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Research article

To Hear the Form, to See the Sound: “The Voice of Matter” in Artistic Language

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Abstract

This article analyzes artistic practices of the 20th and 21st centuries through the prism of a processual understanding of artistic form. Using the works of Wassily Kandinsky, Alvar Aalto, and Sergei Filatov as examples, it explores the concept of “the voice of matter” as an analytical category describing situations in which the artistic element, material, space, or acoustic environment begin to participate in the emergence of form and the organization of perception. It is shown that in these practices, artistic form is understood not as the realization of a predetermined image, but as the result of the interrelationship between the artistic element, material, environment, technology, and perception. In Kandinsky's painting, the autonomization of the artistic element and the convergence of visual composition with musical organization are analyzed. In Aalto's architecture, space is considered as an acoustically and bodily experienced environment, where material and perception participate in the formation of architectural experience. Sergei Filatov's sound art explores the processual nature of sound form, emerging through resonance, vibration, and the technological mediation of acoustic processes. Methodologically, the article combines a phenomenological approach to perception with an interdisciplinary analysis of visual, architectural, and sound practices. It concludes that the concept of "the voice of matter" allows us to describe the shift in artistic thinking in the 20th and 21st centuries, in which the artistic element, material, technology, space, and perception all begin to participate in the emergence of artistic form.

Keywords: The voice of matter; Production of form; Artistic language; Processuality in art; Perception; Technology; Sound art; Abstraction; Architecture; Interdisciplinarity

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Научная статья

Слышать Форму, Видеть Звук: “Голос Материи” в Художественном Языке

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Аннотация
Статья посвящена анализу художественных практик XX–XXI веков через призму процессуального понимания художественной формы. На примере работ Василия Кандинского, Алвара Аалто и Сергея Филатова исследуется понятие “голос материи” как аналитическая категория, описывающая ситуации, в которых художественный элемент, материал, пространство или акустическая среда начинают участвовать в возникновении формы и организации восприятия. Показано, что в рассматриваемых практиках художественная форма понимается не как реализация заранее заданного образа, а как результат взаимосвязи художественного элемента, материала, среды, технологии и восприятия. В живописи Кандинского анализируется автономизация художественного элемента и сближение визуальной композиции с музыкальной организацией. В архитектуре Аалто рассматривается пространство как акустически и телесно переживаемая среда, где материал и восприятие участвуют в формировании архитектурного опыта. В саунд-арте Сергея Филатова исследуется процессуальный характер звуковой формы, возникающей через резонанс, вибрацию и технологическое опосредование акустических процессов. Методологически статья сочетает феноменологический подход к восприятию с междисциплинарным анализом визуальных, архитектурных и звуковых практик. Делается вывод о том, что понятие “голос материи” позволяет описывать изменение художественного мышления XX–XXI веков, при котором художественный элемент, материал, технология, пространство и восприятие начинают участвовать в процессе возникновения художественной формы.

Ключевые слова: Голос материи; Формообразование; Художественный язык; Процессуальность; Восприятие; Технология; Саунд-арт; Абстракция; Архитектура; Междисциплинарность

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INTRODUCTION

The artistic turning points of the 20th and 21st centuries are associated not so much with the emergence of new forms as with a shift in the very understanding of art. The artist gradually abandons the concept of the artwork as the realization of a predetermined image and begins to consider the artistic element, material, space, sound, and technology as factors influencing the emergence of the artistic form.

This shift is associated with a crisis of representation and the search for alternative foundations of artistic language. Attention shifts from the image to the conditions under which artistic experience emerges: the autonomy of the artistic element, the properties of the material, the perception of space, and the role of technology in organizing the environment.

Despite the development of interdisciplinary artistic practices, art history still frequently examines visual, architectural, and sound forms in isolation. As a result, it becomes more difficult to identify the general principles of artistic thinking manifested across various types of art.

This article juxtaposes the practices of Wassily Kandinsky, Alvar Aalto, and Sergei Filatov – the artists in whose works form emerges through the relationships between the artistic element, material, space, and the acoustic environment.

The purpose of this study is to describe an artistic strategy in which form emerges through the interconnection of the artistic element, material, space, technology, and perception, as well as to clarify the analytical potential of the concept of “the voice of matter.”

This study does not attempt to establish a direct line of influence between the three creative personalities, but rather to explore a comparable shift in understanding of artistic form. In Kandinsky's works, the artistic element becomes autonomous; in Aalto, space begins to be understood as an environment of perception; and in Filatov's sound art, artistic form acquires a processual and acoustic character.

