to hydrophone recording arrays in freshwater and marine ecosystems.

Ocean Listening (2016 – ongoing) is an interdisciplinary research project that explores the creative possibilities of marine bioacoustics and the potential for sound as a tool for engagement and awareness around ocean health. The project sits within a portfolio of acoustic ecology research led by Barclay at the Queensland Conservatorium Research Centre at Griffith University in Australia. Launched in 2016, *Ocean Listening* (2016 – ongoing) is working with

communities in Australia, Mexico and Canada to further understanding of marine bioacoustics and has a particular focus on bringing attention to the environmental degradation of the Great Barrier Reef in Queensland, Australia.

Barclay's work sits firmly and confidently within ecoacoustics. She is one of a number of high profile artists working within this genre, which also includes such luminaries as Chris Watson, Jez Riley French, and Hildegard Westerkamp. A provenance of the genre often starts with the work of Bernie Krauss and Hildegard Westerkamp – known as much for their individual work as for their collaborations. When John Cage created his piece *4'33"* (1952) he introduced the conditions for deep listening – confounding the audience by not meeting their expectations of what the performance of a piece of music in a concert hall should be. This performance prepared future audiences for an attention to listening to every other sound present in that environment. Other profoundly significant works in this vein include Pauline Oliveros' *Extreme Slow Walk* (1971) and all her deep listening pieces and exercises, John Cages' piece *Organ2/ASLSP* (As SLow aS Possible (1987), and Jem Finers' *Longplayer* (1999-2999), designed to play for 1000 years. All these works exceed expectations of what a 'sound work' can be, and invite audiences to stop and listen deeply.

Ecoacoustics (sound art derived from recordings in particular environments) as a genre has been deeply influenced by the seminal work of Pauline Oliveros (1932-2016) whose notion of deep listening has had a massive impact on the work of sound artists working across a range of sonic/audio genres. Andra MacCartney (1955 -2019), Viv Corringham, and Hildegard Westerkamp are all renowned in this field. The notion of the Sound Walk and the Sound Map are all recognised strategies within this field, alongside the creation of soundscapes. It is these

strategies, combined with the tendency to present work within gallery and installation spaces, or as downloadable perambulatory experiences via *SoundCloud* and other digital platforms, which mark this body of work off from simply 'documentary'.

In relation to the work of Barclay, and to sound art and ecoacoustics more generally, a handful of facts pertaining to the science of listening are worth noting in relation to the process of capturing sounds from the natural world. Infrasonic sound refers to vibrations that our bodies need (such as vibrations relating to the functions of the heart, and the respiratory system, and with emotions), but which we do not necessarily notice. Infrasonic sound waves have a frequency below the lower limit of human audibility. With digital manipulation these sounds can be adapted so that the human ear can detect them. An example drawn from personal experience occurred when attending a workshop run by Jez Riley French[3] in which we 'heard' the sound of the earth turning, and the sound of a shooting star. All the ecoacoustics highlighted in this research – including work by Barclay, and my own production – *Benthic Caress* (2017) – has relied upon extensive use of hydrophones – sound recorders designed for underwater use.

Hydrofeminism acknowledges and foregrounds our transcorporeal relations of being within and of the natural world. It invites us to perceive of our selves and our subjectivities as immersed within the world of bio-logics, not atomised and separate. Hydrofeminism also draws attention to the possibility that acting fluidly corresponds to thinking fluidly. Acting in a responsive way, with a willingness to question oneself and a determination to locate ways of 'being-with' that have integrity is one articulation of acting fluidly. This manoeuvre engenders a symbiosis between bodies – from the microbial to the mammalian. In her work Barclay

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[3] https://jezrileyfrench.co.uk/ accessed 04/04/2020

enables this perception, drawing us, not only close to, but also as enmeshed within the 'natural' world. Indeed, it could be said that Barclay's work is better understood as '*zoe*'-centred – where '*zoe*' corresponds to 'brutal' life, understood as a conceptualisation of what we understand (and contest) as 'the natural world'. Braidotti (2009:105) asserts that historically '*zoe*' has been in an inferior relation to bios (intelligent, social life) and that a re-emphasis upon '*zoe*' can recalibrate our relationship with and conceptualisation of both.

Where Sharrocks' *Museum of Water* (2014 – ongoing) mostly inhabits and explores the human, social domain through the prism of water, Barclay's *Ocean Listening* (2016 – ongoing) work absolutely inhabits and explores the more-than-human, zoe-logical domain through the prism of water, motivated by a desire to urgently address the physical effects of human exceptionalism as it impacts upon aquatic life. Here, then, is an example of an aqueous ecopolitics articulated through creative modes of enquiry and dissemination. Another example of Barclay working with an aqueous ecopolitics to affect positive experiences for marginalised groups of people (as opposed to focusing solely on the health, or otherwise, of bodies of water) can be found in the project Listening to Country (2019) - an arts-led research project exploring the value of acoustic ecology in promoting cultural connection, maintenance and wellbeing among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and groups who experience separation from family, culture and country (2019: 41-44).

Barclay brings to our attention contemporary research which identifies that communication between fish species, and other marine and aquatic species utilises sound. She also clearly points the finger at human industrialisation for overwhelming this sonic messaging, which has negative effects on the health of these species.

People imagine the ocean as serene, but the deep has never been the silent world that conservationist Jacques Cousteau once called it. Data suggests most of the 34,200 species of fish can hear, and there's plenty to listen to. Whales aren't alone in singing; at least 800 species of fish click, hoot, purr, or moan. A healthy coral reef sounds like corn popping. Storms and earthquakes add to the score. But the industrialization of the sea over the past 70 years has generated enough din to make hearing anything else difficult. (Barclay 2019: i)

It can seem challenging to consider the oceans as shared sites of watery relations when historically, by virtue of their seeming vastness, they conjure up a vocabulary of oblivion. Indeed the term 'abyssal' refers to the greatest depths of the ocean and means literally 'without bottom'. Alaimo draws our attention to the fact that whilst the deep sea may seem unknowable, human action impacts upon these fragile ecosystems. Acting on our ethical concerns should come at the expense of a disjoined wonderment that uses 'unknowability' as a strategy for lack of care.

Although the deep seas do seem a world apart, when scientific and popular rhetorics cast distant depths and abyssal creatures as "alien," they imaginatively remove them from the planet, from the terrain of human concern, and even from reality. While the sense of wonder may encourage a paradoxical amalgamation of ethical concern and epistemological restraint, it may also spark the detached awe of the spectator and deflect responsibility, as what is alien dwells beyond the domain of earthly concern. (Alaimo 2017:153)

Specific marine habitats – those most beyond the human reach – the benthic and pelagic, are most often described as alien. Yet, as Alaimo (2012) reminds us: Rachel Carson points out that the sea is in our blood, Sylvia Earle makes the point that our very breath is dependent upon the oxygen produced by plankton, and Julia Whitty states that we see the ocean through the ocean, as our eyes sit in pools of saltwater. Transcorporeality demands that we recognise our permeability ('*watching, amazed, as our skins become thinner*' Neimanis 2012: 107), and that we accept that this permeability refuses any attempt we might make to retreat into exceptionalism. In *Ocean Listening* (2016 – ongoing) Barclay makes audible these ethical

insights, presenting the opportunity to listen with the more-than-human marine life that makes home in the abyss. These sonic entanglements overcome the impossibility of seeing with our own eyes what happens in the ocean's depths, drawing us viscerally closer to the intra-actions between species.

There is a convergence between Barclay's practice and my own. Indeed, Barclay contributed a segment within the hour-long soundscape that constituted *Benthic Caress (2017)*. In this way the term 'communities of practice' has particular resonance. Whilst *Ocean Listening* (2016 – ongoing) focuses upon fixed locations in the sub-marine world, *Benthic Caress (2017)* offered a journey, a 'meet'n'greet' introduction, a wet networking event in which human participants were passengers on an underwater 'road trip' focussed upon meeting distant family members. This watery whizz through environments inhabited by our intra-active marine relations could be considered superficial, touristic even. Yet, by way of an introduction it served to bring urban-dwelling human terrestrials into sonic contact with worlds we/they affect, are affected by, but rarely consider. *Benthic Caress* (2017) sought to make the alien familiar. *Ocean Listening* (2016 – ongoing) continues this process of making kin (Haraway, 2016), b ringing sonic environments to the surface so that we might get to move beyond introductions and begin to establish viable, mutually beneficial relationships that last.

3.4: Parker and Moore - Maelstrom: The Return (2014)

Figure 11: *Maelstrom: The Return*. Parker & Moore (2014)
(Image used with permission)

The intention to frame these analyses of work by other artists, as participants in a 'community of practice', strongly resonates in the work of Kayla Parker & Stuart Moore. For the purposes of this analysis, I will focus on a moving image work from 2014: *Maelstrom: The Return* to show how these resonances operate.

> *Maelstrom: The Return* is inspired by the turbulent waters of Devil's Point, Plymouth. Mysterious upwellings and whirlpools combine with cinematic memories of long-forgotten arrivals and departures. Cinematic memories of long-forgotten arrivals and departures 'projected' onto mysterious upwellings and whirlpools to conjure the confluence of histories at Devil's Point, the rocky promontory on the westernmost edge of Plymouth, where the swirling waters of the River Tamar pour through the narrow gap between Devon and Cornwall to meet the salty tides of Plymouth Sound, its topography producing riptides, strange turbulent waters and unique meteorological conditions. (Parker 2014)

Maelstrom: The Return (2014) makes direct reference to the hydrological phenomenon of a powerful whirlpool in the sea, a feature that is visible at the location for this film – Devil's Point in Plymouth. The title also hints at the cultural use of the term 'maelstrom' as a situation or state of confused movement or violent turmoil. This cultural reference could be said to foreground a feedback loop within the conception of the film, whereby the use of archive footage from the South West Film and Television Archive mirrors the physical action of a

whirlpool in which the water goes 'round and round'. In a sense, so do the stories, memories and histories of place, both at the level of individual subjective experience and, in relation to this specific site. The narratives of colonialism and post-colonialism swirl dangerously around the Point. Explorers of the Late Renaissance and Enlightenment period – Drake, Cook and Darwin, all famously departed from this point, whilst just a short distance away, the first Pilgrims departed for America in 1620 aboard the Mayflower ship. In the last 20 years, however, Plymouth has self-identified as a far more inward-looking, perhaps fearful city, the negative effects of globalisation underscoring the high levels of poverty (more than two-fifths of children are living in poverty, O'Leary 2018), whilst poverty is likely to also be a significant factor in the city's unequivocal vote to leave the EU by a margin of almost 20% (BBC, 2016). The city was the subject of a briefing from The Institute of Race Relations (2011) which identified Plymouth as experiencing particularly high levels of racist attacks. Whilst the film *Maelstrom: The Return* (2014) does not make direct reference to these broader socio-political and historical connections, they are implicit within the utilisation of archival material, the feedback loop implicit in Massey's notion of place as 'a simultaneity of stories so far' (2005). However, in the documentation video which accompanies the short film, Parker and Moore discuss two episodes which form part of the colonial narrative of Plymouth. The first concerns the place name Devil's Point whose origin is contested. One version of the story of how it became named Devil's Point is that it is a corruption of Duval who was said to be a Huguenot refugee living in a cave in this location. Parker & Moore make the point that this reference is from an 1882 folk (or false) etymological book that they used in the development of their work (no reference given), though historical records do confirm Huguenot congregations in Plymouth from 1681 onwards (until 1810). In short, as might be expected of a coastal port on the South coast, immigration here has a long history. The second episode which resonates both with narratives of colonial expansion and with mythologies surrounding Sir Francis Drake,

tells of how Drake came to Devil's Point to visit some witches prior to the invasion by the Spanish Armada in 1588, and conspired with them to use incantations to 'cook up a storm' that would hinder the invading army. This example of magic realism serves to bolster Elizabethan patriotism in its co-opting of obvious social outcasts (witches) in the fight against the enemy (Spain), whilst also canonising Drake as a celebrity in his own lifetime who was able to draw upon his considerable special qualities – including magic – to get the desired results. Within the film itself, archival footage of two women in white cardigans swirl across the screen, overlaid onto footage of the swirling waters. It is as if these two characters are ghosting the witches of Drake's folkloric tale. Indeed the term 'ghosting' refers directly to the appearance of a ghost or secondary image on a display screen, and that is precisely the effect here.

In the documentation video of approximately five minutes that can be found on their website (please see bibliography), Parker and Moore talk between themselves about aspects of the process of research. There is a sense that the viewer is eavesdropping on a private conversation focused upon intimate observations, and this stylistic approach is apposite in relation to the use of archival material – presented for contemporary viewers yet produced (in this instance) for private consumption, (only later donated to the South West Film and Television Archive). As viewers, we are afforded the opportunity to eavesdrop on private moments from an anonymous donor, and this is paralleled in the documentation video featuring the conversations between Parker and Moore. *Maelstrom: The Return* (2014) is included in this 'Community of Practice' for the following reasons. Whilst seemingly sitting unequivocally in the category 'artist's moving image' the work is also transdisciplinary in the way that it draws upon curation (in the selection of material from the archive) and collaboration (jointly produced by Parker and Moore). Below, I explore the connections between this piece and my own practice, and to key concepts within hydrofeminism.

The work connects with my own is in the choice of location – Devil's Point in Plymouth. However, where I use the site as a departure point for a sonic expedition through the world's oceans (*Benthic Caress* 2017), Parker and Moore use it to 'capture the confluence of the histories and lived experience of *this place* for the audience in moving image and sound' (my emphasis). In locating our work in this one location we are adding to the 'simultaneity of stories so far' (Massey 2005). In siting our works in this specific location, we are also citing (consciously in the work of Parker and Moore) the many other incidences, actions and memories that have occurred here. In so doing we share a strong connection in terms of located embodiment, whilst contributing in our individual ways to this site as an embodied location. This notion that location and social relations are entangled in ways that produce a particular understanding of space is informed by Doreen Massey's work, 'For Space' (2005). Massey argues that what makes a particular view of social relations specifically spatial is their simultaneity. In this way she is able to articulate 'space' as a moment in the intersection of configured social relations rather than as an absolute dimension. Understood this way, space cannot be seen as static. Space is mobile, as geophysical phenomenon. Space moves socially also. The full recognition of space involves the rejection both of any notion of authentic self-constituting territories/places and of the closed connectivities of structuralism as spatial (and thus evokes space as always relational and always open, being made) (Massey 2005:189).

Maelstrom: The Return (2014) and *Benthic Caress* (2017) share other intersections also: the use of curation as a creative methodology, and a collaborative approach to production. Most obviously, our works bear a relation to each other through the use of watery motifs, and it is here that our works converge around considerations of an aqueous imaginary.

