

FA287 Audio Documentary

Seminar Leader: Noam Brusilovsky
Email: n.brusilovsky@berlin.bard.edu
Office Hours: By appointment

Course Description

This course introduces students to the craft of non-fiction audio storytelling and leads them toward producing a polished 15-minute documentary piece. Students listen to and discuss outstanding audio documentaries and learn the core practices of the form: recording sound in the field, conducting interviews, editing and shaping material in post-production, and researching stories with attention to factual accuracy and narrative clarity. Alongside technical training, the course examines documentary audio as a cultural and artistic practice: how sound conveys reality, how to engage responsibly with real people's stories, and how to shape a relatable story. The class includes two key excursions: A visit to Prix Europa, providing exposure to current European documentary audio and professional workflows; and a visit to Haus des Rundfunks (rbb) for behind-the-scenes insight into public-broadcast audio production. By the end of the semester, each student creates a 15-minute non-fiction audio work that integrates field recordings, interviews, archival research, sound editing, and narrative design.

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.
- 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
- Ensure to read the requested material for each class. The complete bibliography is available on reserve in the library.
- Ensure the timely submission of all assignments and coursework.
- Engage actively and constructively in class discussions and activities.
- Present their homework in front of the class and discuss their work with the other participants.
- Return all borrowed technical equipment on time and in proper working condition.

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.

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

The primary requirement for this course is the production of a **15-minute documentary sound piece**, which students will develop throughout the semester. This comprehensive project involves scriptwriting, field recording, editing, and final production. Assessment evaluates both the final piece and your consistent engagement with the production process through the following components:

- **Weekly Assignments and Presentations:** Students will receive small weekly tasks that must be presented in class. These milestones are designed to ensure steady progression through the stages of scripting, recording, and editing.
- **Active Participation:** Regular contribution to class discussions, peer reviews, and the ability to constructively process and integrate critique into your work.
- **Consistency and Technical Improvement:** Evaluation of your continuous progress from week to week, your technical development in sound production, and your capacity to respond to feedback.
- **Final Output:** The creativity, technical execution, and conceptual clarity of the completed 15-minute documentary sound piece.

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 will receive feedback for their course work during and at the end of the semester. 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 (includes attendance, maintenance of all common and private spaces used for production / rehearsal, communication with Professor and other students): 35%

Homework and in-class work: 35%

Project presentations for critiques (final project): 30%

Schedule

Week 1: Introduction to the Audio Documentary (September 2nd)

In-Class Topics:

- Course overview and syllabus review
- Deep listening and group analysis of *Ghetto Life 101* (1993).
- Presentation of the instructor's artistic work
- Telling stories through voice messages

Week 2: Introduction to Recording and Editing (September 9th):

In-Class Topics:

- **Facility Orientation:** Review of studio rules, space maintenance, and general procedures.
- **AV Orientation:** Introduction to the AV room, equipment booking system, and checkout protocols. (To be confirmed)
- **Technical Introduction:** Basics of sound recording editing and audio workspaces.

Required Preparation (To be completed before class)

- **Software Setup:** Bring your laptop with **Audacity** already installed.
- **Audio Sample:** Find a short interview excerpt online (audio recording) and upload the file to Google Drive in .wav format for class use.

Week 3: Excursion: Haus des Rundfunks (Masurenallee 8-14) (September 16th)

Visit to the radio station rbb at the historical building of Haus des Rundfunks. The tour will be guided by a sound engineer and a producing editor. **Please bring your passports / EU-ID-Cards with you.**

Required Preparation (To be completed before class):

- **Presentations** on the history of the building

Week 4: Auditive Storytelling and the History of the Genre (September 23rd):

In-Class Topics:

- **The Narrative Power of Sound:** Exploring how we construct stories and meaning through non-verbal audio.
- Introduction to radio history and the evolution of the audio documentary format.
- **Listening** to excerpts from 8 Uhr 15, OP III, Hüftplastik (1970)
- **Peer Listening & Exchange:** Sharing first student recordings and discussing the exercise.

Required Preparation (To be completed before class):

- **The Auditive Recipe:** Produce a short audio sequence documenting the preparation of a dish, using only raw sounds and upload the exercise to Google Drive.
- **Read:** Reková, Tereza. European Radio Documentary: A History of the Format and Its Festivals. Palgrave Macmillan, 2024 (chapters 3 and 4)

Week 5: Being a Listener (September 30th):

In-Class Topics:

- **Field recordings:** Introduction to sonic environment, soundscapes and field recordings.
- **Reading:** Preger, S. (2021). Storytelling in Radio and Podcasts: A Practical Guide. Palgrave Macmillan. (Chapter 1.3).
- **Listening:** An interview with Eleanor McDowall
- **Peer Listening & Exchange:** Sharing first student recordings and discussing the collective experience in the field.

