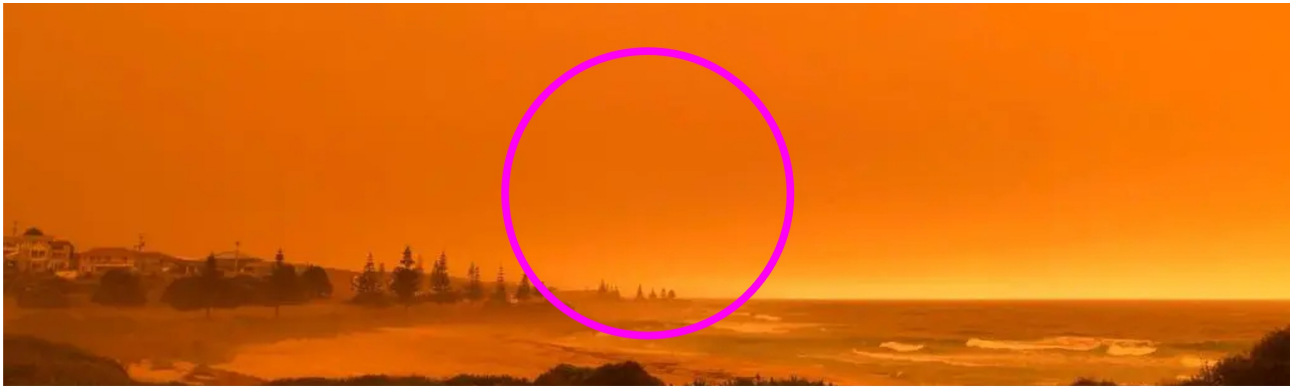




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AMBIENT MUSIC

Critical Explorations, Wicked Problems, and Small Wonderments

International Conference

Copenhagen, Denmark

September 15-17, 2026

Venue

RMC, Rhythmic Music Conservatory, Leo Mathisens Vej 1, 1437 Copenhagen

Organizers

Holger Schulze (University of Copenhagen) & Ulrik Schmidt (Roskilde University)

RMC Conference Team: Mimmi Bie & Jan Stricker

Why is everybody listening to ambient music these days? Beatless music, or music with almost inaudible percussion or beats, seems to be one of the hidden champions these days. It finds its audience across the spectrum of age, gender, race and ability. It has a clearly soothing and healing quality – but also oozes into all sorts of other genres, styles and artistic movements: its roots and offshoots range from Minimal Music to Krautrock, from Gamelan to Soundscape Composition, from radiophonic composition to noise music, from film music to neoclassic, from hauntology to lo-fi hip hop beats to relax/study to.

Ambient is a truly planetary genre of music – with an endless range of local traditions and highly diverse scenes. Is ambient even becoming the dominant model for popular music production in the 21st century, replacing the backbeat of rock'n'roll, the percussive patterns and loops of EDM, and taking its place alongside hip-hop and R'n'B? Is the ambient music genre simply tailor-made for perfect playlist adaptability, workplace mood regulation, and spotifycore? A few decades ago, listening to this genre was considered embarrassing, or at the very least, clichéd by many: today, it is a widespread preference of countless artists, music lovers and streaming platforms across the globe.

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PROGRAM

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 15

8:30 REGISTRATION AND COFFEE

9:30 **WELCOME AND OPENING STATEMENT**

Holger Schulze and Ulrik Schmidt

10:00 **KEYNOTE**

Ann Werner (SE)

Beyond Seamless Listening: Ambient Music, Platforms and Gender.

11:00 COFFEE BREAK

11:30 **LOCAL HISTORIES I**

Katsushi Nakagawa (JP)

Local history and aesthetics of ambient music in Japan

Nick Prior (UK) – *Audio Paper*

Ambient Machines: A Sound Essay on Japanese Vending Machines

12:30 **LOCAL HISTORIES II**

Niels Lyhne Løkkegaard (DK)

Surrection & Mirage Making

13:00 LUNCH

13:30 **LUNCH PERFORMANCE**

Ng'at Maler (KE)

Listening in Chaos

14:00 **AMBIENT AND MEDIA I**

Riccardo Ancona (IT)

Ambient Music in the Age of AI Reproduction

Macon Holt (UK) – *Audio Paper*

How commercial AI generated ambient music helps me sleep, when there are a lot of good reasons to lie awake at night

15:00 COFFEE BREAK

15:30 **HIGHTEA PERFORMANCE**

Jane Arnison (US)

We Are All in This Together

16:00 **AMBIENT AND AESTHETICS**

Caroline Locke (UK)

Sonic Ecologies: Ambient Music as Environmental Translation and Embodied Listening

Brady Cranfield (CA)

Towards a Field Theory of Timbre

19:00 EVENING PERFORMANCE

LASALTAS (ES/NL/BR)

Matt Choboter (CA/DK)

Katharina Schmidt (DE)

Norah Lorway and Jason Rule (CA)

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 16

9:00 COFFEE

9:30 KEYNOTE

Jacob Smith (US)

New Age Audiovision and the Will to Shine

11:00 COFFEE BREAK

11:30 AMBIENT AND MEDIA II

Raphael Börger (DE)

Pleasure Control Through Sonic Tonics: Irv Teibel's environments (1969-1979)

Ann-Kathrin Allekotte (DE)

"Congratulations! You've reached a digital resting point. Stay as long as you like" – Digital Resting Points as a Phenomenon of Ambiance Listening and Viewing Practices on TikTok

Roberto Azaretto (AR/US) – Video Presentation

Levels of ambient attentional engagement

13:00 LUNCH

13:30 LUNCH PERFORMANCE

Christian Naujoks (DE)

14:00 LOCAL HISTORIES III

Ondřej Daniel (CZ)

Dub Echoes: Ambient Aesthetics and Cultural Translation in 1980s Czechoslovakia

Piotr Kędziora (PL)

Who Cares How You Listen? Thoughts on Ambient Music as a Laboratory and The Polish Ambient Music Project

15:00 COFFEE BREAK

15:30 HIGHTEA PERFORMANCE

Seth Cluett (US)

Spheres of Multiplicity

16:00 AMBIENT AND HEALTH

Louisa Grantz (DE/UK)

Sonic Care: The Role of Ambient Music in Healing Environments

Rupert Till (UK)

Ambient and Autism

19:00 SOCIAL GATHERING

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 17

9:00 COFFEE

9:30 **KEYNOTE**

Joseph Kamaru / KMRU (KE/DE) – *Audio Paper*
Other 'Ambient' Music

10:30 COFFEE BREAK

11:00 **AMBIENT AND POPULAR MUSIC**

Anders Bach Pedersen (DK)
Ambient Music Is Officially Mainstream

Lorenzo Montefinese (IT)
Music for the body and the mind. Convergences between ambient and electronic dance music