Stacy Alaimo (2008:238) emphasises the movement that the 'trans' in transcorporeality alludes to, expanding our understanding of watery relations to encompass ourselves and other humans, non-human others, ecological and chemical movements, the unpredictable and undesirable as well as the seemingly natural. When considered spatially also, the mobility that is central to an understanding of transcorporeality is further complicated.

As Massey makes clear, because space is simultaneous, and internally multiple, it is therefore difficult because it is incoherent and inconsistent. Water always seemingly exists at a place, 'in' space, but is also, mostly, mobile. However, it is the specificity of situated waters, the confluence of place, space and time that allows water to be conceptualised as transcorporeal, as a slippery site of dynamic exchange and lively relationality. The transcorporeality of water – its movement across different sites – adds to this difficulty in conceptualising its temporal resonances. Space, articulated as an (always provisional) result of social entanglements across species and environments, and time, shapes us as much as we combine in the shaping of those spaces.

The shared watery motifs apparent in *Maelstrom: The Return* (2014) and *Benthic Caress* (2017) are anchored in waters that are situated, in the sense of location (Devil's Point) but also in the sense of the processes of watery becoming which is always embedded in particular places. In considering transcorporeality as an intermeshing (with the more-than-human) to foreground our inseparability from 'the environment', it might be plausible to consider 'thinking across bodies' as a temporal possibility, especially if the concept of transcorporeality is fused with Massey's notion of space. This is especially pertinent in relation to *Maelstrom: The Return*

(2014) where a temporal transcorporeality could be said to intersect with a spatial simultaneity to afford the viewers insights into iterations of located embodiments from the past.

Chen (2013) further complicates this mobile and spatial watery relationality through recourse to the multiple forms that water takes – muddy, humid, frozen, fully-immersed and foggy – emphasising the importance of understanding location through these material realities. She also foregrounds the need to draw upon multiple registers of experience – material and discursive, sensorial and habitual – whilst reminding us to consider what is absent, contested or accentuated in our representations of place (Chen 2013:276).

Our spatial and temporal relations to water may appear difficult, uncontainable and obscure, but these qualities also offer forms of radical opportunity. By its very nature – its transcorporeality – water elicits a particular ethics of relationality, a deterritorialisation that can offer new insights into how we make sense of space, and time, and of our relations with those we share it with. *In Maelstrom: The Return* (2014) these possibilities are opened up through the device of overlaying archival footage with fresh footage of the whirlpools created as the River Tamar mingles with the ocean. The fluid visual imagery elucidates these complex relations between space, time and transcorporeal subjectivities in ways that visual languages are well suited to explore.

3.5: D/deaf & Disabled Arts Practices

3.5.1: Diffractive Relationality

Considering the ways in which D/deaf arts practices can be understood through a hydrofeminist lens, a scrutiny of the politics of difference within Neimanis's work offers a point of entry, as

a theme which courses through her writing. In Bodies of Water (2017:122) and with particularly reference to Ursula LeGuin's 'carrier bag theory' she speculates about our capacity to remain connected whilst paying close attention to that which differentiates us. The examples in this chapter of D/deaf artists forging new practices that reveal novel insights into our bodily differences all pay close attention that which differentiates us, but in ways that don't embrace conventional assumptions about the D/deaf experience. Instead, each iteration of a D/deaf arts practice is itself unique and each provides a critique of the universalising metanarratives consistent with a particular reading of the Anthropocene as a flattening out of difference. Indeed they also provide a critique of the notion of being 'able-bodied' which is also assumptively universalised within broader culture and society.

Exceeding the intentions of LeGuin's original though powerful assertion that the 'things in the bag' exist in a specific and compelling relation to each other, Neimanis posits the possibility that we as a species are ourselves evolutionary containers, holding within our bodily waters the potential for the other, which she calls diffractive relationality. This process of diffraction hinges upon difference – where each ripple varies and exhibits nuance. Bodily difference – in this respect particularly D/deafness – is shown to be equally nuanced, with no one experience or articulation of D/deafness being a universal experience. This perspective implodes the binary of Hearing/Deaf as well as Deaf/Hearing-Impaired. In so doing the notion of able-bodiedness is revealed as a fiction. In my own work (*Hydrosapien,* (2018) and *Manual for Nomads,* (2020)) I was drawn to the use of BSL for what it *could* do as a visual motif and as a form of communication, not for what it signalled its users *could not* do (to hear). Participants in both projects understood this and supported my approach. The nuances I sought to express did still hinge upon difference, including human bodily difference, through the co-production of a work which (in the case of *Hydrosapien,* (2018)) foregrounded the complex and transcorporeal

differences between species and environments. Together, myself, the silent choir and the voice artists who co-created *Hydrosapien* (2018) actively drew upon the partialities within our sensorium that as different individuals we brought to rehearsals. We also hoped that the performances would draw audience members into consciously considering their own loci within their sensorium, thereby opening up channels for embodied responses. This example of diffractive relationality, harnessed as a means for amplifying affect, demonstrates how *Hydrosapien* (2018) worked as a creative practice that foregrounded marginalised voices.

In the next section I introduce the work of Sue Austin, a disabled artist whose work is performed under water, bringing watery relationality and disabled arts practices together in an overt display of an aqueous imaginary. I then introduce a number of D/deaf artists whose moving image practice reveal insights into D/deaf arts activisms within this medium. I complete this section with a consideration of Walking as an art practice, focusing upon artists who use walking as their practice, as women and as feminists, and/or as disabled artists.

3.5.2: Sue Austin

Sue Austin's art practice brings watery relationality and disability arts together, notably in her seminal work *Creating the Spectacle!* (2012). Working across multimedia, performance and installation, *Creating the Spectacle!* is a video performance work in which she uses a specially modified wheelchair to move underwater, using scuba diving equipment. It was performed as part of the London 2012 Cultural Olympiad.

In this work, Austin moves underwater through the Dead Sea in her modified NHS wheelchair. The work aims to change perceptions and challenge viewers to think of the NHS wheelchair not as a symbol of limitation but as a tool for release and freedom. Austin has a patent covering her underwater wheelchair (2013). In the same year she was invited to speak at NASA's Lyndon B. Johnson Space Centre on the importance of diversity. The talk was not open to the public but was broadcast online by NASA.

> I started wanting to make work around my wheelchair, but what I found was that everyone always interpreted it as if I was trying to say something negative about limitation fear. But for me it's always been about freedom, it's transformed my life. (BBC South Today 2013)

Figure 12: *Creating the Spectacle!* Sue Austin 2012
(Image used with permission)

Austin steadfastly asserts that her work is focused on liberation, risk and revolution – a personal revolution that turns the tables on the immobility she experienced prior to becoming a wheelchair user. Limitation fear is very real for people of any age who have experienced certain forms of ill health (such as a stroke) or have been in bad accidents (Fessel, K. Nevitt, M. 2005). However, Austin is clear that her work celebrates personal power and freedom, rather than contributes to the vast array of 'self-help' messaging around limitation fear aggressively promoted online and elsewhere.

Austin's work brings together themes of difference and disability within an aqueous environment, and offers a clear example of watery relationality that is so central to the

overarching themes of hydrofeminism. Whilst the imagery generated by Austin's work is unique, and whilst none of my work has involved submersion, the overlapping desire to celebrate difference and disability, to make difference and disability visible and agentic within artworks created for general audiences, can be seen in Austin's work as well as in *Manual for Nomads* (2020). By bringing signed communication to the centre of the viewers' experience in this moving image work, and by generating a narrative in which the agency of the protagonist is successfully navigated, *Manual for Nomads* (2020) shares Austin's use of watery relationality to celebrate difference. Neimanis makes the point that watery relationality is only possible because water expresses or facilitates difference. Austin's insistence upon the transformative nature of her art practice reiterates Neimanis's insight that through the 'continued expression of watery difference, bodies proliferate and transform – always seeking out new expressions of watery embodiment' (2017:67).

3.5.3: D/deaf Arts On Screen

In this section I aim to provide a particular context for two practice-led elements of this research – *Hydrosapien* (2018) and *Manual for Nomads* (2020), through reference to a range of artists and arts practices that align with, focus upon and critique D/deaf culture. This section then considers the ways in which these art practices can be understood within the aqueous imaginary of a hydrofeminist practice that celebrates difference.

The development and presentation of *Hydrosapien* (2018) was created without reference to works by D/deaf artists or to works that use BSL as a creative device. However, its conception was triggered by two events that impacted upon me in early 2018, both as a direct consequence of my experience as a research student at Bath Spa University. The first was a realisation that verbal utterances that were not word-based could be used as a metaphor for oceanic energy.

This realisation was a consequence of participation on the Porthleven Prize Residency, organised annually by Bath School of Art and Design. During the residency I spent a ludic afternoon exploring these possibilities with the Faroese musician Lyon Hansen, and went away keen to explore this phenomenon more deeply. A few days after the end of the residency I had recourse to visit the Sion Hill Campus in Bath (the main Arts Faculty of Bath Spa University prior to development of the Locksbrook campus in 2019). Whilst walking through the cafeteria I noticed two people talking passionately about a text by philosopher Gilles Deleuze, which was in front of them. However, their conversation was silent; they were using BSL – a method of communicating which seemed to me to mimic the movement of water. By the time I arrived home (some 200 miles south) *Hydrosapien* (2018) had been born in my head. I had envisioned a mass silent choir using BSL, accompanied by a duo of experimental voice artists, all presenting the same piece simultaneously, but through these two marginal practices. This was what was presented when the piece was finally delivered.

Hydrosapien (2018) enters the community of practice that brings D/deaf arts and artists together from the margins of the hearing world. This community of practice is not a self-defined collective of individuals or practices, they are brought together by me for the purpose of critically reflecting upon creative practices that overlap with my own. However, the breadth and richness of practice generated by D/deaf artists offers a valuable context for *Hydrosapien* (2018) and for *Manual for Nomads* (2020), and I highlight some of these practices further in this section, after explaining my reasoning for using BSL in my creative practice, most especially within *Manual for Nomads* (2020)

D/deaf communities are heterogeneous and host a wide range of views around whether being deaf is a disability. The character of the Commodore in *Manual for Nomads* (2020) was initially inspired by the point of view of a person I have worked with in the context of my parish council. He is a retired Admiral whose views on nuclear disarmament and on strategies to mitigate the climate crisis are in direct opposition to my own views (though *Manual for Nomads* (2020) is not about this individual, so much as this perspective). I sought to creatively articulate what I understood to be shortcomings in this point of view, and my resistance to the belief that individuals and communities have little or no agency to affect positive change. *Manual for Nomads* (2020) presents a protagonist whose very identity challenges the Commodore's world view, an individual whose disabilities place her even further away from any nexus of power as understood by this powerful representative of the Uniformed Services. Yet in the narrative progression of the film, the tables are turned and the power to act is firmly in the grasp of the young protagonist and the community she joins.

Activism is an overt aspect within *Manual for Nomads* (2020), defined by collective practical action, as suggested by the conclusion of the film where Ellen (the protagonist) is welcomed into the world of The Pilots. The intended meaning of this welcome is that it is through collective action that positive change and potential solutions (to personal and societal issues triggered by the climate crisis) can be realised. One of the intentions behind my decision to embed BSL into the methods of communication utilised within the film, is a strategy for highlighting the assertion that all communication is an act of translation, an imperfect interpretation, which allows for communication as an approximation of intent. In mobilising BSL as the dominant communication method within *Manual for Nomads* (2020)*, the shared world of D/deaf communication was foregrounded, signposting of the complex political implications of BSL. BSL is also a highly visual language which has fluidity, pace, and drama.

The next section considers some creative works in which these performative aspects have been used in different ways.

The intersection of D/deaf arts practices and popular culture come together consciously within the work of Bim Ajadi, profoundly Deaf director of film *Here/Not Here* (2020). The film draws connections between krump dance, football and British Sign Language (BSL). Ajadi employs visual vernacular, or VV, an art form unique to the Deaf community, which he was keen to bring to broader audiences. "It's a way of expressing visual vignettes," he says, through an interpreter during a video interview with a journalist. Ajadi references growing up in the 70s and 80s, watching television with no subtitles, and describes how Deaf people would take the shows in visually "and almost have their own version of the story. And when they would communicate back to other Deaf friends they would describe that using VV." (Winship 2020)

In late 2020 FVU (Film and Video Umbrella, a well-established organisation that makes moving-image works by artists in the UK), developed their D/deaf Artists' Film Commissions, part of a series exploring access in artists' moving image as a creative strategy which does not presume sighted or hearing audiences. Two works have been commissioned so far (as of February 2021). In *Captioning on Captioning* (2020) Louise Hickman and Shannon Finnegan, reveal the invisible labour and care required in speech-to-text translation work and producing access. Nina Thomas's *Silence* (2020) explores silence, deaf experience, and language, drawing on the role of Alexander Graham Bell in oralism.

Born deaf, American artist Christine Sun Kim uses technology, performance and drawing to explore sound and spoken languages. A compelling work entitled *Untitled Speaker Drawings* (2012) uses the frequencies of her voice to create paintings. Sun Kim is interested in silence,

and her deafness gives her a unique approach to that. For hearing people, silence suggests an absence. For Sun Kim silence is explored through noise, and one of her experiments focused upon the phenomenon of feedback, to demonstrate that it is not only through our ears that sound enters or affects the body, pointing to sonic warfare as an example of this. What I find most interesting, as an artist who uses BSL in different projects, is Sun Kim's insights into sign languages. Her work supports my previous assertion (in relation to *Manual for Nomads* (2020)) that all communication is an act of translation, an imperfect interpretation, which allows for communication as an expression of intent (rather than an unequivocal declaration). Braidotti (1994:16) makes the point (about writing) that it is 'more than simply a process of constant translation, but also of successive adaptations of different cultural realities'. Sun Kim is drawing attention to nuance across languages, specifically signed languages, and is complicating the ways in which hearing people might try to make sense of signed languages. I quote her here in her own words, as I believe it is important in this example to do so, not least because in her own words, as well as in her practice, there is a refusal to be definite and an insistence to act and to articulate in a provisional way:

> Different languages have different sign languages, but the expressions, ideas, and concepts are similar. I think it's easier for deaf people to communicate amongst their different languages than hearing people……the difference between American Sign Language and English …..It's sort of like writing from Chinese to Spanish or Spanish to French…..That's why I think ASL is a unique language. ASL is derived from French Sign Language mixed with home sign language. It's influenced by those but has its own formalized grammar. The tone is conveyed through body movement and facial expressions……I like using the piano as a metaphor. Playing the piano is similar to ASL. When you put your pinky finger down that's one note. Each finger has its separate notes, and all together you have 10 notes. So if you put them down at the same time, they become a chord. That's like ASL. It's not the same as English. It's spatial, not linear. If you think of a facial expression as one note, then body movement as another note, then speed as another note, hand shape, placement, and so on — all these parts add up to convey the message. When you do it all simultaneously, it becomes a chord. (Wilk 2015)

LOUD silence: Turning Up the Volume on Deaf Voice (2014/15) is the title of an exhibition by Amanda Cachia, an independent curator and critic from Sydney, Australia. Her research focuses on curatorial studies and activism, and the politics of embodied disability language in visual culture, amongst other things. The exhibition *LOUD silence* offered visitors the chance to consider definitions of sound, voice, and notions of silence at the intersection of both deaf and hearing experiences. Christine Sun Kim was one of the artists whose work was included in this exhibition, a show which explored how the seemingly oppositional notions of loudness and silence might be transformed and politicised through the artists' individual relationship to communication and language.

