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Editorial introduction

Voice(s) – An Introduction

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Abstract

In this collection of papers on voice(s), the relationship between voice and technology comes to the fore especially in regard to art and aesthetic practice. Special attention is paid to "mute" objects which acquire a voice through technical intermediaries (microphone, synthesizer, tactile sensors, sound recording archives). These mute or inert objects include puppets, buildings (lost places), textiles, silent movies, or smart homes. In this context, the voice appears not as a static attribute of the subject, but as a procedural formation or emergent effect of the interaction of material forces, discursive practices, and technological environments. This special issue contributes to the media archeology of sound, critical media theory, and posthumanist studies of subjectivity, demonstrating that voice acts as a nodal element in the reassembly of social and aesthetic experience not only in the digital age. The presented cases cover a broad spectrum from the mechanicism of the Russian avant-garde to modern neural network synthesizers, from propaganda radio to decolonial textile sound systems, from microphones that afford authenticity to the technically advanced *gusli* that upholds musical heritage. All this allows us to formulate new research questions about the nature of acoustic materiality and the politics of audibility in techno-cultural landscapes.

Keywords: Voice; Sonification; Silent Movies; Microphone Technology; Avantgarde aesthetics; Sound materiality

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Редакторская заметка

Голос(а) – Введение

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Аннотация

В данном выпуске, посвященном голосу, на первый план выходит взаимосвязь между голосом и технологиями, особенно в области искусства и эстетической практики. Особое внимание уделяется “немым” объектам, которые приобретают голос с помощью технических средств (микрофона, синтезатора, тактильных датчиков, архивов звукозаписей). К таким немым или инертным объектам относятся куклы, здания (затерянные места), текстиль, немые фильмы или умные дома. В этом контексте голос предстает не как статичный атрибут субъекта, а как процессуальное образование или эмерджентный эффект взаимодействия материальных сил, дискурсивных практик и технологической среды. Этот специальный выпуск посвящен медиа-археологии звука, критической теории медиа и постгуманистическим исследованиям субъективности, демонстрируя, что голос выступает ключевым элементом в воссоздании социального и эстетического опыта не только в цифровую эпоху. Представленные кейсы охватывают широкий спектр - от механизма русского авангарда до современных нейросетевых синтезаторов, от пропагандистского радио до деколонизальных текстильных звуковых систем, от микрофонов, обеспечивающих аутентичность, до технически совершенных гуслей, сохраняющих музыкальное наследие. Все это позволяет нам сформулировать новые исследовательские вопросы о природе акустической материальности и политике слышимости в технокультурных ландшафтах.

Ключевые слова: Голос; Сонификация; Немое кино; Микрофонные технологии; Авангардная эстетика; Звуковая материальность

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Voice(s) matter. They are not merely meaningless, fleeting background noise (all “smoke and mirrors”) compared to the true nature of ideas, to written knowledge, or material objects.

The written language and its associated technologies such as pen and paper, printing press, typewriter and word processing are attracting a great deal of attention. But language is voiced in poetry and prose, in conversation and song, at the lectern and on stage, in cries of pain and moans of pleasure. To find and have a voice is fundamental to human existence, requiring technologies of the self but also coaching or speech-therapy.

To have one’s voice heard is fundamental to human sociability, it is a matter not just of politics but also of microphones and media platforms. And yet the technologies of voice reach even more deeply into our daily lives. On the one hand, voices themselves are tunable instruments that can be used strategically. On the other hand, voices have always been subject to technical change, not only now in the age of AI when the human voice might be displaced. After the initial shock of the disembodied recorded voice, the question of voice became controversial when „talkies“ put an end to silent movies: Are the silent movies not eloquent as well, and do mute people and things not have a voice?

There is yet another, a third dimension when one considers that human and machinic voices serve as an interface to technology: We are interrogated by devices and speak to them. There is, for example, the echo in its ancient and modern guise: Through sonification in science, technology, and art, we can interact with material constellations of otherwise inert things. Indeed, the birth of humanity itself has been associated with the evolutionary origins of voice production that gave rise to language and technology at once.

In this collection of papers on voice(s), the relationship between voice and technology comes to the fore especially in regard to art and aesthetic practice.

The first of altogether 11 papers concerns *The Puppet's Voice: From Mechanical Mimesis to Algorithmic Interface* (Markov and Shtayn, 2026). It examines the technological ontology of the voice in light of a history that ranges from ancient automatons to virtual voice assistants using the lead example of the puppet voice: A hybrid being is created that challenges established distinctions such as the one between living or animate and dead or inert things.

