

Impact case study (REF3)

Institution: Oxford Brookes University		
Unit of Assessment: 32, Art and Design: History, Practice and Theory		
Title of case study: Aeolian phenomena: Inspiring artists, influencing arts organisations and bringing sound art to new audiences in public places		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2010–2013		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Max Eastley	AHRC Research Fellow in the Creative and performing Arts	[text removed for publication]
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2013–2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact		
<p>The practise-based research of artist Max Eastley was among the first to extensively investigate and model Aeolian devices – sound installations powered by atmospheric phenomena such as the wind – in the context of sound art. The research took place during an AHRC Fellowship in the Creative and Performing Arts at Oxford Brookes University's Sonic Art Research Unit (SARU). The impact of Eastley's research is demonstrated most clearly through the touring event <i>Audible Forces</i> (2013–2014), a landscape of Aeolian sound installations produced by SARU and Oxford Contemporary Music (OCM). <i>Audible Forces</i> has had a transformative impact on the participating artists' creative practice and career development, enabled organisational development for key production partners, and brought a legacy of sound art installations to appreciative new audiences in the UK and internationally.</p>		
2. Underpinning research		
<p>Internationally renowned sound artist Max Eastley, whose career has spanned five decades, was one of first to develop an artistic practice on the border between sound in the natural environment and human intervention in that environment, using the driving forces of electricity, wind, water and ice.</p> <p>The underpinning research for this case study took place during an Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) Fellowship in the Creative and Performing Arts hosted by SARU 2010–2013. The research project, entitled <i>Aeolian Sound: An investigation of Aeolian Phenomena and their incorporation into Sonic Culture</i>, focussed specifically on Aeolian phenomenon – the activation of sound through the action of the wind on natural materials. (R1, R2) The principal mode of investigation was to seek out materials that are activated by natural forces and test them in a variety of formations. Eastley used the annual SARU festival of sound art and experimental composition, audiograft, as a laboratory for the development of these Aeolian practices, experimenting with formations of latex (2011, Fig.1 below, R3a), and copper (2013, Fig.2 below, R3b), alongside a range of other materials including brass, aluminium and wound steel wires.</p>		
 		

Fig. 1 (left): *Aeolian Device (Latex)*, audiograft 2012, Oxford
 Fig. 2 (right): *Aeolian Device (Copper)*, audiograft 2013, Oxford

Further practical explorations of Aeolian phenomena led Eastley to develop: an innovative indoor work for Raven Row Art Gallery, London in 2011; Aeolian harps at Tempelhof Airport, Berlin (Berlin Sonic Places in 2012; and outdoor Aeolian devices at The Water Tower, Wasserturm, in Prenzlauer Berg, Berlin) in 2013. These works tested two key aspects of the research – the broadcast of Aeolian phenomena into indoor spaces and the use of arrays of Aeolian harps.

In *Gone with the Wind*, Eastley built an Aeolian installation on the roof of Raven Row Gallery and worked with engineer Dave Hunt to develop a means by which the sounds produced by the wind on the Aeolian device could be transmitted twelve meters down into the interior. This allowed visitors to experience and explore the relationship between the 18th century architecture and history of the Aeolian harp. **(R3c)**

The investigation of Aeolian Harps and devices became central to Eastley's practice. For example, twelve Aeolian Harps, constructed on site, were installed for one day on the roof of a decommissioned meteorology building at Tempelhof Airport. The installation and an accompanying talk were part of a series of events curated by German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) awardee – sound artist Peter Cusack. Eastley's contribution was part of the examination of how urban acoustic phenomena could be exploited for city planning and his role was to make imaginative suggestions as to how wind-energised sound might be used to enhance future soundscapes. **(R3d)** In another work, eight Aeolian Harps were erected on the top of the external faces of the Water Tower (Wasserturm) in Prenzlauer Berg, Berlin. The sound from these was transmitted and projected into the interior of the building, in which Eastley had installed ten acoustic sculptures. The sounds of the Aeolian harps and the acoustic sculptures were combined to create an aural space that led visitors through the physical architecture, discovering the interior sculptures on the journey. **(R3e)**