12:00 **TEACHING WITH AMBIENT**

Katharina Schmidt (DE)
From Atmospherics to Academics and Back: Tactics for Teaching Ambient

Angelina Tarlovskaja (DE/RU)
Teaching Texture and Atmosphere: Integrating Ambient Music into Contemporary Piano Pedagogy

13:00 LUNCH

13:30 **LUNCH PERFORMANCE**

Paulus van Horne (US)

14:00 **LOCAL HISTORIES IV**

Anna Ganzha (RU)
Ambient sentimentality: the late-Soviet soundtrack of a transformed world

Evgeny Bylina (UA/GE)
Music for the End of the World: "Quiet Music" as a Reflection on Trauma in Post-Soviet Sound Art

15:00 COFFEE BREAK

15:30 **HIGHTEA PERFORMANCE**

Ricardo Tovar Mateus (CO)

16:00 **FINAL REMARKS**

ABSTRACTS

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 15

KEYNOTE

Ann Werner (SE)

Beyond Seamless Listening: Ambient Music, Platforms and Gender.

In this presentation I ask what meanings ambient music take on in contemporary music culture. I do so by first outlining the phenomena of functional music (Schmidt 2023: 41-42), when music listening serves to aid the listener in another activity, and listening is not primarily a pleasure or a love of music in itself. Music listening can in this view become a driving force for individualisation and productivity in a capitalist world (Szabo 2017).

Secondly, I address ambient music's position in online streaming culture and how the genre's recent growth in seamless playlists on for example Spotify can be understood through critiques of tech-capitalism, platforms and AI (Goldschmitt 2020). Contemporary technological interventions have made music composition and curation a posthuman field of inquiry (Seaver 2022).

Finally, I revitalize a feminist question for music research, who participates and who benefits? Looking closer at the success of ambient music it also appears as a success for unmarked subjectivity; ambient music has no clear gender or race. However, unmarked subjectivities of streamed music have been challenged as pseudo-neutral (Muchitsch & Werner 2024).

The presentation discusses if the subjectivities of ambient music really are for all of us and what political meanings ambient music holds. By drawing on feminist affect theory (Ahmed 2010) the ideas of functional music, seamless access and unmarked subjectivity are challenged. The question about the meanings of subjectivity and difference in listening and on commercial platforms is posed to the cultural phenomenon of ambient music in contemporary music culture.

Ahmed, Sara (2010). *The promise of happiness*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Goldschmitt, K. E. (2020). The long history of the 2017 Spotify "Fake music" scandal. *American Music*, 38 (2), 131-152.

Muchitsch, Veronika, & Werner Ann (2024). The mediation of genre, identity, and difference in contemporary (popular) music streaming. *Twentieth-Century Music*. 21 (3), 302-328.

Schmidt, Ulrik (2023). *A philosophy of ambient sound: Materiality, technology, art and the sonic environment*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Seaver, Nick (2022). *Computing taste algorithms and the makers of music recommendation*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Szabo, Victor (2017). Unsettling Brian Eno's music for airports. *Twentieth-Century Music*. 14 (2), 305-333.

Ann Werner is professor in musicology at Uppsala University in Sweden. She has previously held positions in gender studies and media and communication studies. Her research interests are in music, gender, power, and media, she has published widely on for example streaming and algorithmic culture, and gendered uses of music, drawing on feminist theory. Her articles include 'Organizing music, organizing gender: Algorithmic culture and Spotify recommendations', *Popular Communication* (2020) and her latest book is *Feminism and Gender Politics in Mediated Popular Music* (2022), Bloomsbury Academic). Recently her publications have discussed higher classical music education in the borderlands of Europe and the work environments of artistic work.

LOCAL HISTORIES I

Nakagawa Katsushi (JP)

Local history and aesthetics of ambient music in Japan

This presentation explores the local history and aesthetics of ambient music in Japan. It aims to distinguish between two types of ambient music in Japan: Environmental Music of the 1980s and Kankyō Ongaku reevaluated in the 2010s. In the 1980s, composers like Hiroshi Yoshimura and Satoshi Ashikawa pioneered Environmental Music in Japan as an avant-garde sound practice. This genre was deeply embedded in the artistic and cultural context of the time, drawing inspiration from Max Neuhaus's sound installations, Brian Eno's ambient music, and R. Murray Schafer's concept of soundscape. The 2010s saw a significant rediscovery and reevaluation of this music, which gained recognition as recorded music as part of the Japanese Ambient Music lineage following Haruomi Hosono. This resurgence led to the compilation album "Kankyō Ongaku: Japanese Ambient, Environmental & New Age Music 1980-1990". By comparing these two periods, the presentation examines the perception and significance of this genre in Japan.

Nakagawa Katsushi is an Associate Professor at Yokohama National University in Japan, focusing on sound art across Japan, the US, Europe, and Asia.

LOCAL HISTORIES I

Nick Prior (UK) – Audio Paper

Ambient Machines: A Sound Essay on Japanese Vending Machines

This sound essay takes inspiration from Japan's history of environmental music (*kankyō ongaku*) and particularly the early 1970s experiments of Takehisa Kasugi, to explore the inner sonic lives of vending machines. Quietly ubiquitous but hulking in their material presence, vending machines are the less-than-humans that populate almost every corner of major and minor Japanese cities. Colloquially known as Jihanki, they cater for an expanding repertoire of consumer items - from books to bananas. They are the archetypal ambient machine: ubiquitous but backgrounded, desirable and desiring. A telephone coil pickup mic and other EMF devices sonify their lively components. These sounds form the basis of an ambient composition with interspersed commentary and testimony on the lived worlds of self-service capitalism and the important work of late 20th century Japanese ambient musicians and their approach to *oto no obujie* (sound objects).

Deleuze, G., & Guattari, F. L. (1987) *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
Latour, B. [Jim Johnson], "Mixing Humans and Nonhumans Together: The Sociology of a Door-Closer", *Social Problems*, 35: 3: 298-310.
McCulloch, M. (2015) *Ambient Commons: Attention in the Age of Embodied Information*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
Simmel, G. (1971 [1903]), "The Metropolis and Mental Life", in Wolff, Kurt (ed.), *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, New York: Free Press, 1950.
Sherry Turkle (ed.) (2011), *The Inner History of Devices*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011.

Nick Prior is Professor of Cultural Sociology at the University of Edinburgh, UK, where he researches and teaches on digital and cultural sociology, popular music and social theory.