To be deaf is not to inhabit a world of silence in which the concept of sound is unknown. As Sun Kim's work highlights, sound enters and affects the body in a number of ways, not solely through our ears. Cachia felt that curators had rarely turned their attention to the deaf experience in relation to sound and so was keen to explore this dimension. She challenged the widely used phrase that 'silence is deafening', a phrase used to imply that a lack of response in an exchange between people is usually taken to mean disapproval. From this standpoint, silence, or 'the deafened moment' (Cachia 2015) suggests deviancy, ignorance or a stubborn refusal to communicate. *LOUD silence* sought to overturn these assumptions.

> It's about what disability can provide to the listener, not what the listener can do despite disability (Straus 2011:180).

One body of work in *LOUD silence* bears similarity to *Hydrosapien* (2018) in its use of signed language, but particularly in its refusal to 'translate' what is being communicated for a Hearing audience is *Silent Dedication* (2013) a 16mm black and white looped film by Shary Boyle.

Boyle actively wanted her hearing visitors to be 'othered', to experience alienation and exclusion.

> This was part of the texture of consideration for others that don't have a 'voice' (Boyle 2014:1).

Figure 13: *Silent Dedication* Shary Boyle 2013
(Image used with permission)

Another body of work within the exhibition *LOUD silence* was by Alison O'Daniel which showcased a new scene entitled *Hearing 4'33"* from her film *The Tuba Thieves* (2014). The title of the film refers to a string of tuba thefts that occurred from L.A. area high schools during that period. *Hearing 4'33"* is part recreation of the premier of John Cage's (1952) seminal "silent" music composition *4 minutes and 33 seconds* (*4'33"*). A significant aspect of this work is that the process of writing the film reflected O'Daniel's own experience of hearing. The artist uses hearing aids and lip reads. Importantly, the artist chose to record very little sound within the work itself, whilst also deciding to omit captions of any dialogue or ambient sound. This tactic aimed at unsettling the Hearing viewer, is seemingly the opposite of the tactics I used in the film *Manual for Nomads* (2020). Both O'Daniel's tactics in *The Tuba Thieves* (2014) and

my own in *Manual for Nomads* (2020) aim to critically address the expectations of hearing audiences who assume they will understand the forms of communication usually evident within film. In *Manual for Nomads* (2020), I used captions in two ways; firstly to give the D/deaf actors the breadth of audience they wanted (D/deaf and Hearing). This capacity to reach audiences beyond those who understand BSL is something which was discussed every time I worked with D/deaf people. The actors were passionate in their desire for captions and for strategies which increased their audience reach. Within *Manual for Nomads* (2020) in particular, because it has a relatively conventional narrative arc, and because captions in films are part of the visual language of many films, captioning direct communication was straightforward.

The second way in which I used captioning was to interject an invisible narrator who punctuated the scenes using Neimanis' paragraph about ecotones (2012: 107 In contrast to O'Daniel, the soundtrack I produced was intended to unsettle the hearing audience through the tactic of communication overload. If soundtracks are emotional guides for cinema-goers, then both O'Daniel and I devised strategies for undercutting their expectations.

> …an understanding of one's body – even a rigorously situated one – is multiscalar and mutigenerational; porous and palimpsestic. It is a congeries of the personal and the political; of the material and the semiotic. It is biological and cultural, and it is never only one thing, in only one place, or only 'itself. (Neimanis 2017:30)

Neimanis draws attention to the intentions behind the very different strategies employed by O'Daniel and myself in our separate films – namely that the specificity of difference matters, that even categories of difference such as gender identity, disability or race for instance, can be co-opted to produce an expectation of sameness within difference. To clarify, examples might include the stereotype that all Black women are resilient or that all neurodivergant people are

maths' geniuses. It is important that attention is paid to the differences that inhabit these universalising categories. At the same time Neimanis asserts the significance of relationality. Both difference and relationality, in Neimanis's terms, requires close attention to specificity. In different ways, O'Daniel and I have sought to employ strategies for unsettling the audience that might draw attention to this interplay between difference and relationality.

Returning to the theme of difference within language, including BSL, its regional variations, and signed languages from other countries, a project was developed by Manchester University in 2016, called *Translating the Deaf Self*. The project focused upon D/deaf British Sign Language users' experience of being translated by BSL interpreters and the connections of translation to Deaf culture. Having worked with a qualified BSL interpreter on all my projects that use BSL, I am aware that there are regional differences, and that Devon BSL certainly has its own slang. This became apparent in conversation during rehearsals for *Hydrosapien* (2018), and caused considerable mirth, a facet that helped make the rehearsals relaxed and enjoyable for all involved. I am not proficient in BSL, but the whole point of an interpreter is to bring D/deaf and hearing people together, and to allow everyone present to understand what is being communicated.

For *Translating the Deaf Self* (2016), four artists were commissioned to work closely with the deaf community and create art work inspired by their interactions. The artists selected were Rubbena Aurangzeb-Tariq (Deaf British born Muslim artist based in London), Christopher Sacre (Deaf artist based in Kent), Louise Stern, an American artist *who* grew up in an exclusively deaf community and is fourth-generation deaf on her father's side, and third-generation deaf on her mother's side, and Ruaridh Lever-Hogg (a Deaf artist from the Scottish

Highlands). The artists were in residence at locations across the UK – London (Deafplus, Whitechapel), Essex (Royal Association for Deaf People, RAD), Manchester (Manchester Deaf Centre) and Edinburgh (Deaf Action).

In this section I have introduced a selection of artists and exhibitions that focus upon D/deaf enquiries into sound, hearing and disability, undertaken in recent years. The section considers D/deaf arts as articulations of the politics of difference, examined through a hydrofeminist perspective. These themes are explored in particular in Chapter Two (Methodologies as Practice) and across the thesis as a whole in relation to the ethical crosscurrents that saturate this thesis. The next section considers the role played by Walking within my creative research.

3.5.4: Walking as Creative Practice

In this section, I draw together a selected group of artists who use walking as artistic practice, which provide a context for the evolution of walking as a research methodology within my practice. Particular attention is given to Walking Artists whose work foregrounds issues of feminism and activism, sometimes through the lens of disability arts. Walking is considered in relation to the politics of bodily difference and gendered identity. Whilst none of the artists claim to be able to walk on water, the perambulatory examples given here are all considered in relation to a hydrofeminist understanding of difference.

Walking as practice has threaded throughout my work for many years, and continues to be integral to it. Both *Interim* (2018) and *Rhyne & Huish* (2017-2019) explored forms of walking as forms as creative practice research, or research creation. This is explored in more detail in

relation to my own work in Chapter Two (Methodologies as Practice). In Chapter Five (Conclusion) it is identified as a significant aspect of my current practice (2020-ongoing). However, at the end of this section I consider how the walking artists cited below use overlapping or contiguous methodologies and intentions that speak to my own practice.

The artist Morag Rose is clear that she uses walking as a research tool. Instigator of the *Loiterers Resistance Movement*[4] (The LRM, 2006 - ongoing) a Manchester based collective of artists, activists and urban wanderers interested in psychogeography, public space and the hidden stories of the city, Rose is also very clear that her definition of walking includes mobility devices that enable movement, such as wheelchairs, scooters, sticks and orthotics. As such her work exists at the intersections of art, activism and disability.

Walking as a method for research creation is explored by a wide variety of practitioners, within and beyond the arts. Rose (2020:211) cites a collection edited by Bates and Rhys-Taylor (*Walking Through Social Research* 2017) which offers an overview of different motivations. Contributions include sociological accounts of Black History, walking with youth groups to understand their experiences of space, auto-ethnographic accounts of shopping centres, and community participation in walks to monitor air pollution. As this collection makes clear 'walking is not just a technique for uncovering the mysteries of the city but also a form of pedagogy or a way to learn and think not just individually but also collectively' (Back 2017: 20).

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[4] http://www.thelrm.org/ accessed 19/02/2021

Rose explicitly proclaims her feminism (2020:215) alongside her resistance to Ableism. Rose is keen to drag the practice of walking as a political methodology away from its white, middleclass, ableist, and masculine roots in surrealist and Situationist theory and practice into the present, highlighting the intersectional realities of contemporary artists that use walking.

> I place my own research within an explicitly feminist geographical tradition. This is in part because I wanted to challenge a canon which is overwhelmingly male and which tends to assume the walker is explicitly male or ungendered with an assumption of maleness. This is problematic because of the very embodiedness of walking; bodies are all different and have different privileges. Gender – or presumed gender based on physical appearance – therefore has a fundamental impact on the experience of walking. Both my research and my own lived experience support the view that women and men walk in different ways and feel able to be in space in different ways. (2020:215)

Rose foregrounds her differently-abled embodied experience as a form of activism, not solely or indeed wholly as a signifier of herself as a person with physical mobility challenges. She invites us to allow the category of walking as an artistic and research practice, to become complicated and to exceed mainstream notions of walking, to include female bodies, trans bodies, Black bodies and all those bodies marked by difference.

> …taking a materialist orientation towards bodies does not mean that biological data should be accepted uncritically, as some kind of full and final arbiter of truth. In the context of our contemporary epistemological paradigms, there is a sense that through scientific knowledge, things (like bodies, like water) might finally become knowable. When described through vectors of performativity, or social construction, or affect, or even a more conservative politics of location, knowing our bodies still seemed like a somewhat (comfortingly, even) speculative endeavour. (Neimanis 2017:37)

Here, Neimanis is echoing Rose's claim that bodies exceed their physical limits precisely because they are social and cultural as well as biological. There is no definitive knowledge that can be drawn from our biology because the social and cultural categories which shape us and are shaped by us are always shifting, always distinct. There is no universal consensus regarding what a body is or is not, and this multiperspectival reality pertains to bodies of water also.

An exemplary example of women walking as artistic practice and research is *Walking Women*,[5] a series of walks, talks, and screenings and events curated by Clare Qualmann and Amy Sharrocks in 2016 as part of UTOPIA, and was also part of a day long event with Forest Fringe at the Edinburgh Arts Festival. In London and Edinburgh artist's walks and talks ran alongside a Wikipedia edit-a-thon of women walking artists, open mic artist's talks, and special editions of LADA's Study Room and *The Walking Library*, featuring books by, about and related to walking women. The series brought together over fifty women artists to share their artistic walking practices. The series asked:

> How do we re-write a canon? How do we re-balance the perception of art, artists, and the use of walking as a creative practice? Can we not only imagine a future in which gender bias and skewed vision is destroyed, but actively build the pathway there? https://www.walkingartistsnetwork.org/walking-women/ accessed 15/02/2021

Walking Women was in itself a community of practice, whose targeted enquiries sought to contribute to the ongoing challenges to the dominant and universalising practices within their field. Again, their speculative insights are located, in physical spaces, in communities (intentional in this instance) and in practices.

Within this research, my own walking practice is most evident in two projects. The first was *Interim* (Bangalore 2018) in which walking allowed myself and my students to experiment with the notion of 'using our bodies as sensory data collectors'. This strategy is explored in detail in Chapter Four (Bodies, Spaces, Practices).This project aligns with the work undertaken by Rose who foregrounds the physical limits of her body precisely to reveal the ways that our bodies exceed those limits, specifically because our bodies exist beyond the physical realm and

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[5] https://www.walkingartistsnetwork.org/walking-women/ accessed 12/12/2020

are given meaning as social and as cultural bodies as well. *Interim* (2018) used the body as a starting point for enquiries into embodiment, and revealed the extent to which embodiment is imbricated by social and cultural categories which are always shifting. *Interim* (2018) sought to generate multiperspectival responses to sensorial stimuli as a metaphor for the multi-valenced (countable and uncountable) registers which pertain to bodies of water also.

The second walking project I undertook as part of a range of experimental strategies to explore the themes of this research was *Thirteen* (2019), a multi-layered enquiry, which might also be framed as a consultation. This one-day participatory walk did not involve walking as a physical experience. Instead, thirteen women formed and performed walking-on-water, as we traversed the thirteen miles of the Bridgewater and Somerset Canal on a specially chartered barge. This canal, clearly constructed by humans, is not connected to other waterways or bodies of water, natural or otherwise. All the participants were invited artists and/or scholars whose remit was to tease out, through open-ended discussion, what hydrofeminism might mean to them. Situated within the broader project *Rhyne & Huish* (2017-2019), *Thirteen* (2019) used this numerical label to layer meaning, across forms of feminism, women's histories, space, time and geography. Each participant responded to a different short excerpt from the essay Hydrofeminism (2012) as a strategy for opening up conversation. *Thirteen* (2019) was a community of practice that existed in a specific time and place. It was an embodied and located community of practice framed specifically to generate enquiry into what forms a shared notion of aqueous ecopolitics might take.

> …the challenge is rather an acknowledgement that all imaginaries are a congeries of matter and meaning – ideas entangled with material situations that offer various orientations towards thickly emergent worlds. Our decision can be to orient ourselves in one way, or another. (2017:155)

Disorderly collections of speculative insights, brought together (as they are in this above quote from Neimanis, and as they were in *Thirteen* (2019)) are located, in physical space, in communities (intentional and permanent, or otherwise as in the case of *Thirteen* (2019)) and in practices. In this way, *Thirteen* (2019) connects to work undertaken by *Walking Women* (2016) (cited above) and contributes to the re-writing of the canon of artist's walking practices, not solely by adding a pathway leading beyond the gender bias of the canon, but by also foregrounding watery relationality as a strategy for creating this pathway.