Max Eastley's Aeolian sound explorations, as part of his AHRC Fellowship, led to the creation of *Audible Forces*, a touring exhibition produced by SARU and OCM and co-commissioned by Brighton Festival and the Without Walls consortium of festivals and organisations dedicated to raising the profile of the UK outdoor arts sector. This was an outdoor exhibition of work by seven artists who all created new Aeolian works using the wind to produce sound. The exhibition toured for two years (2013–2014) and went to: Brighton Festival, Norfolk and Norwich Festival, Salisbury International Arts Festival, Greenwich and Docklands International Festival, Stockton International Riverside Festival, Kendal Lakes Alive, Quays Open Day (Greater Manchester's Waterfront), Salford and Stoke-on-Trent. *Audible Forces* energised creative activity around Aeolian phenomena in the UK and opened the door for this practice into the mainstream of sound art. **(R4)** The research is archived and documented at www.maxeastley.co.uk. **(R5)**

3. References to the research

R1. The principle outputs of the research can be found here:
<https://www.maxeastley.co.uk/works/ahrc-funded-research-oxford-brookes/>

R2. The [Max Eastley RADAR collection](#)

This collection, hosted on the institutional repository of Oxford Brookes University, includes articles from Eastley's archive of research into Aeolian Phenomena, as well as new projects created specifically during his AHRC Fellowship at SARU.

R3. Examples of specific projects developed during the AHRC Fellowship in the Creative and Performing Arts:

a) *Aeolian Device (Latex)* at audiograft festival 2012
<https://www.maxeastley.co.uk/2012/03/10/audiograft-festival-2012/>

b) *Aeolian Device (Copper)* at audiograft festival 2013
<https://www.maxeastley.co.uk/2013/03/12/audiograft-festival-oxford/>

c) *Gone with the Wind*, Raven Row, London, 2011
<https://www.maxeastley.co.uk/2011/06/09/raven-row-installation-2011/>

d) *Aeolian Harps at Tempelhof*, 2012
<https://www.maxeastley.co.uk/2012/06/>

e) *Berlin Water Tower Installation*, Germany, 2013
<https://www.maxeastley.co.uk/2013/07/01/berlin-water-tower-installation-jul-sep/>

R4. Documentation about *Audible Forces* 2013-2014
<https://www.ocmevents.org/audible-forces>

R5. Archive of further Aeolian devices and research - <http://www.maxeastley.co.uk>

Evidence of Quality: Max Eastley's research project 'Aeolian Sound: An investigation of Aeolian Phenomena and their incorporation into Sonic Culture' (AH/H033408/1) was awarded GBP240,494 by the AHRC Fellowships in the Creative and Performing Arts scheme.

4. Details of the impact

With production support from SARU and Oxford Contemporary Music (OCM), Eastley's research into Aeolian phenomena led to the creation of *Audible Forces*, an ambitious outdoor touring show, featuring commissioned Aeolian sound art works from seven artists: Kathy Hinde (*Sonic Reed Beds*; *Aeolian Soundmap* with Ed Holroyd), Mike Blow (*Arpeggi*), Jony Easterby (*Birdhouse Flock* and *Stress and stone*), Nathaniel Mann (*Pigeon Whistles* with Peter Petravicius), Mark Anderson (*Phantom Field*), Dan Fox (*Howling Wire*) and Max Eastley (*Aeolian Harp* and *Aeolian Percussion*). *Audible Forces* was transformative for the artists and arts organisations involved, and has been a catalyst for a legacy of new art works, which continue to entertain and inspire audiences around the world.

Inspiring and enabling artists to develop their practice and create new sound art

The artists engaged with *Audible Forces* benefited from the experience in many ways including: introduction to new networks enabling the co-production of original sound art works; the development of novel practices requiring technical innovation; a new understanding of the potential of the field; and the development of new modes of thinking and new creative partnerships that have led to further commissions.