LOCAL HISTORIES II

Niels Lyhne Løkkegaard (DK)

Surrection & Mirage Making

What happens when that which saturates the foreground is relegated to the background? And what emerges when we attend to what appears distant, yet at the same time remains strangely familiar? What happens when we listen to the background in both a spatial and temporal sense? Taking as its point of departure the dual meaning of background—both as the spatial background that is physically distant and as the structural background internalized over time and which (paradoxically) saturates our foreground—the presentation explores how proximity and distance shape how we listen, and how displacements between foreground and background might surrect modes of listening through which places are rendered incomplete in a process of mirage making—thereby destabilizing the horizon.

Niels Lyhne Løkkegaard is Associate Professor and Head of APD Programme at RMC – Rhythmic Music Conservatory, Denmark

LUNCH PERFORMANCE

Ng'at Maler (KE)

Listening in Chaos

A walk down to the bus station in Nairobi's Central Business District is a convergence of bird song, a pastor preaching through a distorting P.A, a passing matatu (minibus) blasting music, a food vendor going head-to-head with a utilities supplier shouting out their prices to passersby. As you move out of the city the sound scape changes. The sound of speeding traffic starts to fade, and in comes the sounds of a flowing stream combined with the sound of birds and children playing in a distance, and the leaves on trees rustling through the air. This intense juxtaposition of nature and the city comes out in the music made by its residents and especially ambient artists. With the current encroachment of green spaces in a city known for its national parks and forests, the soundscape is evolving into intense construction sounds paving way for highways, overpasses and high-rises. Bearing all this in mind we are therefore challenged to pay more attention and listen in the chaos.

Ng'at Maler is a multidisciplinary artist based in Nairobi, Kenya, working across experimental sound, live performance, and electronic music.

AMBIENT AND MEDIA I

Riccardo Ancona (IT)

Ambient Music in the Age of AI Reproduction

AI-generated ambient music constitutes only the most recent phase in the systematic commodification of the genre. Streaming platforms encourage short, utilitarian, playlist-oriented 'mood' tracks, in which the artists' intentions and the context of production are deliberately rendered opaque. In this space, the proliferation of AI-generated pieces is reconfiguring the ambient music market, exploiting unrecognized labour for the training datasets and enabling asymmetrical, unfair competition. To which extent can ambient music be technically reproduced by AI algorithms? What do generative AI models understand to be ambient music and what are their intrinsic limits? A qualitative study has been undertaken, combining online ethnography and music analysis of a vast repertoire of AI-generated ambient music, ultimately revealing how AI mimicry reflects human idiosyncrasies surrounding the genre.

Riccardo Ancona is a sound artist and musicologist, currently pursuing a PhD on the aesthetics of computation in algorithmic music at the University of Bologna.

AMBIENT AND MEDIA I

Macon Holt (UK) – Audio Paper

How commercial AI generated ambient music helps me sleep, when there are a lot of good reasons to lie awake at night

This audiopaper builds from my relationship with the sleep function of the generative AI ambient music app, Endel. The intention of the app is to use "new technology to help our bodies and brains adapt to the new world" (Endel 2020). This audiopaper explores an experience of ambient music as something that is automated and intensively commodified as a means of affective management and bio-regulation in a historic moment of rising levels of depression and anxiety. Taking an auto-ethnographic "auto- guinea pig" (Preciado 2017) approach and constructing a soundtrack generated from the various tools in the app, this audiopaper explores the psycho-social dynamics of ambient music expressed through the app and its use. From here, it unfolds possible implications of addressing a cultural tendency in "societies of control" (Deleuze 1992) towards psychic distress through automated, palliative ambient music, biomedical research as it naturalises an individualising logic and "anti-ecological aesthetics" (Schmidt 2023).

Deleuze, Gilles. "Postscript on the Societies of Control." *October*, vol. 59, Winter 1992, 3-3
Endel. 2020. *Manifesto: How Endel will Reshape our Collective Future*. <https://manifesto.endel.io/>
Preciado, Paul B. 2017. *Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornographic Era*. New York, N.Y: Feminist Press.
Schmidt, Ulrik. 2023. *A Philosophy of Ambient Sound: Materiality, Technology, Art and the Sonic Environment*. Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan.

Macon Holt is a writer, critic and teacher. He has a PhD in Cultural Studies from Goldsmiths, University of London which formed the basis of his book *Pop Music and Hip Ennui: A Sonic Fiction of Capitalist Realism* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2019).

HIGHTEA PERFORMANCE

Jane Arnison (US)

We Are All in This Together

This interactive ambient performance invites the audience to become co-creators of a continuously evolving soundscape. The piece begins as participants sit on cushions embedded with sensors, triggering drone textures generated through a Max patch. As people arrive, leave, or move subtly, distance sensors interpret these shifts to shape the pitch and density of the drones. The tones are processed through a modular system controlled by Jane Arnison, who enhances the evolving texture with live sonic improvisations—including vocalizations and synthetic layers—crafting a rich, immersive sound environment. Building on Arnison's performance-based research into sound as a communal and intimate experience, the work explores the passive/active dynamic between performer and audience. Ambient music—often perceived as background—is here transformed into a participatory, responsive, and socially engaged practice, reinvigorating the social context. The result is a dynamic, co-created space where sound, presence, and connection converge.

Jane Arnison is a composer, sound artist, and performer, exploring the intersections of sound, technology, and human interaction with a focus on immersive, participatory experiences that blur the line between performer and audience.

AMBIENT AND AESTHETICS

Caroline Locke (UK)

Sonic Ecologies: Ambient Music as Environmental Translation and Embodied Listening

This paper explores ambient music as environmental translation and embodied listening, drawing on artistic research in the UK and Arctic Norway. I create immersive artworks using film, sculpture, and ambient soundtracks to engage audiences with ecological concerns, interpreting ambience as both genre and spatial condition. Informed by Elizabeth Grosz's theory of force as a movement from cosmos to body, I translate environmental data into sonic and vibrational experiences. Collaborating with scientists, engineers, I capture tree data and climate recordings to produce sensory encounters that provoke reflection and emotional connection. These works, shaped by digital tools and repurposed analogue systems, sonify melting Arctic ice, ancient tree resonances, and other ecological phenomena. Often rooted in local communities, my practice positions ambient music as an affective bridge between environmental data, sensory experience, and emotional resonance. These ambient soundscapes serve as affective bridges between data and experience, encouraging ecological awareness, relational listening, and engagement with planetary change.

Grosz, E. (2008). *Chaos, Territory, Art: Deleuze and the Framing of the Earth*. Columbia: Columbia University Press.