Thus, the article traces a consistent shift in artistic thinking from the autonomy of the artistic element to space as a perceptual environment and further to a processual acoustic field.

The research is based on a comparative analysis of artistic practices. Methodologically, it relies on a phenomenological approach to perception and an interdisciplinary analysis of visual, architectural, and sound practices.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS: “THE VOICE OF MATTER” AS AN ANALYTICAL CATEGORY

In this article, “the voice of matter” is understood not as a metaphor for animated material, but as a situation in which the properties of an artistic element, material, space, or acoustic environment begin to participate in the morphogenesis and organization of perception.

We are referring to artistic practices where form is not pre-given but emerges as a result of the co-organization of the artistic element, material, environment, technology, and the perceiving subject.

At the same time, “the voice of matter” cannot be reduced to a simple consideration of the physical properties of the material. In engineering logic, the properties of the environment are subordinated to a pre-determined design. In the artistic practices under consideration, the physical parameters of the material, space, or acoustic environment are capable of influencing the very process of the artwork's emergence and altering its final configuration.

Material in this case is viewed not only as an object of artistic impact, but also as a factor capable of influencing morphogenesis along with the organization of perception. The artistic outcome is not completely predefined, but arises as an effect of the processual coordination of various elements of the environment.

Such an understanding is closely linked to the phenomenological tradition in which perception is viewed not as a passive reading of a ready-made form, but as an active co-participation of the subject and the world. As Maurice Merleau-Ponty demonstrates, the meaning of an object is revealed through the process of perception and the bodily presence of a person within the environment (Merleau-Ponty, 1962).

In this perspective, the artistic form is understood not as a finished object, but as a processual configuration arising through the co-presence of material, space, technology, and perception.

Operationally, the concept of “the voice of matter” describes situations in which the properties of an artistic element, material, space, or acoustic environment begin to affect the organization of the form and character of perception. However, the modes of such participation vary depending on the artistic medium. In Kandinsky's painting, this shift manifests itself in the autonomization of the point, line, and color, which organize perception independently of the function of representation. In Aalto's architecture, morphogenesis begins to be determined by the spatial and acoustic parameters of the environment. In Filatov's sound art, the artistic form emerges as a variable acoustic field depending on resonance, movement, and technological mediation. Thus, “the voice of matter” serves not as a metaphor for a “talking material” but as a method for describing various forms of participation of the artistic element, environment, and perception in the emergence of form.

An additional dimension of this approach is associated with a state of deep immersion in the process. The concept of “flow,” proposed by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, allows us to interpret such artistic practices as forms of intense processual engagement, in which action, perception, and environment begin to function as a single dynamic system (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990/2025).

Consequently, “the voice of matter” acts as an analytical category that allows for describing artistic practices in which material, space, technology, and perception form a unified system of morphogenesis.

WASSILY KANDINSKY: THE AUTONOMIZATION OF THE ARTISTIC ELEMENT

The transition to abstraction at the beginning of the 20th century was not merely a formal experiment, but a radical revision of the nature of artistic language. In the paintings of Wassily Kandinsky, the artistic element gradually liberates itself from the function of depicting the external world and begins to function as an independent expressive structure.

In his treatise *Point and line on a plane* Kandinsky describes the point not as a geometric abstraction, but as an element possessing an inner tension and the capacity to generate movement. The line is considered as a result of the movement of the point, and the composition – as a system of dynamic relationships.

What becomes fundamentally important is that the point, line, and color begin to act as autonomous forces of the artistic space. The plane of the painting ceases to be a surface for depiction and turns into a field of interacting tensions, rhythms, and directions.

Kandinsky emphasizes the independent expressiveness of artistic elements: “Color is a power which directly influences the soul” (Kandinsky, 1911-1926/2025, p. 48). This formula establishes an active, rather than auxiliary, role for color in organizing perception.

Another crucial principle becomes the idea of inner necessity: “All means are sacred if they are internally necessary…” (Kandinsky, 1911-1926/2025, p. 69). The artistic form here is understood not as an external construction, but as a result of an internal process of becoming.

This logic manifests itself with particular clarity in his “Compositions” series.

In “Composition VI” (1913) (Fig. 1), the pictorial space is constructed on fluid, almost water-like rhythms. Color masses merge into one another, forming a dynamic and unstable compositional structure. The composition is perceived not as a fixed structure, but as the movement of the process.

Figure 1. Composition VI (Wassily Kandinsky, 1913). Oil on canvas. 195x300 cm. © The State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg, 2026. Photographer P.S. Demidov.