Mike Blow (**S1a**) states that '*the experience of participating in Audible Forces was instrumental in developing my creative practice and building my professional profile, as well as enabling several key collaborations that have built a legacy of new art works, some of which have shown internationally*'. The commission for *Audible Forces* was a significant moment in the development of technical skills that Blow would use in future projects: '*Audible Forces was the first time I had the platform to make a large, portable, robust artwork ... the first time I toured with an installation and the first time I had been involved in the UK festival scene, so it was a big learning and networking opportunity.*' He expands on the networking opportunities that the commission afforded him: '*Audible Forces ...undoubtedly raised my profile ... It introduced me to arts producers, festivals and promoters, and taught me a lot about working with other artists. The experience prompted me to get a studio in Plymouth, and helped me integrate into the art scene in the South West.*'

Of the collaborative projects that the *Audible Forces* commission led to, Mike Blow's further work with Ed Harcourt is perhaps the most productive example. It led to the creation of his work *Colony* (together with Alison Ballard), a multi-channel touch and sound installation, consisting of up to seven internally lit, air filled spheres ranging in size from 2–3.5 meters, that emit an otherworldly 20-minute sonic composition. These large tactile, sonic sculptures allows the audience to experience the physicality of sound through listening, touching, and hugging. *Colony* has toured in the UK since 2016. A precursor to *Colony* was *Pod* (**S7**), a tactile sound sculpture which featured in Science Museum London's Wonderlab Gallery from 2016 until 2020. The relationship developed with Ed Harcourt as a result of *Audible Forces* was fundamental to these projects. (**S1a**)

Involvement in *Audible Forces* 'had a huge impact' on the creative practice and professional profile of Nathaniel Mann (**S1b**) who states that: '*The successful trajectory of my subsequent career can in many ways be traced back to my involvement.*' It was '*the first time I had toured with an installation. It gave me huge exposure to new audiences – It honed my skills in being able to present to, and directly interact with, audiences.*' His work *Pigeon Whistles* (**S7**) has been described by an audience member as '*the closest thing to heaven that I have experienced*' (the

Guardian 22/08/2014). Mann went on to curate a temporary exhibit on pigeon whistles at Oxford University's Pitt River Museum, which has been accessioned in the permanent collection of the museum. This was the first time he had curated a display: *'The exhibit foregrounded those artefacts that were previously rarely noticed; introducing new audiences to ancient Chinese and Vietnamese listening practices and contextualising my own work with the museum collections.'* In 2017, BBC Radio 4 commissioned a documentary about *Pigeon Whistles*, which featured on Radio 4 (Pick of the week; July and September 2017), which Mann presented. He has subsequently written and presented six BBC Radio documentaries, all of which were selected as BBC Radio 4 Picks of the Week. *Pigeon Whistles* was awarded the George Butterworth Prize for Composition 2014 and in 2019 Mann was recipient of the prestigious Paul Hamlyn Foundation prize, a success which he attributes to the work that he did with *Audible Forces* and his Pitt Rivers residency. **(S1b)**

Award winning Sound Artist Kathy Hinde (Ivor Novello Award for Sound Art 2020) states that: *'the research into aeolian instruments and possibilities has continued in my practice ever since... I have learnt a huge amount from the wealth of experience of the other Audible Forces artists, and we have all continued to work together in a variety of capacities... Audible Forces helped me expand areas of my practice more confidently into the outdoor arts realm... I learnt loads of practical know-how, and took much inspiration from the wealth of work [the other artists had made].'* **(S1c)**

The underpinning research had a significant impact on Eastley's own arts practice, particularly with regard to projects developed with German artist and producer Carsten Seiffarth. Seiffarth explains that Eastley's reputation, and the success of a previous project together, led, in 2014, to Eastley being the first British person appointed City Artist in Bonn, a role in which he created artistic connections with spaces in the city. This included the technically challenging design and installation of Aeolian harps mounted on two rafts floating on a lake in the Bonn Botanic Gardens (Aeolian Islands). **(S7)** The installations were enjoyed by visitors who came specifically to see them, and those who discovered them on their visit. In 2016, building on this, he developed *Windklänge* (Wind Sounds) at Herren Hausen Grosser Garten, Hannover, which used the floating harps on the canal of an 18th century formal garden. **(S7)** Seiffarth summarises: *'Max's work has brought unique, inspiring experiences to many venues and new audiences in several cities in Germany. Max's extensive research into aeolian phenomena is impressive and enabled him to create beautiful new sound installations, which are unlike other things previously seen and heard in Germany.'* **(S2)**

Enabling Arts Organisations to develop new ways of producing shows and supporting emerging artists