Caroline Locke, Associate Professor University of Derby, is an artist-researcher working at the intersection of sound, ecology, and technology. Her practice explores how environmental phenomena can be translated into immersive sensory experiences using ambient music, sound sculpture, and film.

AMBIENT AND AESTHETICS

Brady Cranfield (CA)

Towards a Field Theory of Timbre

With the work of Éliane Radigue and Maryanne Amacher as case studies, my essay draws on the process philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead, particularly through the Deleuzian framing of Brian Massumi, as well as ideas from contemporary physics, to explore the idea of a field theory of timbre. In this theory, timbre is considered to be an ongoing, relational interactivity, experienced subjectively as the affect or “feel” of sound. Yet, timbre is not only in the ear or the listener; it has its own independent physical characteristics that are modulated by acoustic spaces over time. Although each listener brings and bears their own conditions and capacities to the experience of timbre, not the least of which are supplied by their own body (to the extent that it's able), their positionality as a listener, like the timbral events that they might experience, is fundamentally emergent, constituted in and by spatiotemporal contexts, and subjectivized in the mind.

Brady Cranfield is a sound-based and visual artist, musician, writer, and currently a PhD student in the School for the Contemporary Arts at Simon Fraser University, Vancouver, Canada.

EVENING PERFORMANCE

LASALTAS (ES/NL/BR)

low lit // between surfaces

A dark hall. A darkened space where sight fades and sound takes over. In this environment, orientation dissolves: direction becomes illusion, stretching the sense of time. Here, the walls do not contain the sound; they scatter it, absorb it, send it back in unexpected waves. The building listens with us. *This is not a stage. This is a body. A place that breathes sound.*

low lit // between surfaces is a multichannel performance born from the expressive spatial exploration of sound as a tool for disorientation and immersion. Through reduced visibility and spatialization audio techniques, sound interacts with the physicality of the space where the performance takes place — its weight and reflections — blurring the boundary between source and echo, performer and architecture. As external reference points dissolve, sound begins to surface vivid yet abstract internal states: locked structures loosen, tension releases and perception sinks into depth and extreme emotional contrast. A state of being here emerges, suspended between surfaces, where inner and outer space momentarily collapse.

The Amsterdam-based duo **LASALTAS** (Iara Perillo: alto flute, live electronics; Bea Alvarez: viola, live electronics) crafts intuitive sonic meditations on space and intimacy, where melodic interplay and digital sound processing shape a post-classical, cinematic sound world.

EVENING PERFORMANCE

Matt Choboter (CA/DK)

Forest

An immersive sound ritual where field recordings, textural piano, and organ sounds resonate through a sculptural forest of reclaimed wood. Danish and Norwegian Sitka spruce and salvaged Canadian red cedar become electroacoustic instruments, each carrying its own voice, history, and resonance, inviting listeners into an intimate encounter with memory, place, and sound.

Matt Choboter is a Copenhagen-based Canadian composer, pianist and sound artist. Informed by non-western cultures and eclectic spiritualism, Choboter paints subliminal sound narratives within contemporary music.

EVENING PERFORMANCE

Katharina Schmidt (DE)

nō (lat.: I swim) for solo percussion and field recordings is a sonic experiment at the intersection of ambient music and sound art. The piece combines hydrophone recordings with extended techniques for snare drum, weaving the rhythms of water and marine life into a tactile narrative. Inspired by hydrofeminism and speculative realism, **nō** layers field recordings, percussive patterns, and granular textures, inviting audiences to listen deeply to submerged worlds and aquatic ambiances. The dialogue between semi-improvised live percussion and fluctuating soundscapes bridges ecological reflection with playful sonic experimentation. The haptic soundscape-based works of Malin Bång and the hybrid rhythmic illusions of Will Guthrie serve as key inspirations for shaping sonic spaces that reflect the complex interplay between aquatic ecosystems and human-made structures. **nō** was developed in collaboration with Sound Art Lab Struer and MONOM Berlin.

Katharina Schmidt is a percussionist, composer, researcher, and radio host based in Berlin. A frequent collaborator, her artistic portfolio includes film music, sound art installations, and radio pieces as well as multichannel compositions.

EVENING PERFORMANCE

Norah Lorway and Jason Rule (CA)

Taking inspiration from the World Soundscape Project, and R. Murray Schaefer's theories of acoustic ecology, our work (current title will explore how live-coding and real-time visualizations can reinterpret everyday sonic experiences, with reference for Montréal historical sonic landscapes and how they have influenced the music created in this cultural node. We will employ live-coding techniques to transform field recordings from Montréal into immersive and evolving ambient soundscapes. Accompanying visuals generated in real time depict representations of Montréal's urban textures, enhancing the immersive quality of the performance. Our attempt to fuse environmental sounds with live-coding and visual art reflects contemporary multi-factor trends in ambient music performance as a whole-body experience.

Norah Lorway is Assistant Professor in Electroacoustic Studies, Concordia University, Montréal. **Jason Rule** is an electroacoustic composer, turntable artist, and music director.

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 16

KEYNOTE

Jacob Smith (US)

New Age Audiovision and the Will to Shine

This keynote consists of material from my forthcoming book, *Bridge to an Unseen Shore: New Age Music as Visionary Art, 1974-1987* (University of California Press), which is the first book-length history of the pioneers of new age music. The musicologist Victor Szabo has recently argued that new age music should be understood as part of "ambient music's psychedelic past," which suggests that it is an ancillary phenomenon to Brian Eno's more critically celebrated ambient releases and subsequent forms of electronic dance music. Rather than see new age music as a quirky stepping stone to subsequent forms of popular music, I present it as an essential component in a vibrant intermedia network of visionary art during the 1970s and 1980s.

New age music intersected with a wide array of visual forms, including visionary painting, planetarium shows, laser lightshows, video art, and avant-garde visual music. In this presentation, I provide the history and aesthetics of what I'm calling new age audiovision: a constellation of multimedia experiments with new age music at their center. The presentation will describe an important historical ambient music scene, allow for a consideration of contexts and technologies of ambient performance (in particular, performances in the immersive space of the planetarium), and examine a chapter in the history of ambient visual music after the peak of the Hollywood musical and before the debut of MTV.

The presentation will include screenings of some rare examples of new age audiovision and abstract films with a new age musical score, among others by legendary experimental filmmaker Jordan Belson.

Jacob Smith is professor in the Department of Radio/Television/Film at Northwestern University, where he co-founded the MA in Sound Arts and Industries. His research focuses on the cultural history of media, particularly sound and music, recording, and relations between media and the environment. He has published widely in sound studies and media history. His books include *Vocal Tracks: Performance and Sound Media* (2008), *Eco-Sonic Media* (2015), and *Lightning Birds: An Aeroecology of the Airwaves* (2021). His most recent book is *Bateson's Alphabet: The ABCs of Gregory Bateson's Ecology of Mind* (2024), and *Bridge to an Unseen Shore: New Age Music as Visionary Art* is forthcoming from the University of California Press.