3.6: Practicing Community

In summarising this chapter, what becomes clear is that using the term 'Communities of Practice' is appropriate. This is not simply so because of the entangled creative relationships I have with many of the selected artists, it is also an insight afforded through the lens of a hydrofeminist and transcorporeal set of relations with our shared subject matters, as well as our shared conviction that we operate within a partial yet situated milieu of intra-active entanglements.

In this chapter the specificity of location (which can signal identity as much as place) and embodiment has been foregrounded to reveal that engaging in aqueous ecopolitics can take many forms. These creative enquiries do not reside solely within the terrain of the watery metaphor, but are realised through strategies akin to oral histories; there is a potency within our shared 'everyday' relationship with water which connects us – to each other, to our more-than-human co-inhabitants, to place, and across time. Whilst Sharrocks creates an archive through the presentation of the *Museum of Water* (2014 – ongoing), Parker and Moore plunder the archive to attest these watery relations. And if both these examples shine a light on what we

think we already know about these relations and the worlds we/they inhabit, Barclay's work plunges us, literally, into the alien-made-familiar of the pelagic and benthic: the oceanic. Mapping a brief (and always already incomplete) history of ecoacoustics to demonstrate the ways in which creative and socially engaged sonic acts can operate in the interstice between science and art, this chapter has argued for a fluidity in our thinking so that we might harness the potential to make kin in the transcorporeal maelstrom of a zoe-centric and intra-active hydro-commons. Such fluidity of thinking is crucial (if a little late) if the marine environment, its flora, fauna, and especially its shell fish and Cetaceans, are to stand a chance (Alaimo 2017:58). Creative acts which offer embodied engagement and which promote empathetic responses in the broader public have a role to play. Changing behaviour and demanding change from governments and multinationals. However, such much-desired-for change is only part of the solution:

> Individuals could have some impact if they shrunk their carbon footprint, stopped con-suming seafood, and avoided plastics. Governments and international bodies should create many more marine-protected areas, and enforce stricter policies regarding fishing, trawling, mining, and dumping. But in the face of overwhelming and even inalterable damages to the ocean—caused by radioactive, chemical, plastic, sonic, and other pollution; wasteful and destructive industrial fishing; trawling; mining; warming waters; and acidification…..fails to account for epistemological challenges, nonhuman agencies, and the incommensurability of scale. (Alaimo 2017:155)

This chapter also considers the specificity of location beyond the geographical meaning, within those communities of practice that includes intentional communities (such as *Walking Women* (2016)). What brings all these practitioners and practices together are their specific articulations of difference, and their foregrounding of difference through their creative endeavours. Difference is a dominant theme throughout this research and is key to an understanding of the ethical intentions embedded within hydrofeminism. In the next chapter 'Bodies, Spaces, Practices' focus is given to my practice as a set of creative responses to hydrofeminism by

harnessing notions of difference. This is articulated through analysis of the ways in which the affect of embodiment that links hydrofeminism to transcorporeality and to posthumanism allows difference to be foregrounded.

4: Bodies, Spaces, Practices.

4.1: Introduction

This chapter describes the rationale for positioning the creative practice within experimental geography and Environmental Humanities. Here I also further anchor the practice as a set of creative responses to hydrofeminism, mapping this work in relation to posthumanism.

I initially used the term experimental geography to position my practice within concerns related to the climate crisis and to the ongoing degradation of our planet. I used it also to flag up that the nature of my creative enquiries were provisional, speculative, and experimental. This approach is supported by the range of contexts within which my work has been shown. My moving image work in particular has been screened most frequently within academic conferences organised by geographers – the AAG annual conference in Washington DC (2019), the RGS-IBG annual conference in Cardiff (2018) and the EUGEO annual conference in Galway (2019) for instance.

Subsequently, I have become more familiar with some of the literatures from experimental geography pertaining to the term, significantly, the work of Kullman (2013) and Last (2012). Situating these insights alongside Hawkins' extensive work on the Geographies of Creative Practice, I believe it is plausible to cite my practice as a geographical practice, one that explicitly seeks to experiment – with space and location, articulated by recourse to watery relationality. Hawkins (2012) positions place as process and place as in process, echoing Massey's conception of space as a 'simultaneity of stories so far' (2005: 23).

Situating the practice at the confluence of experimental geography (explored in detail in Chapters One and Two) and Environmental Humanities, allows the work to ask *what is meant by location that is expressed through practice and that is significant in the discourses surrounding our transcorporeal relationality*? This question signposts my understanding that hydrofeminism is situated within an environmentally focused posthumanism. The Environmental Humanities as an academic set of discourses is by its nature, hybrid. However, the overlapping discourses surrounding space, place and location are key across the discipline. Hydrofeminism explicitly places posthumanism within a watery relationality in which the specificities of location are paramount to an understanding of the relationship between difference and connectivity.

4.2: A Watery Posthumanism

I understand the posthuman subject as inhabiting an ecological milieu of multiple belongings, as a relational, critical subject, constituted in and by multiplicity. The posthuman subject works across differences and is also internally differentiated, but still embodied and accountable. Posthuman subjectivity is embodied and embedded, partially accountable, rooted in a commitment to collectivity, relationality, and community building (Braidotti, 2013:49). For clarity, when referring to posthumanism I am positioning the term in relation to transcorporeality, rather than in relation to the complex technoscapes which also use this term to explore our bodily relationships to digital and other technologies (Lenoir, 2002)

Posthumanism, in the sense that I am using it, and to which Haraway (2016), Braidotti (2013) and Neimanis (2017) all align their work with to differing degrees, breaks from the Enlightenment tradition, and traces its own critical genealogy through Spinoza (1677), to

Deleuze and Guattari (1972). Posthumanism is broadly critical of the foundational assumptions of the humanist Enlightenment project and its legacy, offering robust critiques of historical notions of what it means to be a human, and is particularly critical of its assumption of universality and its notion of what is 'natural'. The 21st century has been labelled The Water Century (Marshall, 2012) especially in terms of resource and commodity, as climate change and its impacts affect global populations in diverse yet specific ways, each offering valuable disruptions to the assumption of universality and what it means to be human within this Water Century.

The politics of water as a commodity unfolds distinctly in the particularities of physical locations, their economies and cultures. In certain regions and parts of the world this impact is clear, such as in Flint, Michigan (Glenza, 2017), and many others. However, less obvious than direct impacts but no less significant, are the complex and contested articulations of gender and of nature which shape worldviews and everyday practices, and which shape our understandings of both.

These articulations impact upon women in specific ways, and have been explored within Ecofeminism (a strand within Environmental Humanities) in a range of ways. Broadly, Ecofeminism seeks to address these articulations of gender and of nature, increasingly, in relation to effects of climate change and the role that water plays in these configurations. The term Ecofeminism is an umbrella term that covers a diverse range of discourses and practices which draw upon Ecologism, often critically (Cudworth, 2005). Ecofeminists draw upon deep ecological theory to the extent that they critique human relationships with 'nature' as a form of domination. They also provide a version of social ecology in which the domination of nature

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is interrelated to intra-human social hierarchy and difference based of gender, sex, race and class amongst other formations. Ecofeminism can be seen as a paradigm for the tracing of interrelations between different formations of domination based on difference (Cudworth, 2005:101). Hydrofeminism levers aspects of Ecofeminism to advance new articulations of difference based on connectivity.

4.3: Bodies, Spaces, Practice – situated entanglements

In this section I scrutinise each main body of work and its relationship to the theoretical insights explored in the previous section.

4.3.1: Benthic Caress

Benthic Caress (2017) https://aquameteor.wordpress.com/benthic-caress/ was a one hour participatory project which brought 100 people into the tidal pool at Devils Point in Plymouth, to listen to ecoacoustic recordings of marine life, using silent disco technologies. The work was very clearly using ecoacoustics as the tool to engage participants in a focus upon marine entanglements; the hour-long soundtrack included work by 10 artists whose remit was to produce up to ten minutes of marine-related sonic art. The technology – wireless headphones provided by a silent disco company – was significant in relation to the listening experience. For instance massive speakers blaring out the soundtrack would have created an entirely different experience. The headphones were noise-cancelling over-ear headphones (they could have been ear buds or on-ear, which again would have altered the experience). This meant that each listener had an intimate and uninterrupted experience of the sound track. Each of the 100 participants negotiated their own relationship between location, elemental sensation, and

sound. Yet each of the 100 participants were listening to the exact same sounds at the same time, and in the same place.

Figure 14*: Benthic Caress – participants in the emptied tidal pool. (2017)*

The invited contributors were *Chris Watson, Leah Barclay,* and *Jez Riley French. Chris Watson* provided 10 minutes of the sound of sea shrimps eating, captured in the thriving corals of the South China Seas. *Leah Barclay* provided 10 minutes of sounds selected from her work with the Biosphere Soundscapes, hydrophonic recordings of underwater environments. *Jez Riley French* provided 10 minutes of sound taken from a recording made in a lab in Iceland of minerals from the sea bed dissolving in a solution that relates to the corrosive levels of pollution at that location. Artists selected by submission included *Ivon Oates* who produced recordings made under an upturned boat lying in a stream on Eype beach, Dorset. The remote sounds of waves, passers-by, and dogs on shingle echo within the contained space, while the rippling stream is amplified. *David Rogers* created Dungeness Tower Shoreline, a technically complex piece which acted as a record of that place at that time. *Rachael Allain* produced Sternidae Altum, a subaquatic sound recording capturing the Terns feeding on the turning tide at sunset

on a remote South Devon beach at the end of the summer. *Andrea V Wright's* piece, Dissolve, Cease was written and recorded at a small fishing village in Cornwall for the 2015 Porthleven Prize. *Moore & Parker* produced 3 short pieces, hydrophone recordings of marine life in a rock pool near Devil's Point, French students enjoying an idyllic evening on Falmouth's Gyllyngvase Beach, and Night Sounding, a composition of a trawler fleet protesting in Plymouth Sound against fishing restrictions. *Lee Berwick* created Dwr (Welsh for 'water') whilst on retreat in North Wales and used sonification to explore the potential of enchantment. Finally, there was a playful contribution from the trio *Wildlife Discotheque* who often work with museums and other cultural institutions sharing their vinyl wildlife recordings.

Whilst sound is a constant thread across the three main bodies of work submitted for this research, it is only in relation to *Benthic Caress* (2017) that I employed ecoacoustics. As it configures hydrofeminism, posthumanism and experimental geography, ecoacoustics can be said to enable diffractive relationality. If one of the main tenets of Hydrofeminism is to identify and prioritise a watery relationality, then the use of ecoacoustics was successful in bringing this concern to a wider public.

> …subjectivity and identity are created in and through practices and through a radical intersubjectivity of joint action and communication. (Neimanis 2017:168)

Within *Benthic Caress* (2017) the utilisation of sonic arts amplified affect, and successfully centred marginalised voices. *Benthic Caress* (2017) used sound to immerse the subject in a sensory space, where transcorporeal and embodied enthralment in the watery relations, re-articulated hydrofeminism beyond its textual definitions. This manoeuvre can be described as an expression of diffractive relationality, where every participant, whilst listening to the same material at the same time, experienced nuanced embodied responses to the work, unique to

them. Neimanis uses this term to describe the prospect that as evolutionary containers, we hold within our bodily waters the potential for the other. The concept of diffraction articulated in this way hinges upon difference – where each ripple varies and exhibits nuance.

In the book *Bodies of Water* (2017) Neimanis expands upon her 2012 essay Hydrofeminism. Drawing closely on the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty (2014), she points out that far from being an abstracted, externalised observation, perception is an unfolding, an attentiveness to otherness from within, an enmeshing of body and space, which simultaneously creates and enacts subject and object. Perception is not the result of critical distance (the capacity to observe and reflect). We are not separate but participating, and in so doing, are constituted in the generation of meaning and subjectivity. Here, Neimanis signposts Barad's notion of intra-active becoming (explored in more detail below).

The ecoacoustic experience precisely allowed for, and created the perfect conditions for a mode of participation with the more-than-human world that constituted new meanings and new subjectivities in the context of these transcorporeal relations. It is in this way that the embodied relationship with marine-others constituted a posthuman configuration between participants and across species, a particular articulation of intra-active becoming. Also, *Benthic Caress* (2017) provided the conditions for a shift from 'a view on the world' to exploring 'a point of view in it' (Hawkins, 2012). This was not an atomised and individuated 'point of view'; the collective experience of an embodied engagement with marine life through the sensuous practice of listening could be described as a collaborative practice in this context.

Benthic Caress (2017) was an experiment – situated and specific – yet also speculative, with a number of 'unknowns' as well as aspects I could not control, most especially the behaviour and response of the participants. However, the location was fixed. It was, like the sound track, situated and specific. Kullman (2013) highlights the growing tendency within Geography for experiments to happen beyond 'the lab', and often in collective or collaborative contexts, and *Benthic Caress* (2017) sits comfortably within this frame. Last (2012) reiterates that the appeal of experimentation for geographers is in part to challenge methodological limitations, and in part to play a more active role in the production of space. Geographers and artists share a motivation to explore how the production of space is simultaneously articulated by engagement with the unknowable and the unrepresentable, through experimentation. By providing an immersive and sensory vehicle for embodied connection with marine species whose habitats are beyond reach for humans situated on land on the edge of the Atlantic, *Benthic Caress* (2017) provided precisely that. Hawkins (2012) further identifies aspects which concern both contemporary geographers and artists: changing orientations towards site, and a phenomenological critique of the body. Contemporary practices are interrogating 'what and how site means', moving beyond description towards evocation, towards experiments that provide conditions in which embodied experiences of location can occur, and *Benthic Caress* (2017) sought to provide such intra-active conditions.

> A transcorporeal, oceanic ecocriticism floats in a productive state of suspension, between terrestrial human habitats and distant benthic and pelagic realms, between the aesthetic estrangement of sea creatures and the recognition of evolutionary kinship, between mediated, situated, and emergent knowledges and an ethico-aesthetic stance of wonder. Both new materialisms and blue–green environmentalisms suggest that there is no solid ground, no foundation, no safe place to stand. Like our hermaphroditic, aquatic evolutionary ancestor, we dwell within and as part of a dynamic, intra-active, watery world. (Alaimo, 2012:481).

Karan Barad takes the term 'intra-activity' from the work of theoretical physician Niels Bohr, and in so doing adds it to lexicon of posthumanism. Stacy Alaimo then takes it up and adds it

to the lexicon of transcorporeality. The term refers to a sense of the world as a dynamic process, and in its use by both Barad and Alaimo it becomes also an entangled dynamic, differential and diverse, not existing in an 'outside', but a 'view from within' the entanglements that personify posthuman transcorporeality. Barad plays with the term to highlight the double meaning of mattering – both as an ethical position ('this matters') and as a posthuman perception of materiality. It is in this context that I have taken up the term within this research.