Required Preparation (To be completed before class):

- **Read:** Schafer, R. Murray. The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World. Destiny Books, 1994 (p. 3-12 and 53-67)
- **Field Recording:** Complete the environmental sound-capturing exercise and upload the exercise to Google Drive.

Week 6: Interview In-Class Topics (October 7th):

In-Class Topics:

- **Listening** to excerpts from The Retrievals (NYT)
- **Reading:** Preger, S. (2021). Storytelling in Radio and Podcasts: A Practical Guide. Palgrave Macmillan. (Chapter 4.5).

- **Peer Listening & Exchange:** Sharing student recordings and discussing the exercise.

Required Preparation (To be completed before class):

- Record an interview, edit the recording (presentation of up to 5 minutes) and upload the exercise to Google Drive

Week 7: Excursion: Prix Europa at Haus des Rundfunks (Masurenallee 8-14) (October 14th):

Students will visit the European media festival Prix Europa and will listen to nominated non-fiction radio pieces from all over Europe. **Please bring your passports / EU-ID-Cards with you.**

Fall break: [Oct 19 – Oct 25]

Week 8: Master class (October 28th)

In-Class Topics:

- **Discussing** impressions from Prix Europa
- **Listening** to a radio piece by Helgard Haug (Rimini Protokoll)
- **Meeting** radio and theatre maker Helgard Haug

Week 9: Being a Witness and Concepts (November 4th)

In-Class Topics:

- **Peer Listening & Exchange:** Sharing student recordings and discussing the exercise.
- **Final projects:** Students will introduce their concepts for their final projects.

Required Preparation (To be completed before class):

- **Record** an interaction between persons, edit the material and upload it to Google Drive
- **Read:** Preger, S. (2021). Storytelling in Radio and Podcasts: A Practical Guide. Palgrave Macmillan. (Chapter 10).
- **Write** a concept for your final project.

Week 10: Intervention and Ethics (November 11th)

In-Class Topics:

- **The Ethics of Interference:** Examining the documentarian's presence and the boundaries between observing and altering a protagonist's reality.
- **Navigating Conflicts in the Field:** Analyzing Chapter 6 (Preger) regarding professional distances, emotional involvement, and narrative responsibility.
- **Shared Auditory Reflections:** Listening to student intervention recordings and exploring how direct involvement shapes the soundscape and the story.

Required Preparation (To be completed before class):

- **Record** Record a short scene in which your presence as a documentarian becomes audible or relevant. This may include asking a question, negotiating consent, entering a space, or reflecting on how the recording situation changes the scene. Do not manipulate or provoke your protagonist in order to create drama.
- **Read:** Preger, S. (2021). Storytelling in Radio and Podcasts: A Practical Guide. Palgrave Macmillan. (Chapter 6).
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Week 11: The Narrator and the Plot (November 18th)

In-Class Topics:

- **The Voice of the Story:** Defining the narrator's persona, tone, and perspective in audio documentaries.
- **Weaving the Sonic Fabric:** Analyzing Chapters 3–5 (Preger) on structural plotting and the interplay between narration and dramatic action.
- **Multi-Layered Listening Sessions:** Sharing student exercises to evaluate how voiceover interacts with multiple acoustic layers (ambient, effects, and speech).

Required Preparation (To be completed before class):

- **Production Assignment:** Prepare a scene that combines three different acoustic components and add a narrator voice to the scene. Upload the exercise to Google Drive.
- **Reading:** Preger, S. (2021). *Storytelling in Radio and Podcasts: A Practical Guide*. Palgrave Macmillan. (Chapters 3–5).

Week 12: Rough Cut Feedback (November 25th)

In-Class Topics:

- **Peer Listening & Exchange:** Sharing student recordings

Required Preparation (To be completed before class):

- **Upload** to Google Drive excerpts from your final project.

Week 13: Fine Cut Feedback II (December 2nd)

In-Class Topics:

- **Peer Listening & Exchange:** Sharing student recordings

Required Preparation (To be completed before class):

- **Upload** to Google Drive excerpts from your final project.

Week 14: Final Presentation (December 9th):

In-Class Topics:

- **Listening** to the final projects
- **Feedback** on the projects
- **Reflection** on the course
- Course and instructor evaluation

Required Preparation (To be completed before class):

- **Upload** to Google Drive your final project.

Week 15: Completion week / Inspection / Open Studios (tbd)

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. Fire exits and lanes must be kept clear of any obstructions.

2. 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.
3. For your safety and the safety of others, smoking and drinking alcohol are strictly prohibited anywhere inside the building.
4. 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.
5. Spray painting and handling any hazardous (chemical or combustible) material is not permitted inside the building.
6. All work surfaces (indoor and outdoor) must be adequately protected with the workshop's drop cloth before spray painting or working with plaster.
7. 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.
8. When leaving the building, students must ensure all lights are turned off, all electrical items must be unplugged, and doors must be closed.
9. 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