AMBIENT AND MEDIA II

Raphael Börger (DE)

Pleasure Control Through Sonic Tonics: Irv Teibel's environments (1969-1979)

In this paper, I will examine auditory practices centered around ambient music in terms of pleasure and control. More specifically, I will analyse Irv Teibel's environment series, and the listening instructions printed on the record covers. I will consider these as a means of controlling pleasure, which primarily appeals to white, middle-class, highbrow men. My focus will be on two interrelated aspects: (i) the presentation of these ambient sounds as sonic tonics. This can be contextualised within the history of tonics, which dates to at least the mid-19th century. These tonics often contained toxic substances and were marketed to 'nervous housewives.' (ii.) the "spaces of possibility" (Hagood 2019, 145) opened up by the ambient sounds and the associated assemblages of a LP, record player and hi-fi stereo system, as spaces characterised by power relations. According to Teibel's instructions, (male) users can mobilise these assemblages as an interface to control intimate interpersonal relationships and sexual pleasure simply by playing these records, twiddling knobs and pushing buttons.

Raphael Börger is a research assistant at the Chair of Musicology at the University of Potsdam. He studied musicology, mathematics and economics at Humboldt University of Berlin, and is currently working on a doctoral thesis on environmental listening practices.

AMBIENT AND MEDIA II

Ann-Kathrin Allekotte (DE)

Digital Resting Points as a Phenomenon of Ambiance Listening and Viewing Practices on TikTok

Digital Resting Points on TikTok are audiovisual formats that promise moments of calm within attention-driven platform environments. Drawing on ambient aesthetics reminiscent of Brian Eno's "Video Paintings," these videos present atmospheric landscapes, nature scenes, and other slow-moving visual environments that interrupt the fast-paced logic of the social media feed. Building on concepts of ambiance listening and viewing practices, Digital Resting Points and related popular video phenomena can be understood as media formats that foster mindfulness, mood regulation, concentration, and relaxation through technologically mediated sensory experiences. While such videos may express an honest need for rest, retreat, and sensory relief among users, they remain embedded within platform economies designed to maximize engagement and retention. The presentation examines this tension between individual desires for calm and the commercial logics as well as infrastructures of "social" media fundamentally shaped by late capitalism. Following Theodor W. Adorno's critique of cultural production, it argues that these formats ultimately serve platform operators and polarization entrepreneurs more than the users whose exhaustion they appear to address.

Adorno, Theodor W. 1975. *Minima Moralia: Reflexionen aus dem beschädigten Leben*. Frankfurt, Main: Suhrkamp.

boyd, danah. 2026. "Social Media Is Now Parasocial Media." *Social Media + Society*, 12(2).

Brett, Thomas. 2016. "From Environmental Sound to Virtual Environment Enhancing: Consuming Ambiance as Listening Practice." In: Sheila Whiteley und Shara Rambarran (eds.). *The Oxford Handbook of Music and Virtuality*. Oxford Academic.

Lorenz, Taylor. 2022. "Doomscrolling got you down? Take a break at a digital rest stop." *The Washington Post*.

[washingtonpost.com/technology/2022/03/22/digital-rest-stop-doomscrolling/](https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2022/03/22/digital-rest-stop-doomscrolling/). 22. März 2022. Accessed April 9th 2025.

Schellewald, Andreas. 2021. "Communicative forms on TikTok: Perspectives from digital ethnography." *International Journal of Communication*, 15, pp. 1437-1457.

Ann-Kathrin Allekotte is a PhD candidate at the Institute for Cultural Studies, Department of Media and Cultural Studies at Heinrich Heine University Düsseldorf. Her research and classes focus on contemporary short-form video phenomena and digital media cultures.

AMBIENT AND MEDIA II

Roberto Azaretto (AR/US) – Video Presentation
Levels of ambient attentional engagement

This video presentation examines the relationship between ambient music and its implicit listener from the perspective of attentional demand. The first section lists and analyzes the influences Brian Eno (Eno 1996a, pp. 330-332; Eno 1996b) identified as important to his early ambient works (minimalist music, cellular automata, moiré patterns, visual recursion), with a focus on their perceptual economy. The second section discusses how these influences affected the sounding surface of ambient music and connects the genre to two other cultural products shaped by assumptions about the typical attention level they could expect from audiences: serialized television shows and computer screensavers (Ellis 1992, p. 24; Butler 2002, p. 178; Brogan 2017). The final section considers the place of ambient in today's media environment, where heightened attentional demands have made listening to music or watching audiovisual work a highly fragmented, multi-threaded experience. We conclude by speculating on the present relevance of ambient and other works that can accommodate different levels of audience attentional engagement.

Brogan, Jacob. 2017. "What were Screen Savers?" Slate.com. <https://slate.com/technology/2017/07/a-farewell-to-screen-savers-the-imagined-dreams-of-our-machines.html> (accessed 29 May 2025).

Butler, Jeremy G. 2002. *Television: Critical Methods and Applications*, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Ellis, John. 1992. *Visible Fictions: Cinema, Television, Video*, Routledge.

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Roberto Azaretto is a composer and media artist working at the intersection of sound, technology, and landscape. Drawing on posthumanism and media theory, Azaretto's practice combines music, sound art, video, installation, and software to explore the relationship between human beings and their environments.

LUNCH PERFORMANCE

Christian Naujoks (DE)

Planetary Background Noise: Tinnitus as Mediator Between Environmental Damage and Audile Scarification

The performance draws on ambient music's capacity to shift between the center and periphery of sonic awareness, between listening and non-listening, inner and outer space. It is part of a larger body of artistic research that focuses on the positionality and auraldiversity of contemporary listeners by positioning hearing impairments, and especially tinnitus, as a generative site for music-making. The performance explores therapeutic sounds and strategies for masking tinnitus as source material for an ambient music in which both illness and cure are mutually mediated. Making one (in)audible through the other, the music will be humming, ringing, whistling, singing, pulsing, crackling, soothing, pausing, echoing, embracing and retreating. Listeners will find themselves in a sonic environment composed of acoustic instruments, soundscapes reminiscent of nature and electronic signals.

Christian Naujoks is a composer, artist and researcher. He is currently Follow Fluxus Fellow at the Nassauischer Kunstverein Wiesbaden. His works have been shown at KW Institute for Contemporary Art Berlin, Museum of Contemporary Art Santa Barbara and Royal Academy of Arts London. He has released several albums on Berlin-based label Dial Records.