For ACE funded Arts Organisation OCM, co-producing *Audible Forces* led directly to changes in the way the organisation approaches production of shows and a new way of working with artists to develop public-facing projects. *Audible Forces* was OCM's first multi-artist show for some time and taking a show of this size on tour was a significant undertaking. As OCM's Deputy Director stated: *'Because of the scale, the whole staff was involved in producing, not just the Director, which was a new approach for OCM and great for up-skilling our colleagues. After the tour, the organisation restructured to share the producing work across more of the staff, partly as a result of the experience staff gained from this project.'* Further, *'the show and tour has been used to demonstrate to funders what OCM is able to achieve in terms of producing work, nurturing artists, and reaching and inspiring large audiences through our creative producing in partnership with organisations like Brookes/SARU.'* **(S3)**

One key legacy of this was BOOM **(S3)**, the annual professional development scheme for musicians, sound practitioners and producers created by OCM: *'We had seen how valuable the skill sharing and relationship building had been between artists during the Audible Forces tour. This had only been possible because they'd been given the opportunity to spend plenty of time together and it happened organically in the time they had off when they were on tour. We shaped the scheme so that we can recreate this valuable organic process for the participants.'* **(S4)** BOOM residencies with OCM enable practitioners and producers (c.20 so far) to lead their own development, research or training programme over one year with no expectation of specific outcomes beyond the evidence of real and effective learning in their practice and profession. BOOM artists have included *Audible Forces* participants Mike Blow and Kathy Hinde, who used

their residencies to create unique artworks. For example, Blow experienced how BOOM '*provided the funding and space*' to develop the *Hornet*, a synthesizer with gestural control, which has gone on to sell c.40 pieces internationally. **(S1a, S7)**

Reaching new audiences and introducing them to unique, formative experiences

Audible Forces, with its dynamic concept and accessible locations, attracted new audiences across the UK, transforming their understanding of familiar places. One visitor noted: '*We absolutely loved the installation – It felt as though it should always be there, a natural extension of how we experience the sea. We often walk along the promenade and it made that walk all the more 'real' and opened up our senses.*' The event created an appetite for further engagement with many visitors visiting multiple times: '*Enjoyed the event a lot – came down on 2 consecutive days to see if the weather altered the 'performances*'.

The show inspired audiences of all ages including children: '*We were fortunate enough to have timed our visit to coincide with the whistling pigeons. It was fantastic and my children (12 & 9) were really entranced also. My pre-teen thinks everything is "boring" unless it has a screen attached to it but he really enjoyed this event.*' A primary school teacher responded: '*I thought it was really interesting as a way to look at how we generate sound and how (like with wind/solar energy) we can utilise the natural resources to create sound. I took videos to show children in my school. I loved the kinaesthetic layout of the exhibits*'. **(S5)**

Further, the show also promoted an awareness of the natural environment: '*Some beautifully different pieces that awakened your own awareness to the weather and forces around us. Something that does need to occur every now and then to remind us of the scale and power of the environment we're immersed in*'.

A subsequent installation by Eastley, Aeolian Harp and Sculptures for Perrott's Folly **(S7)** produced by the Ikon Gallery, attracted 683 visitors from 10 May to 10 June 2018. One visitor summed up the response of many: '*Thought-provoking and totally immersive. The harps provide glorious sensory overload.*' The Ikon Gallery's Director confirmed. '*The aeolian installation with Max was a great success, characteristically unpretentious, imaginative and inventive. It was engaging as it appealed to visitors' sense of wonder.*' **(S6)**

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

S1. Testimonials from contributing artists, outlining the transformative impact of *Audible Forces* on their creative practice and career development – including (a) Mike Blow; (b) Nathaniel Mann; (c) Kathy Hinde

S2. Testimonial from independent artist and producer Carsten Seiffarth, Germany

S3. Oxford Contemporary Music's annual professional development scheme, BOOM, developed in response to *Audible Forces* <https://www.ocmevents.org/boom>

S4. Testimonial from Deputy Director, Oxford Contemporary Music, UK

S5. Transcription of audience responses to *Audible Forces*

S6. Testimonial from Director, Ikon Gallery, Birmingham, UK

S7. Selected examples of art works inspired by *Audible Forces*, including: *Pod*, *Colony* and *Hornet* (Blow); *Pigeon Whistles* (Mann); *Aeolian Islands*, *Wind Sounds* and *Sculptures for Perrott's Folly* (Eastley).