Compositional practice tends to the acoustic, material, and historical conditions of a specific place – such as a towering air-raid bunker – in *Concrete Structure, Fragile Voice*. This paper reflects on the archaeology of bunkers and the techniques required to unearth layers of experience and reference from a seemingly mute building. In the paper, the composer Arne Gieshoff (2026) describes the research and compositional work that led to the musical performance which reanimated a seemingly fossilized structure.

Dmitry Kukushkin and Sergei Kurakov move on to consider a specific musical instrument as mediator between past, present, and future. Their paper considers the cultural meaning that is transported by the *gusli* and that was transformed by a contemporary staging of *The Tale of Igor's Campaign*. Paradoxically, perhaps, the paper shows that technical innovations may be necessary to sustain the voice as a carrier of cultural memory (Kukushkin & Kurakov, 2026)



Maria José Rios's *Decolonial Voices* exhibits the potential of Textile Computation to create relational sound systems and emergent acoustic fields. Sound is created by touch. The modulation of the hand is registered by sensors during physical interactions, i.e., by way of touching. Such transformations of voice as a co-emergent phenomenon lead to a critical re-evaluation of textile practices in the field of media archaeology and decolonial theory (Rios, 2026).

Zero and the Machine by Alexander Markov and Anna Sosnovskaya considers the metaphysics of the mechanical voice in the Russian avant-garde. The paper confronts Jacques Derrida's philosophy of the voice with the artistic practice and the texts of Kazimir Malevich and Daniil Kharms. From the loss of authenticity through the gramophone's mechanical voice arises new creative potential, namely a prophetic concept for the age of artificial intelligence and synthetic language (Markov & Sosnovskaya, 2026).

The focus then shifts to the implicitly transformative, even revolutionary potential of the works by Wassilij Kandinsky, Alvar Aalto, and Sergei Filatov (Erofeeva, 2026). The shift from pictorial elements to the emergence of sound in space brings to the fore what Olga Erofeeva terms the „voice of matter“ and its corresponding practices. These practices constitute a procedural system in which material, technology, and environment begin to participate in the processes of formation and organization of perception.

Quite another dimension of the Soviet Avantgarde concerned the use of radio and the microphone for propaganda, persuasion, and social solidarity. This would be echoed by similar strategies in other countries with very different political systems. A paper on *Sound in New Educational Formats* considers the role and image of the Soviet radio universities (Aladyshkin et al., 2026) – highlighting especially the envisioned educational process.

The following paper on the *Microphone as a Medium of Authenticity* traces the emergence of different logics of vocal statement (Nikonov, 2026). The changing configuration of the relationships between voice and text is subjected to a subtle ideological critique on the basis of so-called *Estrada* songs, showing how the microphone and advanced recording techniques created sincerity and authenticity as a characteristic of vocal technique. The heroism of a voice that faithfully broadcasts a revolutionary message gives way to the commodified authenticity of a soft voice that whispers and moans.

The common practice of scoring silent films gives voice to the already eloquent silence of moving pictures. Natalia Irza (2026) discusses this practice in terms of an exemplary approach adopted by Iraida Yusupova for the 1935 film *Space Flight*. Yusupova follows the compositional logic and rules of silent film while adopting a postmodern aesthetic that bridges past, present, and future.

Displaced, Distorted, Reclaimed considers how so-called Metal Music brings the voice back into the picture (Elnur, 2026). On the basis of a qualitative content analysis of 169 song titles, Ahmet Elnur interprets metal music as an important cultural archive for the broader interdisciplinary investigation of voice and subjectivity. Metal music thus rehearses some prominent theoretical positions on voice.



Finally, Leon Pezzica and his co-author discuss a recently produced play that exhibits the hermeneutic powers of technofutures. It does so by providing a grammar and eliciting a technological echo through which our devices talk back to us. The theme of the uncanniness or eeriness of such devices invites a kind of hermeneutic technology assessment and establishes a highly reflective relation to emerging technologies (Pezzica and Anonymous, 2026).

Altogether, this collection of papers turns to voice in unlikely places, considering artistic interventions that make otherwise silenced voices heard. The three editors in the meantime communicated mostly by e-mail, addressing mute texts deposited at a website. And yet, they were also challenged to find their voice in the collection of papers, expressed in this short introduction.

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