LOCAL HISTORIES III

Ondřej Daniel (CZ)

Dub Echoes: Ambient Aesthetics and Cultural Translation in 1980s Czechoslovakia

This paper examines dub as an ambient listening practice in late-socialist Czechoslovakia. Drawing on oral history interviews, archival recordings, and contemporaneous scene materials, it shows how Czech musicians reworked dub's characteristic aesthetics—echo, reverb, bass-weight, spatial depth, and rhythmic reduction—under conditions of scarcity, surveillance, and filtered access to global culture. Rather than simply imitating Jamaican or British models, local practitioners translated dub into a distinct sonic refuge shaped by alternative spirituality, DIY technologies, and the desire to escape the pressures of everyday life under state socialism. The paper argues that dub functioned simultaneously as healing atmosphere, imaginative autonomy, and subtle resistance. By tracing how Afro-diasporic metaphors such as Babylon and Zion were reinterpreted in a Central European setting, it positions Czechoslovak dub as a locally specific ambient modality at the intersection of sound, politics, and cultural translation.

Ondřej Daniel is a cultural historian based in Prague. His research focuses on subcultures, violence, and the reception of popular and alternative music in Czech and post-socialist contexts. He is the author of *Through the Ears of the Middle Class* (in Czech, 2023).

LOCAL HISTORIES III

Piotr Kędziora (PL)

Thoughts on Ambient Music as a Laboratory and *The Polish Ambient Music Project*

The Polish Ambient Music project, completed in 2023, expanded upon the historical and theoretical perspective presented in my book, *Ambient. Cultures of Listening and Techniques of the Sound* (2024). As part of the project, I conducted approximately 30 in-depth interviews with ambient music musicians, composers, and animators from various traditions, inspirations, and musical aesthetics. I also collected data on the most significant ambient music events in Poland. In my presentation, I will briefly discuss the characteristics of a scene that incorporates idioms such as drone, indie, experimental, artistic, contemporary, ecological, spiritual, background, and acousmatic. I will relate this discussion to issues of semantics and stigmatization, developing the idea of the glocality of ambient music as both a genre and a way of experiencing music.

Piotr Kędziora is assistant professor at the Institute of Cultural Studies, Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, Poland. His research interests include listening as a cultural practice and sound epistemologies, particularly with regard to experimental, drone and ambient music, as well as background music phenomena.

HIGHTEA PERFORMANCE

Seth Cluett (US)

Spheres of Multiplicity

Theorizations of the ambient in music primarily draw from artistic or architectural metaphors that highlight supplements, oppositions, or extensions of atmospheres inherent to the built environment. Where ambience in natural spaces is evoked, the characteristic sonic texture is that of quiet opposition to the din of humanity. In both cases, a sort of apolitical formalism is at work, framing ambience as a passive backdrop, a material reduction that flattens difference inherited from minimalism. In this project I mobilize the work of the humanist geographer Doreen Massey, who framed the spatial metaphor of lived society 'not of a discrete multiplicity of inert things... instead, it presents us with a heterogeneity of practices and processes.' I hope to destabilize the given assumption of drone as static and musical ambience as 'furniture' or 'wallpaper' by recording the ambient interior of objects. I have used a high-order ambisonic spherical capture microphone, designed to collect and represent the 360-degree sound field of architectural and environmental space, to capture the dynamic interior sonic lives of both built and naturally occurring objects. These recordings are then mixed to create a speculative sound world where a series of interiors make up a wireframe model of imagined exteriors capable of retaining the heterogeneity of dynamic simultaneity imagined by Massey.

Seth Cluett is a composer, artist, and scholar whose work ranges from photography and drawing to video, sound installation, concert music, and critical writing. His work is driven by themes of ecological collapse and resilience with special attention to perception, sound in virtual and augmented reality, computational creativity, and speculative acoustics.

AMBIENT AND HEALTH

Louisa Grantz (DE/UK)

Sonic Care: The Role of Ambient Music in Healing Environments

This presentation explores how ambient music is used in clinical settings, from background sound to pre- and post-operative care, drawing on key research papers and artistic examples. From a scientific level, I will examine why ambient music is increasingly introduced into hospitals and its effects on patient anxiety, heart rate, cortisol levels, and recovery time. To show how music can measurably reduce anxiety, I will present studies on music as a physiological intervention. Furthermore, I have composed an audio snippet that transitions from harsh hospital noises into calming ambient textures to invite the audience into a deeper, embodied experience. From an artistic perspective, I will discuss a study showing that Marconi Union's *Weightless* reduces anxiety by 65%, along with research detailing the specific musical features that make ambient music particularly suitable for clinical environments. Finally, I will present examples from a pre-surgery patient study and a postnatal intervention study with premature infants and reflect on the current state of research in hospital ambient music.

Louisa Grantz is a German pianist, researcher, and composer currently based in London. Classically trained at Trinity Laban Conservatoire, she has later released a series of commissioned meditation and relaxation tracks. She is currently completing her MSc in Music, Mind and Brain at Goldsmiths, University of London, focusing on the effectiveness of sonic DNA in music marketing.

AMBIENT AND HEALTH

Rupert Till (UK)

Ambient and Autism

Ambient music and its sub-genre chillout involve pattern and repetition. Autism is characterised by repetitive and restricted behaviours, which may make the practice of repetitive musical content well-suited to autistic individuals, whose focused interests and ability to understand complex patterns may be beneficial in making music. Moreover, the repetition and pattern found in this music and the typical uses made of ambient music bear similarities to 'stimming' - repetitive actions used for self-stimulation or soothing. Ambient music displays numerous conceptual similarities to this practice. While autistic traits have often been portrayed as negative, this project seeks to investigate how they may contribute to ambient music and its cultures, offering a strengths-based perspective. In doing so it will explore issues related to trance, ecstasy, entrainment, and relevant musical genres including minimalism and chill out.

Rupert Till is a composer, electronic musician and professor of music at the University of Huddersfield. His research explores popular music, ambient and electronic dance music, trance, religion and sound archaeology. He performs and records as Professor Chill.

SEPTEMBER 17

KEYNOTE

Joseph Kamaru / KMRU (KE/DE) – *Audio Paper*
Other 'Ambient' Music

The classification of "ambient music" remains a contentious issue. While my album *Peel* (2020) positioned me among "leading ambient artists" (The Guardian), I still resist conforming to the genre constraints. Brian

Eno's foundational definition of the genre "as ignorable as it is interesting" also reduces the scope of what other music could be. There's more to the genre, possibly a sonic extension that's palpable, embodied, and politically resonant.

