

SC215 REFLECTING HUMAN ENVIRONMENT RELATIONS (THROUGH SOUND)

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

Course Description

Course Overview:

This course explores the complex relationship between sound, nature, and culture through theoretical, practical, and artistic lenses. Students will engage with concepts such as the nature-culture divide, the Anthropocene, acoustic ecology, ecoacoustics, and sound activism. By combining readings, outdoor soundwalks, field recordings, and studio sessions, students will develop critical listening skills and artistic responses that raise ecological awareness. The course culminates in the creation of a sound-based artistic project addressing human-environment interactions.

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.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- **Interpret and apply** theoretical frameworks from Acoustic Ecology, Noise Pollution, and Animal Communication to analyse case studies related to human-environment relations.
- **Critically evaluate** diverse perspectives on the Nature-Culture divide, drawing from sound studies, environmental humanities, and ecological discourse.
- **Debate and engage** in informed discussions around listening practices, ecological sound art, and environmental activism.
- **Synthesise knowledge** through the composition of a reflective essay that demonstrates integrated understanding of course concepts.
- **Utilise and operate** field recording equipment and software to capture and process high-quality soundscapes with technical proficiency and creative autonomy.
- **Produce original soundscape compositions** that creatively apply theoretical concepts, demonstrating artistic expression and environmental awareness.

Learning goals

- **Develop ecological awareness** through critical listening and sound-based inquiry.
- **Bridge theory and practice**, encouraging students to move from conceptual understanding to artistic expression.
- **Foster interdisciplinary thinking** across sound art, environmental studies, and activism.
- **Support creative experimentation** and personal artistic development.
- **Encourage collective reflection** on environmental responsibility and sonic agency.

Requirements

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.

Accommodations

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 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.

Please note: All absences due to illness should be communicated via email at least 2 hours before the beginning of the missed class meeting with supportive documentation.

Please note that there are classes that have a practical aspect outside the classroom

Wed, **Feb 18**

Wed, **Mar 4**

There are classes which might take place outside the campus

Wed, **Mar 11**

Wed, **Apr 15 (TBC)**

Wed, **Apr 22 (TBC)**

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

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 essay (2500 words) and present a final artwork/ soundscape composition for this class inspired by ecological sound art approaches. Additionally, there will be several practical 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 the Professor as well as 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 (such as ordering equipment), production, and cleaning up of spaces used at Bard College Berlin.

Assignments

Class participation and practical activities
Essay (2500 words) (Submit draft until 25h March)
Final Artistic project + Concept + Bio (Submit until 29th Apr; Present on the 8th Mai)

Assignments Overview:

- 1. Reflective Essay (2500 words)**
Topic: Chosen by the student in connection with class themes.
Assessed on: relevance, research depth, structure, argument clarity, citation style, bibliography.
- 2. Final Project Delivery/ Soundscape Composition**
Based on student field recordings; software use is mandatory.
Assessed on: creativity, integration of recordings, technical skill, aesthetic coherence.
Must include: Title, Artist bio, Conceptual synopsis, Technical rider.

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 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%
Essay (2500 words): 30%
Final Artistic project presentation/ Soundscape composition + concept + bio: 40%

Schedule

Week 1: JAN 28 - 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. 3-10; 53-67)

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

Possamai, F. (2013). Nature and Culture Dualism: Genesis of an Obsolete Dichotomy (p. 836-841)

Practical assignment: Home soundscape. Record your home sounds.

Week 2: FEB 4 - Historical Perspectives on Human-Environment Relations (AV Room)

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

Practical: Present your home sounds.

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

Readings:

Cobussen, B. (2022). *Engaging with Everyday Sounds* (p. 101-105)

Krause, B. (2015). Voices of the Wild Animal Songs, Human Din, and the Call to Save Natural Soundscapes. (p. 1-15)

Smolicki, J. (2023). *Soundwalking Through Time, Space and Technologies*.

