

SC215 REFLECTING HUMAN- ENVIRONMENT RELATIONS (THROUGH SOUND)

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Office Hours: Wednesdays 5-6 pm (or by appointment)

Course Description

In light of the serious impact of human activities on the environment, such as climate change, biodiversity loss, and noise pollution, we must rethink our relationship with the natural world. A significant barrier to this reimagining is the long-lasting division between 'culture' and 'nature' in Western thought. Through a cross-disciplinary approach that includes acoustic ecology, the arts, environmental artistic activism, and natural history, this foundational course reflects on recent and ongoing efforts to dismantle this divide, providing students with a blend of theoretical and practical knowledge. Students will critically examine the reasons behind the societal separation of nature and culture and how this division has shaped our environmental perceptions and actions. They will develop a deeper appreciation of the interconnectedness of all life forms and the importance of interdisciplinary approaches in addressing complex ecological issues.

Approaches include investigating how soundscapes and acoustic ecology can challenge conventional boundaries of the nature-culture divide, reflecting on the potential of creative expression to re-connect culture and nature, examining the role of environmental artistic activism in addressing noise pollution and ecosystem impact, and engaging in hands-on practical activities and fieldwork to connect theory with real-world experiences. Alongside the practical activities, students will engage with critical theoretical readings by thinkers such as Bruno Latour, Donna Haraway, and Jane Bennett, as well as composers and sound ecologists such as Murray Schafer and Hildegard Westerkamp. These readings will offer insights into the historical separation of nature and culture, the contemporary efforts to overcome this divide, the broader implications of the Anthropocene, and how artists work to create awareness of the environmental crisis.

Requirements

Objectives

- To understand the historical and theoretical underpinnings of the nature-culture divide.
- To explore acoustic ecology and its role in challenging conventional boundaries.
- To investigate the impact of noise pollution on ecosystems.
- To integrate environmental artistic activism with sound art practices.

To engage in practical activities that connect theory with real-world experiences.
To foster new understandings and solutions to ecological issues through interdisciplinary approaches.

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.
- Remove all artworks, art materials, and / or any personal belongings before the end of the semester. Failure to remove works or return spaces clean and empty may result in final grade penalization. Donating unrequested artworks and / or art materials is not permitted and will still be considered student property, expected to be removed by your inspection deadline. Please contact Studio Arts Manager Joon Park for more information: j.park@berlin.bard.edu

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.

Accessibility

Bard College Berlin is committed to inclusion and providing equal access to all students; we uphold and maintain all aspects of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and the ADA Amendments Act of 2008, and Section 3 of the German Disability Equality Act of April 27, 2002 (Federal Law Gazette I p. 1468). If you have a disability, or think you may have a disability, please contact the Disability Accommodation Coordinator, Atticus Kleen, (accommodations@berlin.bard.edu) to request an official accommodation.

Requests for longer-term accommodations should be made as early as possible to ensure adequate time for coordination and planning. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive and may require advance notice to implement.

If you have already been approved for accommodations with the Disability Accommodation Coordinator, please arrange to meet with me outside of class so that we can develop an implementation plan.

Students may face extenuating circumstances related to various personal or external factors, which impact their academic performance. While these circumstances often do not fall within the legal framework of Disability Accommodations, Bard College Berlin is committed to

supporting students experiencing such circumstances. A student needing a short extension or a replacement assignment because of an extenuating circumstance is encouraged to make arrangements directly with instructors if possible. If further support is needed, please visit the [Bard College Berlin Accessibility page](#). Questions about this process can be directed to James Harker (j.harker@berlin.bard.edu) or Maria Anderson-Long (m.andersonlong@berlin.bard.edu).

Attendance

Attendance at all classes is a crucial part of the education offered by Bard College Berlin. To account for minor circumstances, two absences from twice-per-week courses or the equivalent (e.g. one absence from a once-per-week course) should not affect the participation grade or require documentation.

Bard College Berlin may not offer credit for any course in which a student has missed more than 30% of classes, regardless of the reasons for the absences. The full Bard College Berlin attendance policy can be found in the Student Handbook, Section 2.8.

Assessment

Class participation and practical activities

Field report + Essay (2500 words) (Submit until 18th October)

Artistic project (Submit until 4th December; Present on the 11th December)

Reflecting Human-environment Relations Through Sound is a course that allows students to use sound and ecology as their main medium of production. Most technical materials will be provided. Students must produce a middle-term field report and essay (2500 words) and present a final artwork for this class that is inspired by ecological sound art. Additionally, there will be several activities during the classes.