Exploring sounds anchored within black waveforms as rebellious enthusiasms as affirmed by Katherine McKittrick, the audio paper offers a glimpse of Other ambient music by artists from the African Continent and its Diaspora. The sonic collage expounds on the limits of vibrations that challenge the notion of what ambient music could be, bending the genre from within. Excerpts of music from artists like Aho Ssan, Klein, Loraine James/WTW, Barno, Nexcyia, Nazar, Kimina, Ibukun Sunday, Slikback and more are mixed into a 30-minute collage. The audio paper offering a subversion into ambient production techniques that are unplaced in the genre tag, bending the notions of the genre through sonic pressure that lingers in more tangible spaces, shaping consciousness through a sonic rupture.

Joseph Kamaru (KMRU) is a Nairobi-born, Berlin-based sound artist and composer whose work spans field recording, experimental composition, installation, and performance. His practice explores expanded modes of listening, ecology, sonic memory, and auditory cultures beyond conventional frameworks. KMRU has released music on labels including Editions Mego, Touch, Subtext, and Seil Records, as well as through his own imprint, OFNOT. He has performed and exhibited at Berlin Atonal, CTM Festival, the Barbican, Ars Electronica, and the Venice Architecture Biennale. He holds an MA in Sound Studies and Sonic Arts and received an Honorary Mention in the Digital Musics & Sound Art category of the 2023 Prix Ars Electronica.

AMBIENT AND POPULAR MUSIC

Anders Bach Pedersen (DK)

Ambient Music Is Officially Mainstream

In the present platform conjuncture (Dyer-Witheford & Mularoni, 2025; Peck & Phillips, 2021), ambient music is popular music. It is the *mainstream* of social and streaming platforms that provides an immediate sonic backdrop. The mainstream moves dialectically between overground and underground aesthetics as hyperspecific ambient platform music genres like *nostalgia*core and *trauma*core engage followings in the millions. This presentation traces the hyperproliferation of ambient music and its contemporary form as symptomatic of broader shifts in digital culture. In times of environmental collapse, *immediacy* style negates the mediations of postmodernism through authentic immersion and emotional clarity as an *aesthetic* hegemony of moods and vibes (Jameson, 1991; Kornbluh, 2023; Munkholm & Bach Pedersen, 2024). The platform conjuncture is increasingly *enshittified* and modes of circulation are absorbed into modes of production (Doctorow, 2025; Ngai, 2012): from *dream*core to generative AI, ambient music soundtracks our lives on dying platforms, over and over again. This presentation historicizes Western ambient music within the occurrent cultural style of immediacy, and asks: is ambient music increasingly shitty?

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Ngai, S. (2012). *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting*. Harvard University Press.
Peck, J., & Phillips, R. (2021). The Platform Conjuncture. *Sociologica*, 73–99.

Anders Bach Pedersen is a Ph.D. scholar at Copenhagen University who works on a project about platform music on TikTok and the cultural style of short form music genres. Outside the university, Anders is a renowned composer, producer and musician in popular and experimental music for the past 15 years.

AMBIENT AND POPULAR MUSIC

Lorenzo Montefinese (IT)

Music for the body and the mind. Convergences between ambient and electronic dance music

Many artists have challenged the narrow view of ambient as beatless, background, non-intrusive music. One of such cases is ambient's long-standing cross-pollination with electronic dance music. It is argued that, far from being a single genre, "ambient" could be seen as an aesthetic device adopted in order to make music that merges the seemingly contradictory objectives of inciting physical movement and fostering a state of

relaxation, stimulating both the body and the mind. Therefore, the concept of "ambient" can be theorised as a nomadic sonic quality with the capacity to fertilise established dance genres. This involves: a sense of surrounding, enveloping presence; the development of certain sonic atmospheres and moods; and the frequent use of material and spatial metaphors to verbally conceptualize it. This paper examines the various forms through which ambient has entered the dance music realm, from the ambient house and ambient techno sound of the 1990s to the present days, offering aesthetic reflections on this phenomenon.

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- Kivy, P. (2007a). Moodology: A Response to Laura Sizer. *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 65(3), 312–318.
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- Sizer, L. (2007). Moods in the Music and the Man: A Response to Kivy and Carroll. *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 65(3), 307–312.
- Toop, D. (2018). *Ocean of Sound. Ambient Sound and Radical Listening in the Age of Communication*. London, Serpent's Tail.

Lorenzo Montefinese is a Milan-based scholar, DJ and music writer. He has recently completed his PhD in Visual and Media Studies at IULM University in Milan with a thesis on the technoaesthetic imaginaries and practices in popular electronic music and their relationships with visual arts.

TEACHING WITH AMBIENT

Katharina Schmidt (DE)

From Atmospheric to Academics and Back: Tactics for Teaching Ambient

This paper reflects on the experience of designing and teaching a university seminar on the theory and praxis of *ambience* across sound art, music, and media cultures. Anchored in key texts by David Toop (*Ocean of Sound*) and Seth Kim-Cohen (*Against Ambience*), the course design traces the ontological and aesthetic shifts constituting the "ambient turn" in sonic culture. From early 20th-century artistic positions to curatorial strategies and sound-based epistemologies, ambience can be critically explored not only as a genre but as reception mode, method, and material. Positioning ambient music as both an artistic and critical medium makes it possible to engage with the genre in academic discourse, while providing insights on thinking (through) ambient sound and expanding the modalities of academic knowledge production: How to listen critically to what is designed to create immersive experiences? How to operationalise ambience as a subject of critique and a site for speculative practice?

Katharina Schmidt is a percussionist, composer, researcher, and radio host based in Berlin. She holds a Master's degree in Sound Studies from the Berlin University of the Arts and was a scholar of the German National Academic Foundation.

TEACHING WITH AMBIENT

Angelina Tarlovskaja (RU/DE)

Teaching Texture and Atmosphere: Integrating Ambient Music into Contemporary Piano Pedagogy

In recent years, ambient music has increasingly influenced contemporary approaches to piano performance and education. The exploration of how ambient aesthetics - characterized by spaciousness, minimalism, meditative repetition, and timbral nuance - can enrich piano pedagogy for students at all levels is important in modern music education. Drawing on examples from composers like Erik Satie, Philip Glass, Nils Frahm, and Ludovico Einaudi, this paper outlines strategies for integrating ambient techniques into both traditional and

digital learning environments. Key aspects include improvisation as a tool for exercise mindful listening and sound exploration, the use of ambient music as a bridge between classical and modern musical aesthetics, and the emotional and therapeutic potential of ambient piano music in educational settings.

