

# SE306 Performing Water

Course time: Tue, 9 - 12:15pm  
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Office Hours: Tuesdays, 2-4pm or by appointment

## Course Description

How does water shape our lives? In this course we will explore water as a resource, medium, and metaphor in order to understand how environmental breakdown has become represented in contemporary cultural production. In doing so, we will draw on the UN's 2010 declaration of water as a human right and the increasing importance of hydro-politics that negotiate water scarcity as well as rising sea levels. Students will be introduced to central discourses in the environmental humanities and models of eco-critical thinking that reformulate the relationship between the human and extra-human worlds; the notion of "thinking with water" will play a crucial role here to identify alternative knowledge practices. Topics will include the nature/culture divide, Anthropocene debates, environmental histories of capitalism/colonialism, cli-fi and dystopia as well as questions of environmental activism in relation to real-life water crises. The course combines readings on the history, philosophy and politics of water (e.g. Rupert Glasgow's *The Concept of Water*; David L. Sedlak's *Water 4.0*; Jamie Linton's *What is Water? The History of a Modern Abstraction*) alongside artistic engagements with water across literature and the visual and performing arts, including works such as Amitav Ghosh's novel *Gun Island*, Jason deCaires Taylor's underwater sculptures and Olafur Eliasson's environmental installations, Sabrina Mahfouz' play *The History of Water in the Middle East*, the sound art of A.M. Kanngieser, among others. The course will include field trips and participate in the online guest speaker series "Performing Water", co-organized with Le Mans Université and their digital research platform [www.performingwater.org](http://www.performingwater.org). Assessment will be based on active participation in class, a presentation, a midterm essay as well as a creative final digital media project.

## Learning objectives

*Performing Water* aims:

1. to study the politics and poetics of water in modern and contemporary culture, exploring water as an element, social good, medium and metaphor.
2. to allow students to critically engage with the histories that shape how we relate to as well as manage water and to use water as a site to explore current questions of environmental justice, colonialism, and global power struggles in the face of climate change.
3. to expand students' practical and creative skills in digital literacy in using sound media to tell their own stories of water and in creating a course website as a lively document of their work over the course of the semester.

4. to investigate emerging infrastructures and aesthetic means in the arts to privilege the non-human sphere in arts production today as a tool for entering into the public climate change debate.

## **Requirements**

Students are expected to:

- Turn off phones during class time.
- Initiate appointments with the Professor or arts staff outside of class time.
- Always allocate extra time for work preparation and clean-up for independent production.
- Respond to emails from their professors in a timely manner.
- Inform their professors at the beginning of the semester if photos of student's identity, artwork, works in progress are NOT to be taken and / or used for Bard College Berlin.

## **Academic Integrity**

Bard College Berlin maintains the highest standards of academic integrity and expects students to adhere to these standards at all times. Instances in which students fail to meet the expected standards of academic integrity will be dealt with under the Code of Student Conduct, Section 14.3 (Academic Misconduct) in the Student Handbook.

## **Attendance**

- Attendance of all classes is expected. To account for minor circumstances, one absence (that is, absence from **one three-hour session**) will not affect the participation grade or require documentation.
- Tardiness after ten minutes will be considered an absence.
- A student who has missed more than 30% of classes, regardless of the reasons for the absences, whether excused or unexcused, risks not receiving credit for the course. The full Bard College/ Bard College Berlin attendance policy can be found in the Student Handbook, Section 2.8.
- SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR FALL 2022: Some students may need to begin the semester remotely due to travel restrictions caused by the pandemic. In addition, all students and instructors must refrain from in-person attendance if they are feeling ill. Instructors should make efforts to offer alternatives to in-person attendance where needed, including remote participation or asynchronous options.

## **Policy on Late Submission of Essay / Artworks / Presentations**

- Assignments (artworks, essays, performances, presentations) that are up to 24 hours late will risk being downgraded one full grade (Example: B+ becomes C+). The Professors are not obliged to accept assignments that are more than 24 hours late. Where a Professor agrees to accept a late assignment, it must be submitted within four weeks of the deadline. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the

assignment. Grades and comments will be returned to students in a timely fashion. Students are also entitled to make an appointment to discuss assignments and feedback during instructors' office hours.

- Students receive mid- and end-of-semester grades for their seminar work. Students are entitled to make an appointment with the professor to discuss seminar participation, or may be asked to meet with the instructor at any stage in the semester regarding class progress.

### **Assessment**

**Critical thinking, creative work, collaboration:** This course aims for an experimental pedagogy and a close interweaving of theory and creative methods. Students will be assessed on their ability and willingness to fruitfully combine critical thinking and artistic practice. Furthermore, this course fosters artistic and intellectual collaboration amongst students. Working together independently and taking over responsibility for each other is a crucial part of this course.

**Participation and preparation:** Please complete the required homework (readings, presentations, viewings, assignments) and contribute creatively and meaningfully to the exercises and discussions in class. You will receive a participation grade which is based on your in-class engagement, completion of homework and collaboration. Please reserve approx. 3 hours on average for weekly class preparation. Readings will be made available through Google Classroom.