Simonsen (2007:168) reminds us that '*subjectivity and identity are created in and through practices and through a radical intersubjectivity of joint action and communication'.* Through the act of collective listening, *Benthic Caress* offered the potential for radical intersubjectivity, not just for and with humans, but also with marine-others. The spatiality of the body is not a spatiality of position, but one of situation, where situation is understood to contain intra-subjectivities – our sense of the many and different complex ingredients that make us uniquely ourselves, including as species. Both Hawkins and Neimanis draw our attention to relational ontologies, 'a mutual enfolding of self and world that inevitably moves us beyond the singular personal experience' (2011: 467), towards relational subjectivities, and in evaluating the responses from participants after the experience, *Benthic Caress* (2017) was successful in creating conditions in which this could occur.

4.3.2: Hydrosapien

Hydrosapien (2018) https://aquameteor.wordpress.com/hydrosapien/ was a public performance in which a Silent Choir of 100 local people used British Sign Language (BSL) to present a signed version of The Ecotone Paragraph from the essay Hydrofeminism (2012), alongside a duo of experimental voice artists who used non-linguistic vocal interpretation to present the same paragraph from the same essay. This paragraph directly references the water

bodies which are the triggers within my practice. The demand within this paragraph that we work through an embodied relationship to a watery ethics was one which I sought to amplify. Simonsen (2007) reminds us that emotions are not simply 'actions' or simply 'passions' (understood as external forces that impact upon us) – they are both at once. Drawing on Merleau-Ponty (2014), she identifies an aspect of emotional spatiality as 'affective space, which is the space in which we are emotionally in touch – open to world and aware of its affect on us. This perspective allows us to understand that emotions can be public and relational – 'formed in the intertwining of our 'own' bodily flesh with the flesh of the world and with the intercorporeal flesh of humanity' (Simonsen, 2007:177). Neimanis's unfolding of ethics within Hydrofeminism locates difference as a shared experience, despite and in full acknowledgement of the fact that our particular difference might be unique.

Hydrosapien (2018) operated within the registers of Environmental Humanities in its attention to human actions and their effects upon ecological systems. The Ecotone Paragraph exists within a text that is firmly anchored within Environmental Humanities. Transcribing it through BSL and experimental voice work could be said to constitute an instance of experimental geography, where the intention to openly experiment with location as a site of difference (where location is understood as the 'geography closest in' (Simonsen, 2007:179) is formed through a manifestation of watery relationality. *Hydrosapien* (2018) successfully presented, through performance, a tangible expression of hydrofeminism through its elevation of difference, within a context where that difference provides connections. The work did this by presenting new modalities of sonic art, uniting seemingly oppositional elements within the performance; a Silent Choir and an Experimental Voice Duo.
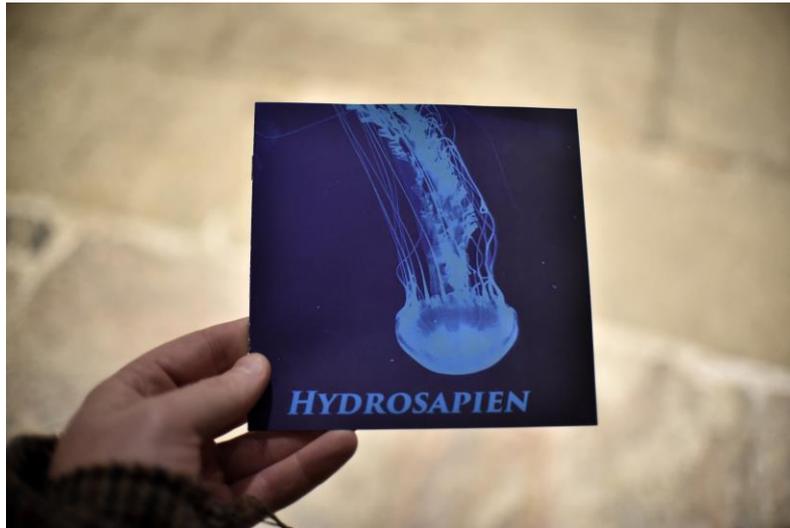
Figure 15: Booklet for *Hydrosapien* (2018)

Hydrosapien (2018) performed a posthuman transcorporeality in its presentation of semiotic and symbolic exchange (Neimanis 2017:77). *Hydrosapien* (2018) embodied a milieu of multiple, relational, critical subjects, marked by multiplicity. Braidotti (2013:49) reminds us that the posthuman subject is grounded in an engagement with collectivity, relationality, and community building. In the journey from initial idea to public performance *Hydrosapien* (2018) exemplified this definition of posthumanism.

4.3.3: Manual for Nomads

Manual for Nomads (2020) https://aquameteor.wordpress.com/manual-for-nomads/ is a film that builds upon work undertaken exploring sound and its absence. It draws upon previous work using BSL, and introduces the use of Braille as a tool for foregrounding the convergence of the languages, codes and methods of communication of differently abled persons. It explicitly uses Neimanis's Ecotone Paragraph, and unlike previous works, it is presented in narrative form. In the next section I seek to contextualise the film's various elements to uncover its position in relation to Hydrofeminism.

In broad terms, the overarching themes in *Manual for Nomads* are concerned with knowledge production, power, communication, and community, in relation to responses to the effects of climate change. Knowledge production in *Manual for Nomads* is directly contingent upon the emotional spatiality that Simonsen identifies as affective space (2007:177) and is located in the protagonist's (Ellen) ongoing search for help in understanding and ultimately managing her emotional responses to the effects of climate change. Her knowledge production is incremental as the narrative of the film builds. Ultimately, she is able to situate her emotional knowledge within a very particular sense of community, and in so doing is rescued from isolation.

> Situated knowledges are about communities, not about isolated individuals. The only way to find a larger vision is to be somewhere in particular. (Feminisms) images are not the products of escape and transcendence of limits (the view from above) but the joining of partial views and halting voices onto a collective subject position that promises a vision of the means of ongoing finite embodiment, of living within limits and contradiction – of views from somewhere. (Haraway 1988:90)

The theme of knowledge production is also explored in the character of the Commodore – a high ranking naval officer who 'commands' ships. The Commodore, when in uniform, is seen to embody conventional knowledge production, knowledge which is predicated upon a belief in the possibility of objectivity. This is underscored by his dismissive response to the scribbled, hand-made booklets he scrutinises. The Commodore sits in his uniform in an abandoned interior location (an 'anywhere' defined by disuse, dysfunctionality and evacuation), commenting with increasing cynicism about the booklets, which collate unconnected facts about the oceans, the constellations, the tides, marine species and other watery themes. The Commodore clearly demonstrates his disdain for the subjective and partial knowledges they contain. In contrast, the same actor, naked and in the same sparse location, is equally annoyed and offended as he skims through The Royal Navy Officers Pocket Book (1944). The Naked

Commodore sits uncomfortably in relation to conventional, objective knowledge production, in the full knowledge that this 'Gods Eye View' is a set of untruths.

> All Western cultural narratives about objectivity are allegories of the ideologies governing the relations of what we call mind and body, distance and responsibility. Feminist objectivity is about limited location and situated knowledge, not about transcendence and splitting of subject and object. It allows us to become answerable for what we learn how to see. (Haraway 1988:583)

Figure 16: Still from *Manual for Nomads* – the Commodore discards the books (2020)

In parallel to the theme of knowledge production is the theme of power. The Commodore scenes are about public versus private personas, conventional knowledge versus intuitive knowledge. 'Power' here refers to the implied dominance of mainstream discourses whose universalising language places marginality and difference as mutually inclusive, and on the outside of dominant power dynamics. This point speaks to my second research question: *Can creative practices which articulate the confluence of subject, location, and difference, as ecotone, foreground marginalised voices?*

Ellen's power, in parallel with her knowledge, visibly grows, incrementally as the film progresses, and as before, she is at her most powerful when engaged in collective practical action. However, power, as defined or redefined as effective communication, is hers from the outset. Whilst her initial encounters with others, in the bus stop and in the underpass, are unsuccessful in terms of eliciting positive responses from the people she communicates with, she does successfully communicate with them. They all speak the same language – in this case BSL – and even viewers who do not speak or understand BSL (or indeed English, the language of the subtitles) will get the gist of each conversation. Embedding BSL, and to a much lesser extent, braille, into the dialogues that constitute the films' script is a strategy for foregrounding the fact that all communication is an act of translation, an interpretation, that allows for communication as an imperfect articulation of intent. I believe this strategy foregrounds Neimanis's notion of diffractive relationality, an insight that values the specificity of difference within difference, and particular approximations that exhibit nuance. This notion parallels Haraway's insistence upon the situated and partial nature of knowledge.

> Feminism loves another science: the sciences and politics of interpretation, translation, stuttering, and the partly understood. Feminism is about the sciences of the multiple subject with (at least) double vision. Feminism is about a critical vision consequent upon a critical positioning in unhomogeneous gendered social space. Translation is always interpretive, critical and partial. (Haraway 1988:589)

Haraway (1988) is talking specifically about knowledge production within science, yet the essay offers a transferable set of insights which have pertinence here. When the protagonist in *Manual for Nomads* (2020) finally meets up with the Pilots, she comes to realise that it is through collective action that positive change and potential solutions can be realised. She understands the power of community.

> Subjectivity is multidimensional; so, therefore, is vision. The knowing self is partial in all its guises, never finished, whole, simply there and original; it is always constructed

and stitched together imperfectly, and *therefore* able to join with another, to see together without claiming to be another. (Authors emphasis) (Haraway 1988:586)

Prioritising affect within *Manual for Nomads* (2020) as a powerful tool for understanding knowledge production, draws upon the *feminist* within hydrofeminism. In *Living a Feminist Life*, Sara Ahmed (2017:22) draws attention to how sensation matters, despite (though actually because) "a gut feeling has its own intelligence. A feminist gut might sense something is amiss. You have to get closer to the feeling" (Ahmed 2017:27). In *Manual for Nomads* (2020), the protagonist Ellen is propelled forward through the narrative by her gut instinct that 'something is amiss'. She pursues this logic in her quest to 'find closure' precisely because she gives priority to her affective judgement. This strategy can be understood as feminist in that the politics of emotion are concerned with the affective investments of gender as a social norm. Åhäll (2018) argues:

> In order to understand such affective investments as a politics of emotion, I argue, we must also approach affect as methodology. To this end, what feminist knowledge offers is twofold: First, a way to identify "the political" in the affective-discursive because affect generates questions about how the world works. Second, by feeling differently, a feminist analysis opens up a space for thinking, acting, and knowing differently. (Åhäll 2018:50)

Åhäll (2018) discusses affect as a methodological tool. I also understand it, and affect more generally, as ecotonic, as a transitional sensation borne out of the merging or clashing of two registers: the physical (by which I mean 'of the body') and the intellectual (by which I mean 'of the mind'), though of course, as discussed previously, both these registers intermingle to generate embodiment.

> But more than just a marker of separation or even a marker of connection (although importantly both of these things), an ecotone is also a zone of fecundity, creativity, transformation; of becoming, assembling, multiplying; of diverging, differentiating, relinquishing. (Neimanis 2012:107)

Figure 17: Braille embroidered onto fabric (2020)

As transition areas between two adjacent but different ecosystems, both gradual shifts and abrupt demarcations. But more than just a separation or even a marker of connection (although importa... things), an ecotone is also a zone of fecundity, creativity, transforma... becoming, assembling, multiplying; of diverging, differentiating, reli... Something happens. Estuaries, tidal zones, wetlands: these are all limi... where "two complex systems meet, embrace, clash, and transform one anot... home. Tone: tension. We must learn to be at home in the quiv ...ng tension between. No other home is available. In-between nature and culture, in-betw... biology and philosophy, in-between the human and everything we ran our... against, everything we desperately shield ourselves from, everything we tru ourselves into, wrecked and recklessly, watching, amazed, as our skins b... thinner.

Figure 18: Text as it would look if transferred from the embroidered Braille above (2020)

I am advancing embodiment as a means of operating with agency within the world. This is apparent when the protagonist in *Manual for Nomads* (2020), begins to understand the braille embroidered onto her cape, a panel of tactile code which translates most of the paragraph within the essay Hydrofeminism that concerns itself with ecotones. The embroidered braille is not complete, it is partially 'washed away' (see figures 17 and 18). This subtle manoeuvre underscores the impetus for code-breaking that the cloak as a whole offers, placing the actions and motivations of the protagonist in a dialogue with potential solutions. Ellen needs to bring something of herself to the issue at hand in order to locate these potential solutions. This 'something' is her gut instinct. Braille is a code, not a language. This coded message is a tactile and tactical charge, a message which confirms to Ellen that her gut instincts are to be acted upon, and that in joining with others, in seeking community, she will locate the agency for

which she yearns. Ellen's embodied transcorporeality is inscribed upon her body (in this sense upon her clothing).

> Within a feminist posthumanism, however, transcorporeality is never 'merely' a matter of physical or chemical exchange. Gathering up feminist theoretical insights on embodiment across decades, we know that matter is never 'just' brute matter; when matters of the body overlap with and transit through a more expansive elemental milieu, this transcorporeality is also a semiotic and symbolic one. Meanings ebb and flow, gather and disperse. (2017:77)

In this sense, *Manual for Nomads* (2020) can be understood as embodying hydrofeminist posthumanism (where transcorporeality is a condition of posthumanism). The film can be understood as employing *ecotone* as methodology, through the various devices of knowledge production, power, communication and community.

> This is how feminist knowledge on affect offers a way to retune, reset, and reimagine research on the politics of emotion. By prioritizing affect as methodology, feminist knowledge and analyses should be valuable for critical endeavours interested in changing the status quo, no matter if the political puzzle is about gender or not. If scholars are serious about analysing the politics of emotion, feminist knowledge must not be ignored. Åhäll (2018:50)

4.4: Supporting Works: Rhyne & Huish, Interim, Field Notes

These three bodies of work operate discreetly as individual and separate experiments. They explore, in their own ways, potential strategies for developing creative practices that might contain successful elements within a transdisciplinary practice that seeks to address my research questions.