Angelina Tarlovskaja is a music educator and researcher based in Würzburg, Germany, currently pursuing an MA in Musicology at the University of Würzburg. Her research interests include piano pedagogy, digitization in music education, sound studies, and music technology.

LUNCH PERFORMANCE

Paulus van Horne (US)

In this twenty-minute sound performance, I use two varispeed CD players feeding into a digital signal processor and outputting to a stereo or multichannel speaker system. I utilize extreme time stretching and pitch shifting to modulate the recognizability of the chosen soundscape, navigating their spectra deep into the blurry territory of ambient music. By changing the timescale of the source, by slowing it down to a crawl, I turn rhythmic material into a rich and slow-moving ambient texture. When searching for source material, I often look for compilation CDs that promise generic sound worlds such as spa music, self-help, Gregorian chant and children's sing-alongs. These particular sonic flavors often strike me as 'missing something,' and thus mix well with other 'incomplete' soundscapes. While performing, I listen intently for areas of spectral overlap and contrast, using filters and time stretching adjustments to hide the transitions between material.

Paulus van Horne is a Seattle-based sound artist, practice-based technology researcher, and software engineer specializing in interactive spatial audio. They hold a PhD in Emergent Technologies and Media Art Practices from the University of Colorado Boulder. Their work explores noise, gender, voice, and technology.

LOCAL HISTORIES IV

Anna Ganzha (RU)

Ambient sentimentality: the late-Soviet soundtrack of a transformed world

Crystallized from radio and TV spots, musical-dramatic compositions, and "musical sketches," Soviet ambientness found its rightful place in late-Soviet film production. Turning to the music of Alexei Rybnikov, who became known for his music for Soviet children's movie fairy tales - a genre halfway between fantasy, musical and didactic film - it is possible to define the place of ambientness in the system of musical meaning production. This place was determined by a combination of new technological possibilities, an appeal to the register of eternity and the transfiguration of the world. This ambientness was aimed at the universalization of late Soviet man and his incorporation into the world cosmic order, bypassing the forms of sociality that were inferior because of the unattainability of the ideal. While for bourgeois society the enveloping, atmospheric character of ambient music performs functions ranging from relaxation to attunement with the vibrating cosmos, the utopian society of late socialism, denying the bourgeois message of experiments with ambient music, uses it in combination with lyricizing techniques. The result is a paradox: an ethereal, abstract, atmospheric soundtrack is endowed with a sentimental voice-guide that returns the collective listener to the "world of childhood". The voice of "reason", "conscience", "tender feeling" curbs the element of uncontrollable sound

Anna Ganzha is an associate professor at HSE University in Moscow and a visiting professor at the Moscow School for the Social and Economic Sciences. Her research explores musical phenomenology and aesthetics, sound studies, cultural sociology, temporality, and Soviet film music.

LOCAL HISTORIES IV

Evgeny Bylina (UA/GE)

Music for the End of the World: "Quiet Music" as a Reflection on Trauma in Post-Soviet Sound Art

"Music for the End of the World" is a concert series and radio program dedicated to ambient, electroacoustic and other forms of electronic "quiet" music that took place in Russia, and later in Georgia and Armenia. The

conceptual message of the cycle was based on a number of ideas about the end of utopianism and history, as well as criticism of late capitalism in modern popular culture. One of the leitmotifs of the cycle was an attempt to “listen to the apocalypse” and the desire to reflect on the social, political and cultural moods that modernity is forced to experience. The tragic turn of history has shown that the title of the cycle proved prophetic. My paper is shaped as a curatorial self-reflection on the present and future of the project, and tries to demonstrate how ambient can be an unrepresentative form of experiencing the social traumas of the past and a way of political imagination during Russia's devastating invasion of Ukraine, which changed the coordinates of history and everyday life throughout the post-Soviet space.

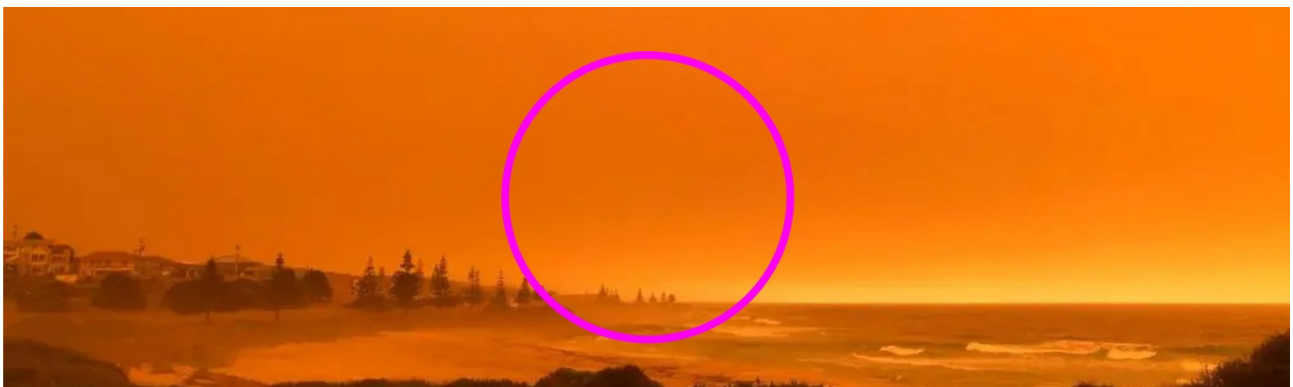
Evgeny Bylina is a Tbilisi-based cultural theorist and sound scholar exploring memory, nostalgia, and listening. He runs *The History of Sound* series, curates *Music for the End of the World*, and co-founded HSE Art and Design School's Sound Art and Sound Studies master's track.

HIGHTEA PERFORMANCE

Ricardo Tovar Mateus (CO)

And Then There Was Quiet is a live multichannel audiovisual performance exploring ecological grief, memory, and resilience from a South American perspective. Adapted from a larger six-screen installation, the conference version combines ambient sound, field recordings, processed voice, video, and spatial diffusion. The performance begins with a transformed excerpt from *Versos de la Tierra*, where a descending bass motif meets ocean recordings and stretched synthesizer textures. Archival speech by Rigoberta Menchú, poetry by Colombian writer Fredy Chikangana, piano fragments, and environmental imagery emerge within shifting acoustic and visual spaces. Through gradual modulation and spatial movement, the work brings personal memory, landscape, and political presence into relation. For Copenhagen, the piece will be reconfigured as a modular one- or two-projection performance with multichannel sound, adapted to the venue's technical possibilities.

Ricardo Tovar Mateus is a Colombian composer, media artist, performer, and artistic researcher whose work connects sound with image, body, movement, and political memory. Since 2026, he has been Professor of Media Composition at the University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna.



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