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

Shafer, M. (1977). *The Soundscape – Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World*. (p. 212-213)

Practical assignment: Soundwalk from your home to class: Identify sounds from the environment (bio, geo, anthropo soundscapes). Key, signals. Soundwalk reflection.

Week 3: FEB 11 - The Anthropocene / Soundwalking (AV Room)

Input: Listening and understanding the Anthropocene – definitions and debates. What is Sound? Soundwalking.

Practical: The physical aspect of sound. Hands on equipment. Software intro.

Discussion: Reflecting on the debate and personal viewpoints.

Reading:

Chion, M. (2012). *The Three Listening Modes* (In: The Sound Studies Reader; (Chapter 5; p. 48-52)

Schafer, R. M. (1997). *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World*. (p. 3-10; p. 133-150)

Optional:

Tuuri et al. (2007). *Same Sound - Different meanings: A Novel Scheme for Modes of Listening*. (p.13-18)

Erbe, C.; Thomas, J. (2022). History of Sound Recording and Analyses Equipment (In: Exploring Animal Behavior Through Sound: Volume 1: Methods Chapter 1, p. 2-12)

Practical assignment: Import your sounds in the software. Listen and identify. Organize recorded sounds (metadata).

Week 4: FEB 18 - Acoustic Ecology and Soundscapes (AV Room)

Input: Introduction to acoustic ecology and soundscapes.

Outdoor: Record inside and outside around Monopol surroundings. 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)

Cobussen, B. (2022). *Engaging with Everyday Sounds* (p. 28-30; 34-37)

Westerkamp, H. (2002) Linking Soundscape Composition and Acoustic Ecology.

Fortkamp et al. (2023). *Soundscapes: Humans and Their Acoustic Environment*

Optional:

Gilmurray J. (2021). *Beyond Phonography An Ecomusicological analysis of Contemporary Approaches to Composing with the Sounds of the Natural World* (p. 1-24)

Practical assignment: Listen, trim/ remove unwanted sections. Explore fade in and fade out. Order sounds in a timeline to present in class.

Week 5: FEB 25 - Sound and Biodiversity. Transecology and oral histories. (AV Room)

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

Practical: Software. Present your sounds. Analysing animal communication recordings of various species.

Discussion: Comment on the recordings.

Readings:

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

Goldsmith, M. (2012). *Discord The Story of Noise*. Oxford University Press. (p. 42-46)

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)

Optional:

Vakoch, D. (2020). *Transecology Transgender perspectives on environment and nature* (Chapter 9; p. 174-187)

Practical assignment: Make your oral history connecting sound and nature. Narration, interview, speaker for the living. Use equalisation.

Week 6: MAR 4 - Noise Pollution and its Impacts on Ecosystems (AV Room)

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)

Farina A. and Gage S. (2017). *Ecoacoustics: The ecological Effects of Noise on Species and Communities* (p. 95-100)

Labelle, B. (2018). *Sonic Agency* Goldsmiths Press (p. 160-162).

Henderson, C. (2023). *A Book of Noises Notes on Auraculous*

Practical assignment: Your Soundmap. Record a noisy area. Try different input levels. Choose an environmental sound artist to present next class.

Week 7: MAR 11 - Environmental Sound Art. Sound Activism. (AV Room)

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. (TBC)

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

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)

Optional:

Polli, A. (2012). *Soundscape, sonification and sound activism*.

Practical assignment: Structure your soundscape composition.

Week 8: MAR 18 Software and Spectrograms. Case Studies in Ecological Sound Art

Input: Ecological Sound Art. Overview of software for sound editing.

Practical: Sound editing and artistic soundscape exploration and experiments. Soundscape composition.

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)

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)

Practical assignment: Define your conceptual narrative. Share in class your inspirations and your process.

Week 9: MAR 25 - Invited Guest lecturer (AV Room)

Input: Invited Guest lecturer.

Discussion: Open.

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)

Bennet, J. (2009). *Vibrant Matter*

MID-TERM ESSAY

Week 10: APR 8 - 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. Creative sound walking.