4.4.1: Rhyne & Huish (2017-2019)

Rhyne & Huish (2017-2019) is a title framing a body of experimental work that used the Somerset Levels as a location to explore my research questions across a range of practices in

an open-ended way. The title references specific landscape features unique to this area, but is also intended as a light hearted jibe at high end companies such as Farrow & Ball and Osborne & Little, whose products grace glossy magazines such as 'Home of Interiors', which present rural locations as rarefied landscapes within which to be seen to enjoy ones privilege. *Rhyne & Huish* (2017-2019) is situated within a county that records the highest levels of rural homelessness in the UK (Noor, 2018). Facts such as this one underscore the irony intended in the use of the title *Rhyne & Huish* (2017-2019). The project started with an accumulation of facts, mostly regarding climate, topography and other geographical data pertaining to the Somerset Levels. These were collated into a small reference book, the pages of which were exhibited in my local community centre in February 2018.

The range of other work undertaken under the heading *Rhyne & Huish* (2017-2019) included group walks, and a series of drawings, which were exhibited at Space, Dartington in 2019, in a group show organised by artdotearth, entitled Memory and Observation. *Thirteen* (2019), already described within this thesis, took place on the Bridgewater and Somerset Canal. The canal 'stood in' for a Rhyne in this context, allowing access in a way that the actual rhynes are unable to.

Figure 19: *Rhyne & Huish* - drawings at Space, Dartington (2019)

Rhyne & Huish (2017-2019) was brought into being through a series of actions aligned with geographic practices and with concerns articulated within discourses within the Environmental Humanities. These actions were the research and development of contextual material attending to the climate, topography, ecological data and human demographics specific to the Somerset Levels. This material was complimented by short film works positioned as field notes that blurred the distinctions between factual information and embodied responses. Though the project was marginal in relation to this research, through *Thirteen* (2019) it succeeded in formulating novel approaches to research creation in its focus upon a multiperspectival approach to a critique of Hydrofeminism. *Thirteen* (2019) also manifested a tangible form of watery relationality that foregrounded shared accounts of embodiment within a group of women marked by difference.

Figure 20: *Rhyne & Huish* - Thirteen (2019)

4.4.2: Interim

Interim (2018) is documented here: https://aquameteor.wordpress.com/interim-2/ The project focussed upon the water crisis in Bangalore, and brought students together to explore the potential for 'using our bodies as sensory data collectors'. The work produced on *Interim* (2018) – both as process and as final performance – sought to articulate affective relationships that might reveal oblique connections between natural, social and creative ecologies. We focussed upon the tanks which have historically supplied the city with water. We made visits to a number of tanks – one so highly polluted it spontaneously combusts, and one which is being nurtured back to life by a local community group, one which is currently drained, undergoing landscaping as preparation for a recreational space to complement burgeoning development within the city, and one that has previously been built on but which floods during each monsoon season. We focussed our attentions on Jakkur Tank – nearest to the Srishti Campus. Throughout *Interim* (2018) our focus upon water was intentional. We explored the capacity for water to summon relationality, alongside our human/animal fundamental need for access to water. We sought to reimagine the tanks, taking ownership of the ways they have been presented on conventional maps and plans.

> The line by which representations assert the land-water divide is drawn in a time when water appears containable and not when it is precipitating, evaporating, transpiring, and

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generally   behaving   in   ways   that   defy   delineation. https://www.mathurdacunha.com/platform accessed 05/12/18

Figure 21: *Interim* – Jakkur Lake (2018)

This refusal to be satisfied with representations in which water is merely contained and delineated, rather than embraced as a living, lucid phenomenon was crucial in the adoption of our method of using our bodies as sensory data collectors.

We used mark-making to generate something between a map and a score, in response to collaborative activities in which bodies-as-sensory-data-collectors harvested sensation to be later transcribed, as a set of instructions and a visual record of sensory experience. Woven into these visual works were sounds harvested from each location, which had been manipulated into flows of simultaneity, where recollections and forecasts merged to create a present set of '*stories so far'* (Massey 2005). Use of the term 'data collectors' was a sardonic nod to the primacy given to scientific language as a vehicle for expressing a 'truth'. We sought to articulate affective truths and in so doing shift the conversation away from an impotent

frustration with systems and institutions who purport to take responsibility, and towards collective agency.

Throughout *Interim* (2018) our focus upon water was intentional, the capacity for water to summon relationality, alongside our human/animal fundamental need for access to water, being strategically utilised to bring a group of students together from different Design and Fine Art courses across the Institute, many of whom had not worked together previously, to share the creative process. We sought to reimagine the tanks, taking ownership of the ways they have been presented on conventional maps and plans.

Interim (2018) consciously mobilised the human body as a marker for acknowledging an excess that could not be contained within the human body. This excess is that which exists, always in flux and never static, within our social and cultural bodies. These fluid social and cultural markers, in parallel with our corporeal bodies, overlap into forms of embodiment, and are confluences of the difference and connectivity that Neimanis attends to in Hydrofeminism. *Interim* (2018) sought to generate relational insights to sensorial triggers as a metaphor for the many diverse and sometimes ambiguous registers which also relate to bodies of water.

Figure 22: *Interim* – students on a field trip (2018)

Slowing down our brains long enough to tune into all the sounds around us as well as the sounds within us as we undertook our field trips, to tune into how our skin felt, in the breeze by the water, in the humidity and dust of the nearby streets, the incredible mixture of noise and sound, in the rain that fell sporadically, presented challenges as well as opportunities. Articulating intersubjective embodiment meant creating a space in which students relaxed enough to allow the difference between themselves and their surroundings to become porous, where they were present in the moment.

We then transcribed these sensory responses into marks – different marks for different sensations – to build up a key or a legend for the large collaborative maps we eventually made. To make these large maps I encouraged the students to tear sections or aspects of their individual works away, to add to the larger collaborative map. These massive maps became a rolling digital backdrop to a silent performance that used BSL to explore the overarching themes - that water connects us, across continents, genders, species, temporalities, geologies. Students had seen the videos from *Hydrosapien* (2018) in the introductory lecture I was asked to give about my own practice at the beginning of the five week residency. They were intrigued by sign language, actively requesting to include it somehow in their final performance. I had online tutorials sitting on my laptop that had been used in rehearsals for *Hydrosapien* (2018), and the students asked me to share these so that they might practice in their own time. The rationale for using BSL which was understood as an allegory for the extra-linguistic voices of the more-than-human was borne out of a very clear desire by the students to explore the performative potential of this (also) extra-linguistic mode of communication. We had use of an indoor amphitheatre with professional lighting and a generous stage for the final performances. Students decorated the floor with large paper boats, projected the maps into the far wall and performed their silent poem to an audience of about 100, two nights in a row. Talking with

audience members afterwards, they understood the BSL, the communication-through-silence and hand gesture, as the students had intended - as a parable regarding the unheard voices of the more-than-human co-inhabitants of the city's water bodies. This reception was very well received by the students.

The methodology deployed in *Interim* (2018) was experimental. The work sought to operate within registers aligned with Environmental Humanities, particularly in its emphasis upon location, bodies of water, and our entangled relations between ourselves, each other and the more-than-human co-inhabitants of the city's tanks. Our creative enquiries were environmentally focused, and speculative, seeking to uncover new ways of thinking and responding to the water crisis in Bangalore. Difference and connectivity – watery relationality - are two key perspectives within Hydrofeminism, expressed through reference the development of an aqueous imaginary. Just as each location – or tank –is different, yet still a tank within a system of tanks, so are our bodies (physically, socially and culturally marked) different, yet still bodies within a milieu of bodies. *Interim* (2018) worked with these parallels to develop a shared aqueous imaginary.

4.4.3: Field Notes (2016 - 20)

Field Notes (2016 - 20) is a collation of experimental work created using moving image and sometimes sound. Many of these very short films (12 in total) have been screened in the public domain, in the UK, Europe and beyond – either at academic conferences or as part of wider arts festivals. I have not included them all on the website dedicated to this research, but have selected two for further scrutiny. They are *Primordial* (2017)

The rationale for framing them as *Field Notes* was to locate them as a strategy to capture immediate data specific to a time and place, positioned as provisional and indicative within bigger research projects. Field Notes are defined as an initial basis of an ongoing enquiry. They are foundational yet also marginal. Field Notes articulated in this way identify and anchor key trajectories within research, they sketch out a general direction and highlight potential areas where key findings might later be located. A key feature of academic practice within the field of geography, field notes are commonly used in qualitative research as a means of documenting contextual information (Lauderdale, J. Phillippi, J. 2017).

Both works include sound as an element that is given equivalence to the visual within the whole. Upon reflection, these works operate as initial field notes for the question *in what ways can difference be foregrounded in ways that expand, through a practice that is weighted towards sonic arts, the aqueous metaphors employed with Neimanis's articulation of hydrofeminism?* Neither works succeed in answering this question, not least because they omit reference (visual, sonic or otherwise) to notions of difference. However, they frame different approaches to working with sound and with water, whilst responding broadly to my initial readings of Hydrofeminism and ultimately feed into the three successful main bodies of work.

Field Notes also have an integrity in their own right precisely because they are subject to memory and subconscious bias. Therefore collating these works under the title *Field Works* had a rationale. Using moving image as a 'sketchbook' approach to experimenting with

potential responses to my research questions ultimately led to the development and production of *Manual for Nomads*, though whilst I was making these sketches I did not have this outcome in mind. Rather, I was exploring a range of responses to bodies of water, in a somewhat descriptive, observational way.

Figure 23: *Field Notes -* still from *Primordial* (2017)

4.4.3.1: Primordial (2017)

Primordial (2017) documents and responds to a particular site – Cleveland Pools (Bath, SW England). This work was one of the first practice-led enquiries I created within this research. Water as a visual motif dominates the screen. However, apart from the rain hissing down, water as a sound object is omitted from the soundtrack. The sound aims to corrupt what might be an otherwise predictable familial narrative, drawing upon ecoacoustics to pose questions about our relationship with water and the more-than-human others with whom we share it. Sound is a significant element of the work, given an equivalence to the moving image material, and used strategically to steer the viewer's perception of the mise en scene.

Cleveland Pools is a Lentic ecosystem (as explained below). I was keen to find creative parallels that might use this information, in combination with other narrative intentions, in

order to place emphasis upon the unworlding - the ongoing cheapening of nature (Haraway 2017:100) of watery ecosystems when subject to the throes of the Capitalocene (2015:159-165). I chose birdsong, and used it in different ways to attach specific meanings to the work.

Lentic refers to relatively still water. Ponds and pools have two regions: the pelagic open water zone, and the benthic zone, which comprises the bottom and shore regions. Since lakes have deep bottom regions not exposed to light, these systems have an additional zone, the profundal. I wanted to find sonic equivalents to these pelagic, benthic and profundal zones, and birdsong seemed to offer that. These zones will have site-specific sonic phenomena, but without access to specific equipment, they are impossible to capture. Also, without interpretation, they would have been meaningless to the viewer/listener. I needed a sonic metaphor that would carry the audience down into the water, and that would conjure up a species-rich environment. My thinking was that if the Passerines (commonly, the smaller songbirds) occupy the pelagic zone, and pigeons and cuckoo occupy the Benthic zone, then to evoke a profundal zone – the deepest part of the body of water, I had to create a preternatural acoustic that was of birdsong but not the same as it. To do this, I slowed a section of the dawn chorus right down. Just as the sound track shifts into a deep acoustic, so the image falters, the camera revealed as hand-held, voyeuristic and far from any notion of an idyllic family outing.

> Just as the deep oceans harbour particulate records of former geological eras, water retains our more anthropomorphic secrets, even when we would rather forget. (Neimanis, 2012:98)

Primordial (2017) constituted an early experiment, an initial exploration of creative articulations of an ecological milieu of multiple belongings within an aqueous imaginary. It was a field note that informed the development of *Benthic Caress* by drawing upon ecoacoustics to consciously bring humans into an ecological milieu. However, in contrast to

Benthic Caress (2017), it sought to highlight an absence of watery relationality. Whilst the short film foregrounded affective dissonance, it failed to connect this to its political potential as identified by Åhäll (2018:50).

Figure 24: Still from *Ascent of Woman* (2018)

4.4.3.2: Ascent of Woman (2018)

The Ascent of Woman (2018) was shot by a friend on my mobile phone under my direction over a number of takes. (I am the figure on the screen) and edited by me, including the use of a default 'silent movie' filter. The sound includes contributions from a small herd of Jersey cows and from minnows that were nibbling my naked feet (recorded using a hydrophone), which have been adapted using basic sound editing software. It was created during a residency entitled *Ephemeral River* hosted by GNAP (Global Nomadic Art Project) at Dartington, for which I was one of 12 selected artists, and is included in a publication of the same name. The title *The Ascent of Woman* is a playful take on the title of a 1972 publication by Elaine Morgan entitled *The Descent of Woman* which proposes the aquatic ape theory of evolution. I remember reading the book in the early 1980s and it was from these memories that I constructed this film, which seeks to show that moment when 'woman' moves from a wet environment onto dry land for the first time. In order to emphasise the antiquity of the original move onto land, I chose to convert the footage into black and white, and to use the 'silent movie' filter – a filter which

adds effects intended to imitate early film, such as scratches, and frame distortions. There is a short section of the film in which the protagonist looks at her hands as if surprised that each finger is separate, that her hands are not, in fact, flippers (like a seal has). However, it is the sound track that makes clear that viewers are witnessing a moment from archaeological time (Morgan sets her study within the Pliocene, between 5.333 million to 2.58 million years ago). There is no speech, but plenty of grunting, whispers and whines, communicating a range of emotions and intentions as the heavy form attempts to heave herself onto land. The protagonist is not communicating with another of the same species, so much as vocalising her experience in the present moment. The eavesdropping viewer cannot mistake or misinterpret what is being communicated.

> High summer; Jersey cows with doe eyes and hot breath….slide under the surface and into the body of water as it passes its midway point between cold Dartmoor torrent and estuarial ease. Riparian relationships made in a moment,…a heaving body mixing mud and water, the primal soup eventually serving up a first human, a woman that moved from water to land, bringing aquatic subconsciousness to bear in a grounded presence. Minnows shuffle in the intimate muddlings of disturbed riverbed, alluvial sands and soils mixed up into minute clouds, a suspension where sound lingers below the plop plopping, the murmur-grunts, the ripples. Frustration, discovery, comprehension, frustration, vulnerability and ambition – all are audible, located outside language.
>
> (Text written by me for the publication 'Ephemeral River' art.earth GNAP 2018)

A photo-essay exploring the soundscape created for *The Ascent of Woman* (2018) will be included in a publication entitled *EnCOUnTErs*, edited by Helen Frosi, a London-based sound artist, in 2022.

