



CITY BY SOUND

Practices, Poetics, and Politics of Listening to Built and Natural Environments

How do we relate to our cities' soundscapes, and how do they come about? Are they merely incidental by-products of architectural and urban planning decisions, or can they be shaped and experienced more thoughtfully and deliberately? Who participates in composing our soundscapes, and who is excluded from them?

The aim of this course is to introduce and practically explore creative and critical approaches to assessing soundscapes. We will do this through a combination of discussions around key concepts and methods from the field of acoustic ecology (e.g. soundmark, keynote, biophony, geophony, anthrophony), and practical exercises in mapping, listening, and field recording, focusing on selected soundscapes of the Cambridge or greater Boston area.

Participants will learn various perspectives from which soundscapes can be listened to and evaluated. They will also be introduced to practical sound mapping techniques and field recording technologies that may include hydrophones, geophones, contact microphones, and ambisonic microphones.

As a final project, students will produce short “*sonic scenes*” that reflect on, critique, and creatively speculate about the soundscapes of the city—considering their past, present condition, and possible futures. To promote a variety of means of expression,

the use of sound won't be required; these sound-focused scenes may also take the form of short written stories, drawings, collages, images, or graphic scores.

The material produced in the class and elaborated further by those particularly interested in the subject, will be compiled into a physical map entitled "*Cambridge by Sound*." The map will be made available to the public during the **Walking Festival of Sound** in April 2026 in Cambridge. The Walking Festival of Sound is a nomadic, transdisciplinary event dedicated to practices of walking and listening to shared environments. It was co-founded by Loeb and ArtLab Fellow Jacek Smolicki and has previously taken place in cities including Vancouver, Kraków, Zurich, and Seoul.

Timeframe:

Lectures and Discussions:

January 5

- 10:00am–10:45am — Introductory soundwalk (meeting point to be decided and if the weather is bad, we will do an indoor walk instead)
- 11:00am–12:30pm — Introduction to Acoustic Ecology, Soundscape Studies, and their relevance to spatial design practices

January 6

- 10:00am–12:30pm — Overview of critical and creative sound mapping techniques and recording technologies. Introduction to the assignment "*Sound Scenes*"

January 7

- 10:00am–12:30pm — Presentation of examples of sound art in urban contexts, audio storytelling techniques, and sonic cartography. Short overview of ideas and locations students will work with

January 8–9

- Individual and/or group work; optional on-site consultations. (If the weather is bad, we will work with meet indoors).

Tuesday, January 13

- 10:00–1:00pm — Presentations of "*Sound Scenes*" at Harvard ArtLab

Number of students:

Maximum enrolment number would be between 18 and 25 students

Room/Equipment:

A classroom at Gund Hall with an A/V setup (a projector and speakers). I am planning to host one session at Harvard ArtLab, a dynamic and versatile space that serves as a catalyst for creative expression and interdisciplinary collaboration (140 N Harvard St, Boston, MA 02134)

Jacek Smolicki (Kraków born, Stockholm based), PhD, is an interdisciplinary artist, designer, and researcher. His work explores the transformative potential of sound and listening in reimagining how we shape and care for our environment. He is a Loeb 2026 and Harvard ArtLab fellow.

He is the cofounder of the Walking Festival of Sound, a transdisciplinary and nomadic platform uniting artists, researchers, and local community members to explore the creative and critical role of sound in understanding our lived environments. Recently he founded Ekoton, a sound-focused art and design studio in Stockholm.

Working both independently and with international institutions, Jacek has developed projects that foreground sound to draw attention to natural and built environments, highlighting their often imperceptible dimensions, histories, and actors—human and other-than-human. His practice, manifested through soundwalks, soundscape compositions, archives, and audiovisual installations, has ranged across diverse geographies, including the Canadian Pacific Coast, the Nordic Arctic Circle, Walden Pond, the Krakow Jewish Ghetto, and the Canaveral National Seashore.

As a sound and media scholar and writer, Jacek has published on the ethics, politics and poetics of listening, soundscapes, field recording, and audio technologies in academic and popular science outlets. He has pursued his theory and practice-based research at Malmö University, where he earned his PhD, Simon Fraser University, and Uppsala University. In recent years, he received an international postdoc grant from the Swedish Research Council and was a Fulbright Visiting Scholar at Harvard.

More on:

<https://loebfellowship.gsd.harvard.edu/fellows-alumni/fellows-search/jaceksmolicki/>
www.smolicki.com