Reading:

Taylor, S. and Fernstrom, M. Acouscenic Listening (In Sound, Media, Ecology, Chapter 13, p. 243-258)

Practical assignment: Sonic postcard from Berlin.

Week 11: APR 15 - Immersive Listening and Environmental Awareness (AV ROOM)

External: Field trip - tbc.

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)

Practical assignment: Final Project pre-writing (Title, Synopsis, Artist bio). Present to class.

Week 12: APR 22 - The Intersection of Ecology, Art, Activism, and Sound

Input: Introduction to ecological artistic activism.

Practical: Open class for deepening any practical aspect that the class wants to improve or develop further.

External (optional): Group visit at selected exhibition or artistic studio from selected artist.

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

Week 13: APR 29 - Emerging Topics. Contemporary issues on the Nature-Culture Divide.

Input: Emerging Topics, Artists and Works. Examples: Joannie Lemerrier, Leah Barclay, Kat Austen, Robertina Sebjanic, Marco Barotti, Theresa Schubert, Margarita Pevere, Fara Peluso, Pablo Diserens, Spela Petric.

Practical: Studio Sessions - rehearsals for final project *in loco*. Selected artists discussed.

Week 14: MAI 6 - Rehearsal Presentation and Critique of Final Projects (AV ROOM)

Presentation: Rehearsals. Students present their final projects at Monopol. Group discussion and feedback.

Troubleshooting: final adjustments.

Conclusion: Recap learning goals and reflections on the course.

MAI 8 - FINAL ARTISTIC PROJECT PRESENTATION @ MONOPOL

Deadlines

Class participation and practical activities (Discussions in the following class)

Essay (2500 words) (Submit draft until 25th March)

Final Artistic project/ soundscape composition + Concept + Bio (Submit until 29th April; Present on the 8th Mai)

Policy on the use of facilities:

The Factory and Monopol

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

AV Facilities – Platanenstrasse 98 (downstairs)

- 1) BCB's AV (Audio / Visual) facilities provide a limited quantity of AV equipment to support those students enrolled in arts classes that require specific items. AV facilities do not include any black and white or color printing services for students.
- 2) The opening times may change every semester to adapt to specific course times and social distancing conditions. Borrowing equipment is currently implemented by scheduling an advance appointment through this email: av@berlin.bard.edu AV facilities are ONLY available during days when classes are held (closed during official BCB holidays).
- 3) All items checked out are due back during AV hours the following day, unless other arrangements have been made in advance directly with AV Staff.
- 4) Items to be reserved on a specific date should be requested at least one week in advance. Without reservation, availability is limited to a first-come, first-serve basis.

- 5) The AV Staff may exclude students from borrowing items at any time, if the student:
 - failed to return items in time
 - failed to return items in person (pick up and/ or return by friends is not allowed)
 - returned items with missing pieces
 - returned items damaged or in poor shape
- 6) AV equipment will be given out only to those students responsible in organizing, picking up as well as returning their items IN PERSON. No exceptions.
- 7) All items returned late, regardless of patron's position at BCB, will be subject to a 1 Euro fine, per day.
- 8) Any item returned without accessories (such as cables, SD card, batteries, tripod head, lens cap, etc) will be subject to a 1 Euro fine, per day (the same as late returns).
- 9) Any items missing will be subject to patron reimbursement for its value (or under special circumstances, replacement, at the discretion of AV Staff). Any items damaged or malfunctioning are expected to be reported to Staff upon check-in.
- 10) Please use the AV email to inquire about equipment or policy, as well as to reserve (av@berlin.bard.edu). Do not contact AV Staff through their personal emails.
- 11) We strongly suggest personally visiting the facilities to inquire and reserve before borrowing equipment!
- 12) AV equipment is limited at BCB. Whenever possible students are encouraged to use their own devices (computers, cameras) for production purposes.
- 13) Contact AV Staff directly with any questions: av@berlin.bard.edu

Photo Darkroom Facilities – Platanenstrasse 98 (downstairs)
Computer Pool and Media Lab – Kuckhoffstrasse 24 (upstairs)

** Guidelines to be offered during orientations.

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