In seeming opposition to the term 'posthuman' *The Ascent of Woman* (2018) instead focuses upon a fictional first human. Works by other artists who have focused upon the idea of Early Human were brought together in an exhibition presented at Plymouth Arts Centre in 2016, entitled *The First Humans*, curated by Angela Kingston and organised by the Pump House

Gallery in collaboration with Plymouth Arts Centre. The exhibition featured the work of Caroline Achaintre, Salvatore Arancio, Vidya Gastaldon, Andy Harper, Ben Rivers and Jack Strange. Ben Rivers' film, *The Creation as We Saw It* (2012) candidly depicts a creation story from a tribal village in the South Pacific. Shot on 16mm film, in black and white, it gives the impression of an educational film from the early 20th century, an impression which is broken when you see the villagers using mobile phones.

Stacy Alaimo, drawing on the work of Karen Barad, suggests that origin stories (which *The Ascent of Woman* (2018) is) may be '*ethical when they emerge from and engender ways of knowing, being, and acting that do not externalize the world, but instead insist that the (post)human is always already that which was and continues to be "part of the world in its becoming.*" (2012:479). I believe that *The Ascent of Woman* (2018) does position the human, the posthuman, in this way, most significantly through the soundscape which foregrounds the intra-active entanglements between ourselves and other species. In this sense the short film is an ecoacoustic articulation of located embodiment, a theme which is consistent (even if expressed in various forms) throughout my practice.

In this chapter I have made the case for positioning forms of art practice within an understanding of experimental geography and in relation to the geographies of creative practice. I have articulated further the intra-actions between practice and the theories of hydrofeminism and transcorporeality, with particular reference to the three main bodies of work which this thesis supports. I have anchored the practice within Environmental Humanities, as a prism through which to speak of ecological degradation in relation to bodies of water, positioning the embodied human within a transcorporeal wet-scape where fluid and

creative responses to hard environmental crises amplifies the urgent need for connectivity. I have worked through each iteration of practice and linked these themes to their unique creative attributes. In the next chapter I consider these works in relation to the research questions, identifying my original contribution to knowledge.

5: Conclusion

5.1: How did I get here?

In this final chapter I consider the ways in which I have answered my research questions. I scrutinise the extent to which my responses to these questions push new critical insights, both creatively and theoretically, and identify the ways in which this research presents original contributions to knowledge, whilst also outlining the limitations therein. I identify outcomes that were not predicted at the start of this research journey. This leads into a consideration of potential future research directions. Finally, an Appendix gives readers oversight of documentation relating to the Research Ethics journey that has formed an important part of this research, which concludes this thesis.

5.2: The Research Questions

5.2.1: Question One

In what ways can difference be foregrounded in ways that expand, through a practice that is weighted towards sonic arts, the aqueous metaphors employed with Neimanis's articulation of hydrofeminism?

This question afforded me the opportunity to scrutinise the various tactics related to sound embedded within my practice. I have shown how working with sound and its absences, through BSL in particular, can reveal insights into who is speaking for whom (or from where do we speak?). I mobilised the concept of the *ecotone* to bring sound and silence together within *Hydrosapien* (2018) and within *Manual for Nomads* (2020), as a means of bringing difference and connectivity into creative works which proposed a watery relationality. By harnessing the

genuine communicative capacity of BSL (rather than simply devising a dance for hands), I rendered silence as a text that could be read, whilst also questioning assumptions around D/deaf people as both artists and audiences, placing participants identified as marginal within mainstream culture at the centre of the work. The ways in which these works succeeded owe something to the mutual exchange mechanisms of collaboration, and the learning processes I underwent working with the D/deaf community. These included a much greater understanding of how BSL makes 'sense' on its own terms (through a complex and variable range of whole-word gestures, alphabetical finger spelling, and facial gestures), through the formidable capacity for digital technology to open up the lives of D/deaf people (demonstrated in these contexts through a lively use of text messaging, and through an appetite for online training videos), and the Choir's suggestion that their simple black clothing could form the backdrop for the visual spectacle of a mass of brightly coloured gloves as part of the performance, to draw attention to the mass of signing hands.

Through the formation of a bespoke community of practice (Chapter Three) that responds to the articulation of diffractive relationality within hydrofeminism, difference is again foregrounded. Through the practice of Christine Sun Kim and Alison O'Daniel in particular, who both experiment with sonic arts, this key theme within hydrofeminism is foregrounded. Both artists place emphasis upon bodily difference in ways that overturn conventional assumptions about the D/deaf experience. In doing so they also provide an excavation of the notion of being 'able-bodied'. Their work challenges the binary of Hearing/Deaf as well as Deaf/Hearing-Impaired, revealing the notion of able-bodiedness as a fiction in the process. In my own work I mobilised BSL as both a visual device and as a form of communication, not as a signifier of lack. Participants and I shared this viewpoint. The nuances expressed in the works focused upon difference, including human bodily difference, but also the complex and

transcorporeal differences between species and environments. This standpoint was also in common with the points of view of the participants, who wanted a platform to highlight these important and timely issues, just as I did. We shared the desire to engender a care-full response to environmental issues, and indeed this was a motivating issue for those who self-elected to participate in the creative works. These instances of diffractive relationality, situated within works which utilised sonic arts as a strategy for amplifying affect, demonstrate how the creative practice worked to foregrounded marginalised voices.

This research question was a strategic device to highlight the overarching argument that difference is the characteristic that connects us. Neimanis explores this paradox through a spate of aqueous metaphors, foregrounding the watery relationality that the term 'hydrofeminism' embodies. Through reference to 'sound' as a broad category, in which silence, experimental voice performance, ecoacoustics, and a bodily choreography that 'stands in' for sound (BSL), this question highlights the creative use of sound art. In doing so, sound broadly amplifies notions of multiple differences that my creative practice employs, especially in relation to D/deafness.

The three main bodies of work all offer dynamic and specific counter-narratives which impact upon the audiences' and participants' engagement with environmental and ecological issues, in ways that are framed as transcorporeal and relational. Sound-based strategies have been effective tools when generating creative work which articulates different (individual and collective) subjectivities related to water that are specific and dynamic. Difference as a connecting characteristic is amplified beyond the textual metaphors that flood Neimanis's writing. Voegelin (2014) shows us how sound foregrounds the pluralities, multiplicities and

mobilities which situate the listener as a posthumanist subject able to embody equivalence and mutuality with their environment, comprehending their subjectivity as one of accountability instead of dominance. (Voegelin 2014:141). Voegelin's insight reveals the capacity for sound to engender ethical reflections which bridge seemingly irreconcilable differences, between people and between humans and non-humans. Sound is one tool within my creative practice that moves the subject into the sensory space where transformation might be possible, making available the possibility of a transcorporeal and embodied immersion in the watery relations that are key to hydrofeminism. In this way, my use of sound as a broad category, articulated in specific and dynamic ways, constitutes one way in which this work offers an original contribution to knowledge.

> Who are you, and so who are we? Here we are and so what are we to become? (Haraway 2008:221).

5.2.2: Question Two

Can creative practices which articulate the confluence of subject, location, and difference, as ecotone, foreground marginalised voices?

The second question draws attention to the elements of my creative practice that evidence co-creation with Plymouth's D/deaf community. I have detailed my use of *ecotones* as creative-critical methodological tools within my practice, and have positioned my uses of the *ecotone* within the milieu of a transdisciplinary arts practice. I have demonstrated that by expanding the reach of the term, using grammatical structure as the device which brings these practice-led expansions into text, *ecotone* can convey multiple meanings and offer new insights into embodiment and affect. This strategy reveals the dynamic of a methodology as mobile and generative, one that can demonstrate the competency of experimentation as a strategy within creative practice. I have demonstrated how the intra-action between communities of practice,

methodologies as practice, and ecotonic devices all identify this work as research creation. This formulation successfully provides a scaffold for understanding how my conceptualisations of the *ecotone* constitute an original contribution to knowledge.

In Chapter One I mapped how the term moved from ecological discourses (Gosz 1993) into the realm of environmental humanities via the work of Sandilands (2004). I showed how Neimanis worked with these configurations through a distinctly feminist lens, foregrounding embodiment and watery relationality as ways of thinking through difference and connectivity. I took these configurations into practice to interweave various languages, codes and methods of communication to generate a hybrid, multifaceted assemblage of meanings. Due to the irregular, spatially fluid nature of the term as articulated through practice, I have sought to anchor the term within the textual analysis of the thesis by drawing explicitly upon formal strategies within written language, using grammar as a device to separate out ideas, actions, and representations.

In Chapter Two (Methodologies as Practice) I demonstrated that when positioned as a noun, the term *ecotone* concurrently identifies ideas (such as watery relationality) as well as the materiality of the creative practice. As a verb, the term reveals the process of making the work and the methodology as ecotonic, weaving the processes of creative practice and creative methodologies together in a reciprocal way, as each process changes the other. I have demonstrated that my practice has embedded the *ecotone* as a methodological device, one which anchors hydrofeminist embodiment as a strategy for having agency within the world. Another way in which I have expanded the term *ecotone* is as a pronoun where it performs the function of the narrator within *Manual for Nomads* (2020) (present as subtitles). The body as

location is clearly articulated through Neimanis' use of the *ecotone*, as she utilises the coming together of two different registers to analyse difference and connectivity. For Neimanis, *eco* references the human and *tone* references the many specificities of difference that articulate intersectionality. By positioning human within and of the *ecotone*, Neimanis underscores the significance of embodiment within her conceptualisations of hydrofeminism, and clearly links subjectivity to location. Location is understood as the body marked by difference.

I have also demonstrated that affect-as-ecotone is another concept that gives insight into how embodiment might be manifested. This is most apparent within the works that explore sound and its absences. I drew on the work of Voegelin (2014) to demonstrate that the pluralities, multiplicities and mobilities which position humans in ways that enable equivalence and mutuality with their environment, articulate affect as ecotonic. This insight is further supported by Simonsen (2007:179) who talks about 'the geography closest in' to visualise the various registers through which humans operate within nuances of social spatiality.

> The self is already a multispecies crowd (Haraway 2008:165)

5.2.3: Question Three

What is meant by location that is expressed through practice and that is significant in the discourses surrounding our transcorporeal relationality?

This question offered a strategic point of entry into three concerns. Firstly it signposted a desire to focus upon interspecies relationships and an emphasis upon our interconnectedness with more than human others which is embedded throughout the essay Hydrofeminism, and which situates hydrofeminism within an environmentally focused posthumanism. It was in *Benthic*

Caress (2017) that the specificity of location, when framed as 'what and how site means' (2012:58) was articulated as an opportunity to 'make kin' (2016) with more-than-human others so that we might establish viable, mutually beneficial relationships that last, and which strengthen connections in the face of the challenges presented by the climate crises.

Stacy Alaimo (2008:238) provided an intersection between the desire to focus upon our interconnectedness with more than human others and the second concern that this question points to; the development of appropriate creative methodologies. In articulating the ways in which the 'trans' in transcorporeality encompasses ourselves and other humans, and non - human others (and so much more besides) the emphasis upon the mobility of these seemingly distinct categories opened up the register of possibilities. I developed a creative practice in a mobile and fluid location, a transdisciplinary practice equipped for the process of folding artistic practices, feminisms, posthumanism and cultural geographies into the research, and also into the emerging field of environmental humanities. In working through these mobile entanglements hydrofeminism is extended in new ways, through performance, live art, sound art, walking and film.

Thirdly, this question gave focus to articulations of the body as a location. Hydrofeminism emphasises the responsive and reciprocal relationship between bodies and environments, mobilising watery exchanges as inscriptions of both difference and connectivity. Rejecting conventional notions of the discreet subject, Neimanis advances the concept of an 'onto-logic', which opens subjectivity up to relationality, to the 'common how, where, when, and thanks to whom that certain seemingly disparate beings share' (2017:96). By situating embodiment within a watery relationality, Neimanis uses aqueous analogies, to include the other-than-human, whilst proposing that a watery relationality is predicated upon difference. Within

Benthic Caress (2017) in particular, this comingling of the human and more-than-human understanding, within an aqueous imaginary that connects across difference, is articulated using creative languages that exceed the textual analyses of hydrofeminism to engender embodiment in real terms.

In Chapter Three (Communities of Practice) I identify artists whose work shares (intentionally or otherwise) a focus upon the body as location. By way of example, Amy Sharrocks' work *Museum of Water* (2014 – ongoing) draws audiences into reflections upon what (and how) we share, broadly, as a species, and how our differences – bodily, culturally, ethnically, and geographically – are involved in reciprocal relationships with water. This work makes intelligible the concept of a hydro-commons, revealing our part within a milieu that shines a light on our shared and embodied relationship with water. Most of the other artists in this community also actively use the body as a location to raise questions around notions of difference and connectivity, thereby forming a community that includes my practice. Christine Sun Kim explicitly draws forms of language into creative discourses around the body as location, emphasising the significance of specificities of difference within difference, which are also able to connect. Foregrounding all communication as an act of translation, an interpretation predicated upon partiality, Sun Kim's articulation of the body as location predicated upon difference, reveals the complexities involved when thinking closely through difference. My work enters this community of practice through a range of practices, identified as transdisciplinary, through which these complexities are explored.

Other ways in which this community of practice folds my work into its loose assemblage include the development of works which draw upon an aqueous imaginary to explore forms of

feminism, artists whose work has entered my own practice where curation is used as a creative methodology, works that are positioned within sound art and/or within D/deaf arts, moving image works, and works which foreground walking as a practice, as well as works which utilise and challenge notions of disability.

In Chapter Four (Bodies, Spaces, Practices) I anchor the creative practice within experimental geography and Environmental Humanities, demonstrating how the practice manifests key arguments within Hydrofeminism that hinge upon difference as a connecting experience, mapping this work in relation to posthumanism.

5.3: Original contributions to knowledge

It is in the convergence of practices, theories and methodologies that new articulations of hydrofeminism have been shaped, beyond textual analyses. It is through an art practice that, by virtue of its transdisciplinarity, echoes the watery relationality is at the heart of hydrofeminism. This practice foregrounds an aqueous imaginary across a range of forms and practices, forging a new contribution to knowledge. It is in the specific and dynamic shaping of each body of work generated through this research that the nuance of, and distinction between, particular insights within hydrofeminism have been advanced. I developed a transdisciplinary creative practice that was able to suffuse fold feminisms, posthumanism and cultural geographies into the research, and also into the emerging field of environmental humanities. In my creative articulations of these mobile entanglements hydrofeminism is extended in new ways, through performance, live art, sound art, walking and film.