Students are also assessed on their ability to work independently, in groups, and responsibly. They will be graded on their ability to communicate with Professor as well amongst themselves. This also includes their ambition to create artworks as well as their willingness to budget their time for all requirements connected to this class. This assessment also includes preparation, production, and cleaning up of spaces used at Bard College Berlin”

Policy on Late Submission of Artworks / Presentations

Assignments (artworks, essays, performances, oral presentations) that are up to 24 hours late will be downgraded one full grade (Example: B+ becomes C+). The Professor is not obliged to accept assignments that are more than 24 hours late. Where a professor agrees to accept a late assignment, it should be submitted by the new deadline agreed upon by both parties. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment. Grades and comments will be returned to students in a timely fashion. Students may 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 an instructor to discuss seminar participation, or may be asked to meet with the instructor at any stage in the semester regarding class progress.

Grade Breakdown

Class participation and practical activities: 30%

Field report and Essay (2500 words): 30%

Artistic project presentation + Concept + Biography: 40%

Schedule

Week 1: Sep 4 - Introduction to the Course

Input: Course overview, objectives, and expectations.

Practical: AV intro + share personal experiences related to nature and sound (nature quiz).

Discussion: Initial thoughts on the nature-culture divide and the importance of sound in understanding human-environment relations.

Readings:

Cobussen, B. (2022). *Engaging with Everyday Sounds* (Chapter 2, p. 13-14)

Shafer, M. (1977). *The Soundscape – Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World*. (p. 53-67)

Schultz, P. Wesley. (2002). *Inclusion with Nature: The Psychology Of Human-Nature Relations*. (p. 61-74)

Week 2: Sep 11 - Historical Perspectives on Human-Environment Relations

Input: Emergence of ecological sciences, environmental movement, and the nature-culture divide.

Outdoor: Soundwalk. Identify positive/ negative sounds from your home environment and at exterior places in the campus surroundings.

Discussion: Reflections on the shift from admiring nature to exploiting nature.

Readings:

Latour, B. (1993). *We Have Never Been Modern*. (p.1-12)

Haraway, D. J. (2016). *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. (p. 99-103)

Steffen, W. et al. 2011. *The Anthropocene: Conceptual and Historical Perspectives*. (p. 845-849)

Week 3: Sep 18 - The Anthropocene and Its Implications

Input: Understanding the Anthropocene – definitions and debates.

Practical: Group debate on the Anthropocene's impact

Discussion: Reflecting on the debate and personal viewpoints.

Reading:

Schafer, R. M. (1997). *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World*. (p. 3-10)

Krause, Bernie. (2015). *Voices of the Wild Animal Songs, Human Din, and the Call to Save Natural Soundscapes*. (p. 1-12)

Week 4: Sep 25 - Acoustic Ecology and Soundscapes

Input: Introduction to acoustic ecology and soundscapes. Invited guest.

Outdoor: Field trip to local parks to record natural and anthropogenic soundscapes.

Discussion: Analysis of the recordings and what they reveal about the environment.

Reading:

Truax, B. (2019). *Acoustic Ecology and the World Soundscape Project* (In Droumeva and Jordan; Chapter 2; p. 21-30)

Haraway, D. J. (2008). *When Species Meet* (p. 3-19)

Week 5: Oct 2 - Sound and Biodiversity

Input: Natural Soundscapes. The role of sound in animal communication and ecosystem health.

Practical: Analysing animal communication recordings of various species.

Discussion: Comment on the recordings.

Reading:

Farina A. and Gage S. (2017). *Ecoacoustics: The ecological Effects of Noise on Species and Communities* (p. 95-100)
Schafer, R. M. (1997). *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World*. (p. 71-77)
Goldsmith, M. (2012). *Discord The Story of Noise*. Oxford University Press. (p. 42-46)

Week 6: Oct 9 - Noise Pollution and Its Impact on Ecosystems

Input: Noise pollution and conservation. Sources and effects of noise pollution.

Outdoor: Soundmap - Map noise pollution levels in the campus surroundings.

Discussion: Soundmap findings.

Reading:

Bianchi, F. and Manzo, V.J. (2016). *Environmental Sound Artists*. New York: Oxford University Press. (p. 144-151)

Week 7: Oct 16 - Environmental Sound Art

Input: The history and evolution of environmental sound art. Key works and their impacts.

Outdoor: Field trip to local canal/ river to record natural and artificial underwater soundscapes.