In “Composition VII” (1913) (Fig. 2), the space reaches maximum saturation. A multitude of lines and color streams create a complex field of tensions, completely devoid of a stable center. The viewer's perception is intergrated into a system of rhythms and movements that organize the compositional space.

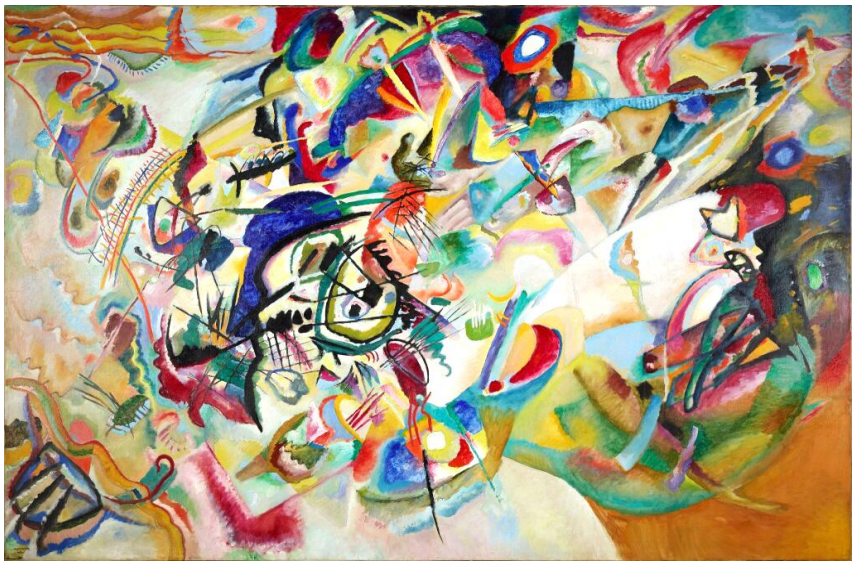

Figure 2. Composition VII (Wassily Kandinsky, 1913). Oil on canvas. 200x300 cm. From the collection of the Tretyakov Gallery. https://my.tretyakov.ru/app/masterpiece/10873

“Composition VIII” (1923) (Fig. 3) demonstrates a different stage in the development of Kandinsky's artistic language. Geometric elements – circles, lines, and planes are arranged into a more analytical and rhythmically organized system. However, even here, the composition continues to function not as a depiction of an object, but as an organization of relationships between elements.

These compositions demonstrate that abstraction in Kandinsky's work is not a singular rejection of representation, but a consistent modification of the methods of morphogenesis.

It is particularly significant that Kandinsky's artistic composition is increasingly built upon principles close to musical organization. Color and graphic elements interact as rhythmic structures, and the pictorial surface itself begins to be perceived as a field of intervals, tensions, and dynamics.

In this sense, visual perception begins to be organized according to principles close to acoustic perception: the composition is perceived as a system of rhythms, intervals, and directions unfolding in time.

Thereby, a fundamental shift occurs in Kandinsky’s work: the artistic element ceases to be a means of depiction and begins to directly organize perception.

The status of the artist changes as well. The artist no longer acts exclusively as a creator of an image or an interpreter of external reality. His task lies in organizing the relationships between the elements of the artistic system, inside of which form emerges through a process of co-becoming.