5.3.1: Silence as a text than can be read

This includes the shaping of silence as a text that could be read. This was achieved by re-presenting the existing communicative capacity of BSL within a socially engaged production that performed Hydrofeminism (the essay). This contribution is paralleled by the shaping of Hydrofeminism as a performance of vocal sounds, unanchored from linguistics. In these manoeuvres, the works queried the marginal status of D/deaf people as both artists and audiences. Giving flexibility to the term *ecotone* allowed for an expansion of creative practice, conceptually and creatively. *Ecotone* is figured as a noun, to reveal conceptual metaphors such as intra-active becoming, as well as creative metaphors, in the materiality of the artwork. *Ecotone* when figured as a verb allows the interplay of making work and developing methodology to become ecotonic.

5.3.2: Expressions of diffractive relationality

These were amplified through sonic arts to foreground affect, and successfully centred marginalised voices. Works that used sound to position the subject in sensory spaces, where transcorporeal and embodied immersion in the watery relations, re-articulated hydrofeminism beyond its textual definitions.

5.3.3: Redrawing the Ecotone

My practice has revealed that in drawing together differently abled persons, alongside languages, codes and methods of communication, that a space is created for a re-conceptualisation of the *ecotone*. The convergence of sound and braille and text and speech

and BSL is most cogent within the short film *Manual for Nomads*. It is in these convergences that the *ecotone* is created.

> [It is] at the interface or intersection of self and other, material and immaterial, human and non-human, inside and outside, such that processes which might be designated psychological (are) always trans-subjective, shared, collective, mediated, and always extending bodies beyond themselves (Blackman, 2012:23).

I have extended the reach of the term *ecotone* within my creative practice whilst seizing the rules of grammar to return these practice-led contributions into text. I have shown how *ecotone* can carry multiple meanings that bring new insights into our understanding of embodiment and affect. This dynamic methodology demonstrates the value of experimentation as a strategy within creative practice. I have brought intra-action between communities of practice, methodologies as practice, and ecotonic devices into the frame of research creation. This frame successfully demonstrates how my conceptualisations of the *ecotone* constitute an original contribution to knowledge.

5.4: Positioning my practice within Environmental Humanities

Earlier in this thesis I situated my practice within a hybrid space where experimental geography and environmental humanities created a space for art practices that expand the boundaries of possibility for production and reception. The Environmental Humanities as a scholarly field of enquiry is in itself hybrid, and increasingly those scholars working within water-based disciplines are said to be operating within the field of Blue Humanities. For a robust overview of this emerging field, the work of Professor Steve Mentz (2021) warrants attention. I can place my own work within this schema. However, with the notion of *ecotone* at the forefront of this research, it seems inappropriate to carve up scholarly activity that maintains an environmental

focus, into distinct and separate spheres of activity. Land and water meet, seep, slide, abut and comingle in ways that defy these sharp distinctions. As Mathur and da Cunha put it:

> The line by which representations assert the land-water divide is drawn in a time when water appears containable and not when it is precipitating, evaporating, transpiring, and generally behaving in ways that defy delineation. (2018:36)

In the final chapter of *Bodies of Water* (2017) entitled *Imagining Water in the Anthropocene*, Neimanis charts the emergence of 'modern water' by undertaking a close reading of Linton (2010). Her insights support the argument that hard separations between land and water are untenable. Arguing that the Anthropocene is mostly articulated through a geological frame, Neimanis erodes this perspective by flooding our understanding of the Anthropocene with fresh perceptions that hinge upon difference as a strategy for countering a monolithic viewpoint.

Viewed as a resource, one that can be measured and known, bound by the language of management, water becomes placeless, an abstraction that is universalised. Instrumentalising and quantifying water in this way permits its exploitation, but also reveals the fact that this management mind-set is poorly equipped to respond to the specificity of water challenges (from floods, to droughts, to poisoning and other challenges), as indeed the recent flooding in the UK, referenced earlier in this chapter, testify. Neimanis makes the point that the term Anthropocene, and its attendant assumptions[6] also has the effect of flattening difference and specificity. The homogenisation, the betrayal of difference marks a more general anthropocene imaginary and parallels the ways in which water is figured as abstracted, made 'isomorphic'.

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[6] The term Anthropocene, and its attendant assumptions, is explored in detail, in relation to water, in the final chapter of *Bodies of Water* (Neimanis 2017:153-182)

Neimanis seeks to disrupt the dominant narratives of the anthropocene by injecting an aqueous compass. Regarding the Anthropocene she says:

> But the dominance of the Earth's stony archive-in-the-making belies the water that flows through and beneath these accounts. My invitation in thinking about Anthropocene water is thus, in the first place, a suggestion to pay more attention to hydrosphere as the (again, oft-overlooked) fascia that lubricates and connects the Earth's lithosphere to its biosphere and its atmosphere, those more popular players in this Anthropocene drama. (2017:160)

This reconfiguration of the Anthropocene as an aqueous possibility that connects ecologies of scale, including the atmosphere, mirrors the desire embedded within my research questions to find creative languages that can offer more connected and embodied insights framing the environmental and ecological crises we currently face. Neimanis unambiguously articulates the ways in which differences connect, not just across humankind, but across ecologies of scale:

> Differences are vital strengths, we must acknowledge how oppressions or vulnerabilities that affect others also affect us, but are affected by us too. Intersecting axes must be thought across species and elemental lines, timescales vast and molecular, generations and geographies. (2017:165)

The final chapter of *Bodies of Water* (2017) *Imagining Water in the Anthropocene* begins with a reference to artistic practice, but more significantly goes on to explore aqueous imaginaries, offering incisive critiques of dominant imaginaries, yet also inviting care-full, difference-sensitive imaginaries in line with the questions which have shaped my creative practice during this research process. Neimanis is alert to the messy and imperfect nature of these imaginaries, yet her dominant argument is that they remain 'one of the best lifeboats we've got' (2017:182), they hold no guarantees however, but nothing does. She shapes her discussion of the aqueous imaginary in relation to Barad's term 'worlding' – a term which makes clear the intra-relationships in the material world which cannot be divorced from the conceptual frameworks we use to make sense of them (Sauzet 2018). This is not a linear or chronological process which

has a start and an end, rather it is a 'perpetual worlding, materialising from the intra-actions of always emergent things-in-phenomena, a co-extensive, co-emergent entangling' (Barad 2007:136). Neimanis presents *Bodies of Water* as a strategy for foregrounding watery relationality:

> Bodies of Water, as figuration, invite us to amplify a relational aqueous embodiment that we already incorporate, and trans-corporate. Bodies of water ask us to imagine these corporeal waters as part of a hydrocommons that we make, and that makes us in turn. […] Bodies of water recognise the need to understand waters as emplaced, specific, and contingent on relations, but they reject the binary of 'local' and 'global' as well. (2017:170)

From an ecological perspective, as well as a conceptual perspective, the *ecoton*e is a cogent figuration of Barad's 'worlding'. It also concisely describes the interplay between practice and theory within this research, whilst reframing the Environmental Humanities as capable of containing the complexities that occur when Green Humanities and Blue Humanities are not seen as separate.

5.5: Unpredicted Outcome

A profoundly moving and unpredicted outcome was the spontaneous translation into BSL, of the grunts, barks and other vocal feats that the voice artists delivered, by the qualified Interpreter who acted as Choirmaster for Hydrosapien. She signed these sounds for the choir, and in so doing brought the two aspects into direct dialogue with each other in ways I had not considered possible. The BSL she used was her personal interpretation of these sounds, which somehow the Choir entirely understood. As Neimanis points out in *Bodies of Water* (2017):

> Art [can be a] site of collaborative enquiry…that can… introduce [others] to different understandings of water without any pretence of full knowledge. In a posthuman phenomenological orientation, I can engage with these artworks and allow my own

bodily uptake of them to open glimpses into other kinds of imaginaries that might resonate with my own. (2017:171)

5.6: The Limits of the Research

The creative practice that embodies this research does not seek to present replicable models of practice for future research, but rather offer examples of practice that can be drawn upon in the future by others developing other forms of practice, in other situations.

This research does not seek to position the critical-creative practice within the discourses of art language. It has been purposefully undertaken under the umbrella of Environmental Humanities so that practice can respond to and enter the discourses therein. Of course it would have been possible to position the entire body of work within the well-established parameters of art language and also perhaps within other Geography-facing disciplines. However, the Environmental Humanities is a hybrid discipline within which it has been possible to expand my practice in ways that better address the overarching research questions.

The research does not present itself as activism, but does acknowledge imbrication with forms of activism, and this has been further explored previous sections.

> 'Bodies of water' is both something we already are and a certain embodied orientation and potential we can amplify…. If ethics are always aspirational and incomplete, politics is what we have to do to stay with the trouble… The work of politics is better understood as a trace (a mark, an impression) that signals the imaginary that one hopes to build and sustain. (2017:176)

5.7: Future Research Directions

This journey through practice, in pursuit of critical and creative insights around the impact and potential of hydrofeminism which forms and informs this PhD, has been dynamic and fluid, resulting in new insights which continue to be further developed in a range of ways going forward. Since my Viva Voce in October 2020 I have contributed creative practice presentations to seven conferences (all online), including Pandemic Imaginaries – Living in the End of Times, hosted by Cappadocia University, Turkey, January 2021: *presentation of filmworks – The Underside of Time,* Art & The Anthropocene – Culture, Climate and Our Changing Planet, virtual seminar series hosted by the University of York, March 2021: *joint presentation with Dr. Suzi Richer; Sounds of Sampling*, Temporal Belongings – The Material Life of Time – online conference hosted by University of Edinburgh, March 2021: *presentation of filmworks – The Underside of Time,* a presentation of creative work at Texas A&M University at Galveston *Estuaries and the Anthropocene* May 2021, and Beastly Landscapes, a blended conference hosted by Newcastle University's Centre for Research Excellence in Landscape, for which I was commissioned to make a short film *We Are All Beasts* in September 2021.

Two of these presentations harnessed the power of the film I produced for a commission from The Arts Institute, Plymouth University (November 2020) – *The Underside of Time* developed in response to the theme 'Everything has changed. Nothing has changed. Change is coming'. This also led to the opportunity to re-present the film as an illustrated poem in SFRA (Science Fiction Research Association Journal): https://sfrareview.org/2021/04/22/the-underside-of-time/

Also, my video work *Aerocene as Commons* was selected to be featured in the very first edition of Video Art and Experimental Film Event (VAEFE) at SEA Foundation, themed 'The Commons and Commoning' (Tilburg, Netherlands) showing in late September 2021.

However, most of my creative focus continues to be sited on the Erme Estuary, the river closest to my home. It is here that, for some years, I have slowly developed creative engagements with the themes, methods and insights present within this research. Under the broad term *Intra-Actions* (https://lauradenning.com/intra-actions/) I am developing forms of slow-art which seek to tease out the many embodied relationships which occur here, across species, seasons, and time. The River Erme (whose source is on Dartmoor) is the least developed estuary in England. I continue to engage a number of people in walking conversations at sites along the course of the river, such as representatives of the local AONB and Natural England, a paleoarchaelogist, an amputee war veteran, a diver interested in wrecks and ordinance, and others. I have initiated a number of artist's walks in search of the source of the Erme. Its source is no mystery, yet it is a considerable walk across Dartmoor, and talking with other artists has taken precedence over reaching the pre-determined destination. These walks have included Phil Smith and Helen Billinghurst (Crab and Bee), and I am embarking on a short collaboration with Helen Billinghurst, exploring the stories of wolves that seem to encircle the village of Harford, for a film/sound work as a contribution to the Remembrance Day for Lost Species (https://www.lostspeciesday.org/?page_id=14) in November 2021. I have hosted two overnight camps on Harford Moor to watch the full moon rise, developing soundworks with the artist and archaeologist Fay Stevens (https://london.nd.edu/about/faculty/fay-stevens/).

Significantly, I have been meeting online regularly with the Indian artist and academic Deepta Sateesh, who enabled my *Interim* residency in Bangalore in 2018. Through the Pandemic we began exchanging digital 'postcards' of 'our' estuaries developed at each full moon. We developed these to produce an 18 minute video centred around 'Wet Ontologies', using walking as an embodied methodology. We co-presented our work at the Royal Geographical Society annual conference for the panel – 'Ecopedagogies from the Intertidal Zone'. We also co-presented at 'Multiple Ecologies, Diverse Ontologies: More Just, More Sustainable Futures, University of Plymouth (https://morejustfutures.art/).

Deepta Sateesh and I have been invited to host a talk/seminar for Edinburgh Environmental Humanities Network, as part of the Phenomenal Time series, entitled 'Temporal Wanderings: tactics for an embodied methodology'. This will allow me to further explore an unmediated perception that has been drawn up through this research (but not explored within it). This pertains to the possibility to consider 'thinking across bodies' as a temporal concern. This would begin with an excavation of the concept of transcorporeality, read through the prism of Massey's notion of space. Deepta and I, in our transcontinental collaboration, explore the multiple forms that water takes – muddy, humid, monsoonal, frozen, fully-immersed and foggy, sharing our experiences of location through these material realities. Our work foregrounds the need to draw upon multiple registers of experience, and time. Within this ongoing collaboration, the temporal dimension offers distinct nuances. Every time we meet online (weekly throughout the pandemic) it is my morning and her afternoon. Deepta experiences monsoonal time, whilst I experience (the ever shifting) temperate time. We both live in regions known to be the wettest areas in our countries. I look forward to creatively working through these concerns.

Regarding these collaborations, we are also exploring methodologies for foregrounding the night time or after-dark lives of our estuaries. I am doing this by researching through practice some tactile forms of visibility. This includes testing luminous paints on various textiles, as well as experimenting with e-textiles, to mimic bio-luminosity. The tactile element is being explored through braille, again as a (luminous and raised) pattern on fabric, making connections between touch, lack of sight and reduced visibility. The aim is produce two costumes for a site-specific performance, on either side of the estuary, that foregrounds difference and connectivity, and which re-articulates the *ecotone* in new ways.

I have also been producing monthly zines focusing on different aspects of my practice research related to the river, called Erme Trace. These are sent to self-electing individuals who use the enclosed SAE to provide feedback. They are steadfastly non-digital. These zines also act as print versions of a monthly broadcast show for Soundart Radio, following on from a commission from them in May 2021. I shall continue to develop these various creative enquiries and collaborations, developing film and sound works, as well as a site-specific performance piece scheduled for 2022.

5.8: The Puddle

Having explored, through practice, how being bodies of water might be specifically articulated and experienced, this research has contributed to current discourses which rethink our watery bodies and the unsettled watery dynamics within and beyond our lived environments. It has done so by critically developing creative languages and practices which have successfully embodied transcorporeal becoming as an ethical testimony. This research has therefore

extended hydrofeminism as a concept of becoming. It has all been made possible by a moment

of inspiration triggered by a puddle.

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