Discussion: How environmental sound art can influence the perception of places.

Reading:

Farina A. and Gage S. (2017). *Ecoacoustics and its Expression through the Voice of the Arts: An Essay* (p. 297-311)
Barclay, L. (2019). *AE and Ecological Sound Art: Listening to Changing Ecosystems* (In Droumeva and Jordan; Chapter 8; p. 153-174)

- FALL BREAK -

Week 8: Oct 30 - Case Studies in Ecological Sound Art

Input: Ecological Sound Art. In-depth analysis of significant works.

Practical: Sonic postcards. Sound collage with recorded sounds from previous classes.

Discussion: Methods and impact of these works.

Reading:

Gilmurray J. (2021). *Ecological Sound Art*. In *The Bloomsbury Handbook of Sonic Methodologies*; Chapter 28; p. 449-458)

Week 9: Nov 6 - Practical visit - Berlin Science Week - Holzmarkt 25

External: Field trip

Discussion: Reflecting on the experience and artworks.

Reading:

Harris, Y. (2021) *Melt Me into the Ocean: Sounds from Submarine Spaces* (In *The Bloomsbury Handbook of Sonic Methodologies*; Chapter 30; p. 469-478)

Week 10: Nov 13 - Creative Expression to Reconnect Culture and Nature

Input: The role of art in environmental awareness.

Practical: Sonic Postcards. Hands-on workshop to develop a concept for a sound art piece that reflects environmental themes.

Week 11: Nov 20 - Immersive Listening and Environmental Awareness

Input: Concepts of intention, attention, focus. Underwater Soundscapes and immersive sound.

Practical: Studio sessions - immersive audio set-up. Guided immersive listening exercises.

Reading:

Duncombe, S. and Steve L. (2018). *Artistic Activism*. (In *The Routledge Companion to Media and Activism*; Chapter 5; p. 57-64)

Week 12: Nov 27 - The Intersection of Ecology, Art, Activism, and Sound

Input: Introduction to ecological artistic activism.

External: Group visit at art exhibition or artistic studio (to be defined).

Discussion: Interdisciplinary approaches and their effectiveness. How activism shaped current environmental awareness.

Week 13: Dec 4 - Emerging Topics. Contemporary issues on the Nature-Culture Divide.

Input: Emerging Topics. Relevant Artists. Examples: Joannie Lemercier, Leah Barclay, Kat Austen, Robertina Sebjanic, Marco Barotti, Fara Peluso, Pablo Diserens.

Practical: Studio Sessions - rehearsals. Selected artists discussed.

Week 14: Dec 11 - Presentation and Critique of Final Projects

Presentation: Students present their final projects at **Monopol**.

Critique: Group discussion and feedback.

Conclusion: Recap and reflections on the course.

Week 15: Dec 18 - Completion week / Inspection

Grades Submission

Policy on the use of facilities:

1. The Factory (Eichenstrasse 43) and Monopol (Provinzstr 40-44) at BCB offer space and facilities to BCB art students. Chip access is from 7 a.m. to 10 p.m. every day, including the weekends during the semester. The buildings cannot be used outside these hours.
2. Fire exits and lanes must be kept clear of any obstructions.
3. Students agree only to use the designated class spaces or communal workshops. Respecting the building and its facilities is crucial, as they are shared resources that need to be preserved for the benefit of all.
4. For your safety and the safety of others, smoking and drinking alcohol are strictly prohibited anywhere inside the building.
5. Unauthorized events and/or parties are not permitted. Projects using open flames (such as candles, torches, lanterns, fireworks, etc.) are not permitted inside the building.
6. Spray painting and handling any hazardous (chemical or combustible) material is not permitted inside the building.
7. All work surfaces (indoor and outdoor) must be adequately protected with the workshop's drop cloth before spray painting or working with plaster.
8. During completion week, any space used by a student must be emptied, with clean walls and floors. All garbage must be adequately disposed of. Final grades may be affected or withheld if any item remains by the inspection deadline.
9. When leaving the building, students must ensure all lights are turned off, all electrical items must be unplugged, and doors must be closed.
10. Contact the Studio art manager directly with any questions: j.park@berlin.bard.edu

Emergency phone numbers:

Police (calling from a German landline or cellphone): 110

Fire (calling from a German landline or cellphone): 112

Ambulance and Paramedics (calling from a German landline or cellphone): 112

Out-of-Hours Medical Care (calling from a German landline or cellphone) : 116 117