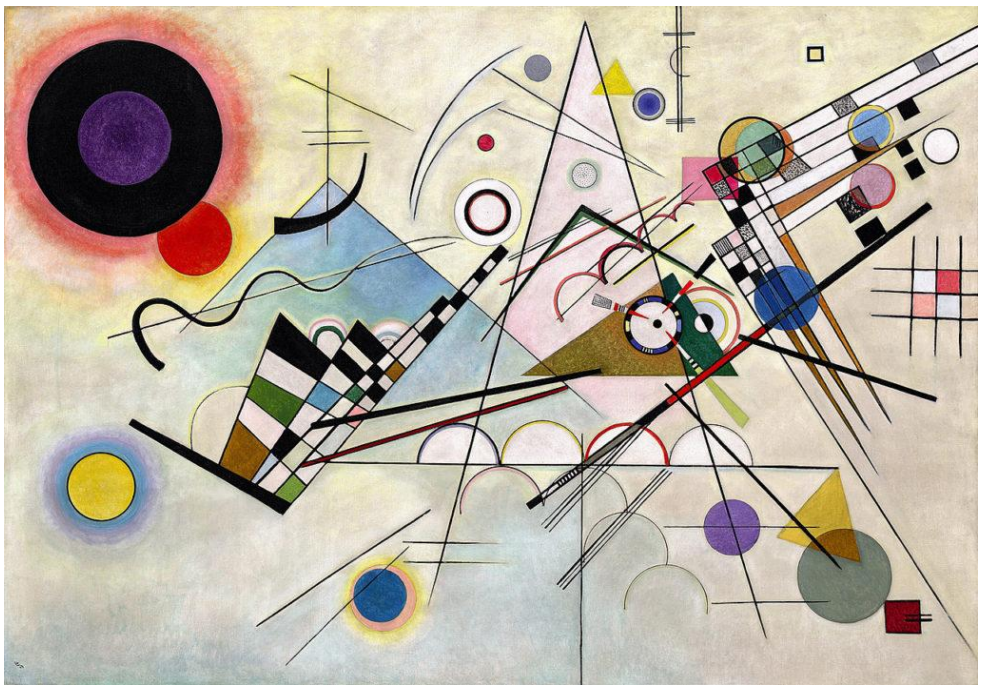

Figure 3. Composition VIII (Wassily Kandinsky, 1923). Oil on canvas. 140x201 cm. From the collection of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York. Source: https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Композиция_VIII

In this sense, the pictorial surface in Kandinsky's work becomes a space in which the artistic element acquires relative autonomy and begins to participate in the organization of perception independently of the function of depiction. It is precisely this shift that creates one of the prerequisites for a subsequent understanding of artistic form as a process arising through the relations of the element, the environment, and perception.

ALVAR AALTO: SPACE AS AN ENVIRONMENT OF PERCEPTION

If in Kandinsky's work the autonomization of artistic language occurs within the pictorial plane, then in Alvar Aalto's architecture, a similar shift extends to space as an environment of perception.

Architectural modernism of the first half of the 20th century frequently strived for universality, rationality, and geometric rigidity. However, in Aalto's projects, space ceases to be understood solely as a functional structure.

In his article "The Humanizing of Architecture," Aalto emphasizes the necessity of taking into account the psycho-physical perception of a human being, going beyond purely functional tasks (Aalto, 1940). According to Aalto, architecture should correlate not only with construction and function, but also with the movement of a person inside the space, acoustics, and the character of the environment's perception.

In this logic, the properties of material acquire special significance. In Aalto's projects, material is considered not only as a technical element of construction, but also as a factor in spatial organization. Its texture, plasticity, and acoustic properties participate in shaping the architectural experience.

This position is linked to an understanding of material as an open process of artistic work. Aalto wrote: “From the artist's point of view, the material is in a constant state of disclosure, in the course of which the artist finds more and more new expressions stemming from the very nature of the material” (Gozak, 1978, p. 94).

As Juhani Pallasmaa notes, Aalto's architecture shapes a space oriented not only towards visual perception, but also towards the experience of a person’s presence within the environment (Pallasmaa, 2005).

The project of the library in Vyborg (1935) is particularly illustrative in this regard. The wave-like wooden ceiling of the lecture hall (Fig. 4) was engineered with the acoustics of the space in mind: its shape contributed to a more uniform distribution of sound during the lecturer's speech.

Figure 4. The wave ceiling of the lecture hall of the Alvar Aalto Library in Vyborg (architect Alvar Aalto, 1935). The restoration of the lecture hall with the suspended wooden undulating ceiling took place between 2006 and 2009. The ceiling was recreated according to the original Finnish drawings (The Finnish Committee, 2009). – Photo by Olga Erofeeva.

However, the wave-like ceiling cannot be reduced strictly to its acoustic purpose. Its form establishes a visual rhythm and influences the character of spatial perception. It is precisely this perceptive quality that allows us to speak of the “voice of matter” as a way of organizing visual and acoustic perception: here, wood does not merely reflect sound but simultaneously organizes sight and hearing. The architectural form arises not from pure geometry, but through the coordination of material, acoustics, and perception.

The connection of architecture with movement and perception was fundamental for Aalto: “A person moves and lives by this movement; movement constitutes the essence of his daily activities” (Gozak, 1978, p. 93).

In this logic, the role of the architect changes as well. The architect acts not only as a creator of a finished object, but also as an organizer of a spatial experience, within which the material, acoustics, and human movement begin to participate in the perception of architectural form.

Thus, in Aalto's architecture, space ceases to be perceived as a static construction. Architectural form unfolds through the process of perception, movement and listening, and material and acoustics become part of the organization of spatial experience.