### **Assignments**

#### **Presentations: Water Stories**

Taking inspiration from *The Guardian Water Stories*-Series from Week 1, students will prepare their own "water story" as a creative in-class presentation to explore the diversity of case studies and artworks on water in contemporary culture. Your "water story" can take the following shape:

- A researched reflection on an existing artwork or piece of literature of your choosing that places water at its center and that you find particularly interesting.
- A narrative account with the help of visuals/sonic material of a case study of your choosing that focuses on an individual's (personal or otherwise) or community's changing relationship to a body of water or use of water.

The presentation should investigate how you encounter and think of water in your daily life and be approximately 10min in length.

Deadline: ongoing (Week 3 – 8)

#### **Midterm Essay**

For the midterm, you will compose a critical essay that investigate how arts and politics interact in drawing out the role of water in contemporary society.

Deadline: October 18, midnight.

### **Sonic Reflections *Gun Island***

For this short assignment, you are asked to translate narratives of water from the novel *Gun Island* into a sonic medium. In order to do so, you will choose an excerpt of 1-2 paragraphs from the novel and create a soundscape for the chosen excerpt. You can select from a series of pre-selected passages or choose your own passage entirely. The soundscape can (but does not have to) include a reading of some or all of the chosen passage but is required to use non-verbal sound effects that engage with the sonic qualities of water. Your sound piece should be 2-3min in length.

We will have a class time to work on sound editing and dramaturgy of your pieces in October.

Deadline: November 1 in class.

### **Final Soundbar Website Project**

The final project will split into three parts and require the whole class to collaborate:

- 1. As a class, design a course website that gathers all the student work for the class on water (water stories; sonic reflections; final water podcast).
- 2. In pairs, you will create a podcast episode on 'water as crisis', expanding either one of the water stories that you brought to class into a 15min podcast episode or using some of the other class materials as a foundation. Your episode should combine critical insights into the social dimension of water with creative sonic material that makes water lively and present on an experiential level. Deadline: November 29, 2022 in class.
- 3. Write a 2-page reflection on the process of making the podcast episode and how the project and the course as a whole has changed your ideas and concepts about water.

### **Grade Breakdown**

Participation:	30%
(participation includes attendance, contributions to discussions and exercises, regular padlet postings, active collaboration with peers, communication with Professors and other students)	
Presentation – Water Stories	15%
Midterm Essay	25%
Sonic Reflection “Gun Island”	Pass/Fail
Final Soundbar Website Project	30%

### **Readings**

All readings can be found digitally on Google Classroom and most the readings are also available on the Course Reserve Shelf in the BCB Library.

Please purchase the following books for the course:

- Amitav Ghosh – Gun Island (ISBN-13 : 978-1250757937-9)
- Sabrina Mahfouz – A History of Water in the Middle East ( ISBN-13: 978-1350156845

### Schedule

***\*\*Please note that this schedule is subject to change, taking into account the progress of our discussions and the cultural programs and events in Berlin\*\****

#### **WEEK 1, Tuesday August 30, 2022: Introduction to Performing Water**

##### **In-class readings/material:**

- Water Stories, *The Guardian* Short Fiction Project Series 2013:  
<https://www.theguardian.com/books/series/water-stories>

##### **Homework for Week 2:**

- Readings for Week 2
- **Assignment:** Please visit the research platform [www.performingwater.com](http://www.performingwater.com) and explore the materials posted there. Choose one treatment of /engagement with water that you find most original and surprising and post a short reflection on the piece on the Padlet by Monday, September 5, at 6pm.

### SECTION I: WATER ACROSS MEDIA

#### **WEEK 2, Tuesday September 6: Ideas of Water**

##### **Readings/AV-material:**

- 'Performing Water' Research Platform – [www.performingwater.com](http://www.performingwater.com)
- Jamie Linton – “Fixing the Flow: The Things We Make of Water” from *What is Water?* (pp. 3-23)
- Rupert Glasgow – “Water as Origin – The Birth of Philosophy” from *The Concept of Water* (11-21)

##### **Homework for Week 3:**

- Readings for Week 3

- Presentations: Water Stories

### **WEEK 3: Tuesday September 13: Water As Medium**

#### **In class Screening:**

- *Watermark* (2012) – documentary by Jennifer Baichwal and Edward Burtynsky

#### **Readings/AV-material:**

- Joanna Zylinska – “Waterkino and Hydromedia: How To Dissolve the Past to Build a More Viable Future” (pp. 220-243)

#### **Homework for Week 4:**

- Readings for Week 4
- Presentations: Water Stories

### **WEEK 4, Tuesday September 20: Visual Waterworlds**

#### **Readings/AV-material:**

- Jason deCaires Taylor Website:  
[https://www.underwatersculpture.com/?doing\\_wp\\_cron=1633684700.7025399208068847656250](https://www.underwatersculpture.com/?doing_wp_cron=1633684700.7025399208068847656250)
- „Underwater“-Zoom Seminar Recording (Excerpt): <https://performingwater.org/underwater/>
- Jamie Linton, “Intimations of Modern Water” in *What is Water?* (pp. 47-72)
- Julia Adeney Thomas, Mark Williams, Jan Zalasiewicz, “The Anthropocene: A Multidisciplinary Approach”

**TBC:** Excursion to the Alte Nationalgalerie, Bodestr. 1-3, 10178 Berlin, on Saturday, September 24 or Sunday, September 25.

Meet at the Museum at 10am.

**Hand out:** Midterm Essay Assignment (Deadline: October 18 by midnight)

#### **Homework for Week 5:**

- Readings for Week 5
- Presentations: Water Stories

## SECTION II: WATER CRISES

### WEEK 5, Tuesday September 27: Listening to Environmental Loss -The Arctic

#### Readings/AV-material:

- Ludovico Einaudi – “Elegy for the Arctic” - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2DLnhdnSUVs>
- Olafur Eliasson – Ice Watch (2014) - <https://icewatch.london>
- Shirley Roburn – “Sounding a Sea Change: Acoustic Ecology and Arctic Ocean Governance” in *Thinking with Water* (pp. 106-128)

#### Homework for Week 6:

- Readings for Week 6
- Presentations: Water Stories

### WEEK 6, Tuesday October 4: Listening to Environmental Loss - Storms

#### Readings/AV-material:

AM Kanngieser – In the Eye of the Storm: <https://amkanngieser.com/posts/eye-of-the-storm>

AM Kanngieser and Zoe Todd – Listening As Relation, An Invocation:

<https://amkanngieser.com/posts/listening-as-relation-an-invocation>

Rupert Glasgow – “Deluges” in *Concept of Water* (pp. 146-165)

#### Homework for Week 7:

- Readings for Week 7
- Presentations: Water Stories
- **Assignment:** gather at least 3 sound bites/effects of water that you might want to use in your sonic reflection on *Gun Island* and bring them along to class on your laptop or mobile device.

### WEEK 7, Tuesday October 11: Narrating Changing Environs I

In class practical session: Sonic workshopping *Gun Island*

#### Readings/AV-material:

Amitav Ghosh – *Gun Island* (excerpts)

Amitav Ghosh – “Stories” in *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* (pp. 54-68)

#### Homework for Week 8:

- Readings for Week 8
- Presentations: Water Stories

## **Week 8, Tuesday October 18: Narrating Changing Environs II**

In class practical session: Sonic Workshopping *Gun Island*

Readings/AV-material:

Amitav Ghosh – *Gun Island* (continued)

## **Tuesday, October 25: FALL BREAK**

## **WEEK 9, Tuesday November 1: Water Governance – From Ibsen to Flint**

In-class showing and feedback session on *Gun Island*- sonic reflections

Readings/AV-material:

- Henrik Ibsen: *The Enemy of the People* (1882)
- Benjamin J. Pauli: “Timeline” (xxi – xxxii), “Introduction” (pp. 1-7) in *Flint Fights Back*
- 60 minutes: “The Legacy of the Flint Water Crisis”:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GYiVHh4U4pE>

TBC: Theatre outing to Thomas Ostermeier’s production of *Enemy of the People* at the Schaubühne.

**Hand out** Final Project Assignment (Deadline: November 29, 2022)

**Homework for Week 10:**

- Readings for Week 10
- **Assignment:** Bring in an idea (1 written paragraph) for a final project topic that interests you most to explore as part of a podcast episode.

## **WEEK 10, Tuesday November 8: Performing Water Wars I – The Middle East**

Readings/AV-material:

- National Geographic – *Global Water Wars*:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A0yu7nP50rM>
- Sabrina Mahfouz - *A History of Water in the Middle East* (2019)
- Lawrence E. Susskind – “The Political and Cultural Dimensions of Water Diplomacy in the Middle East” (pp. 185 – 205)

**Homework for Week 11:**

- Readings for Week 11
- **Assignment:** Create a draft script of introduction and conclusion of your podcast episode and be ready to discuss it in class.

### **WEEK 11, Tuesday, November 15, 2022: Performing Water Wars II - Bolivia**

**In class screening:**

- *También la lluvia* (Even the Rain, 2011) – feature film by Icíar Bollaín (Director)

**Readings/AV-Material:**

- William Finnegan, “Leasing the Rain” (The New Yorker, April 8, 2002, pp. 1-24)
- Alvena Shah, “Leasing the Rain: Water, Privatization, and Human Rights” (pp. 91-109)

**Homework for Week 12:**

- **Assignment:** Create a draft of your podcast for the upcoming final project workshop. Create at least 7min of material and post it on Padlet by Monday, November 20 at noon.

### **WEEK 12, Tuesday, November 22 : Final Project Workshop**

- Workshop/feedback of draft material of the podcasts.

### **WEEK 13: Tuesday, November 29: Final Session: Sound Bar on Performing Water**

- Joint presentation of podcasts in class.

### **WEEK 14: Tuesday, December 6 (no class)**

### **Week 15: Completion week (no class)**