SERGEY FILATOV: PROCESSUAL ACOUSTIC FIELD

In sound art, the logic of processual morphogenesis receives further development: the artistic form becomes not only spatial but also temporal.

In the practices of Sergey Filatov, sound emerges not as a pre-fixed composition, but as a result of the interaction of acoustic processes, mechanical systems, vibrations, resonances, and the spatial environment.

As Irina Kulik points out, “sound art as an art form presupposes a constant correlation, and at times a blending of different channels and dimensions of perception, allowing one to see sound, hear space, manifest gravity or magnetic fields” (Kulik, 2020, p. 6).

This characteristic is exeptionally crucial, as it views sound not as an independent acoustic object, but as a way to reveal the hidden properties of space and material.

In the work “Two points on a smooth black surface” (2020) (Fig. 5), sound pickups sequentially move across the surface, capturing micro-textures at various points. Each contact creates a variable sound configuration.

The surface here acts not as a neutral carrier, but as a source of acoustic events. The sound does not emerge beforehand, but in the process of movement, differentiation, and reading of the environment’s microstructures.

In this case, the point ceases to be a geometric element and turns into an event – into the moment of registering the interaction between surface, movement, and sound.

Another work – “The garden of elusive sonors” (2020) (Fig. 6) – is constructed as a distributed system of resonances. The vibrations of steel sheets, the tension of cables, and the spatial distribution of sound in an octophonic system create a mutable acoustic field.

Figure 5. Two points on a smooth black surface. Sound sculpture. (Sergey Filatov, 2020). With permission from https://sergeyfilatov.com

The sound structure here is determined not by a pre-given composition, but by the interaction of the physical parameters of the material, space, and the listener's position.

Unlike traditional musical form, a fixed center is absent here. The sound is distributed in space and constantly changes depending on the acoustic environment and the movement of a person within it.

Figure 6. The garden of elusive sonors. Sound installation. (Sergey Filatov, 2020). With permission from https://sergeyfilatov.com

In these works, technology acts not as an external tool, but as a mediator that reveals the hidden acoustic and processual properties of the material. Sensors, pickups, mechanical systems, and acoustic transducers make audible the processes that usually remain outside of immediate perception.

As a result, the artwork ceases to be a static object and becomes a process, inside of which form emerges as an effect of the interaction of material, technology, space, and perception.

The position of the artist changes here as well. Filatov does not completely control the final sound configuration, but creates the conditions for processes within which material, resonance, algorithm, and the acoustic environment begin to co-participate in the formation of the work.

Thus, in Filatov's sound art, “the voice of matter” manifests itself as a processual acoustic field, existing in real time and arising in the process of co-becoming of the environment, technology, and the listener's presence.

CONCLUSION

The examined artistic practices allow us to trace a consistent change in concepts of artistic form in the art of the 20th-21st centuries.

In Wassily Kandinsky’s painting, an autonomization of the artistic element occurs: the point, line, and color are liberated from the function of representation and begin to directly organize perception through rhythm, dynamics, and the ratio of elements.

In Alvar Aalto’s architecture, space becomes an environment of bodily and acoustic experience. Material, acoustics, and human movement begin to participate in the formation of architectural experience.

In Sergei Filatov’s sound art, the artistic form acquires a processual character and emerges as a mutable acoustic configuration depending on the properties of the material, technological mediation, the spatial distribution of sound, and the presence of the listener.

Overcoming the crisis of representation occurs through shifting attention from the finished image to the conditions under which experience arises.

Thus, we are dealing not with a direct line of artistic influences, but with a comparable change in the modes of artistic thinking.

The artistic form increasingly emerges not as the realization of a pre-determined image, but as a result of the co-organization of the artistic element, material, environment, technology, and perception.

In this context, “the voice of matter” denotes not the romantic metaphor for “talking things,” but a change in the ways artistic form emerges and is perceived, in which artistic elements, material, space, sound, and the acoustic environment cease to be considered exclusively as passive carriers of form.

Technology in the examined practices serves not as a means of subjugating the material, but as a way to reveal its mutable acoustic and spatial properties.

At the same time, the status of the artist is also changing. The artist no longer acts exclusively as the author of a finished object or the bearer of a sole morphogenetic principle. Their role is increasingly connected with organizing the relationships between

the artistic element, material, space, technology, and perception, within which the artistic form emerges as a process.

Artistic experience in these practices is formed not only through the perception of a completed form, but also through the perception of the relationships between the artistic element, material, space, sound, and environment.

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