

“Spatial Sounds: (A-)topias of the Voice”

**A conference held by the project “Voices as Paradigms of the Performative”
within the Interdisciplinary Research Area *Cultures of the Performative***

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Voices fill space, provoking spatial impressions, even becoming sculptures in space. They can take the form of dense clouds that wrap and surround us, or they can have the effect of a gunshot hitting us in the heart. Spatial phenomena and spatial experiences are generated in the act of speaking and through the voice. As a performative phenomenon, the voice is more than simply a medium of language and the subject; rather, it is an event that constitutes and produces realities and effectualities. The voice, like all acoustical events, is generally conceptualized as an ephemeral phenomenon subject to the pattern of temporal succession. At the same time, however, the voice is inconceivable without spatial coordinates; alongside its temporal aspect it must always be understood as a spatial event and as an event in space.

Like the voice, space is also a category with preconditions, not a static given. Especially when one focuses on voice and acoustics, space presents itself as an ephemeral, variable phenomenon, constantly reconfiguring and reconstructing itself out of manifestations, experiences and interpretations. The spatiality of the voice includes bodily spaces and the surroundings and locations in which these bodies act, as well as spaces of emotion and imagination and finally the sociality of spaces. The sense of hearing is also chiefly a spatial sense; hearing allows us to locate and orient ourselves in space and to develop a sense and consciousness of space. In its spatiality, however, the voice exhibits a constitutive locationlessness. Like all auditory phenomena, its characteristic feature is that it departs and dislocalizes itself from its place of origin. Finally, the atopic aspect of the voice denotes an excess of vocal communication, as in speaking the voice shows something that is not said and remains unavailable.

The conference “Spatial Sounds: (A-)topias of the Voice” examines the relationship between voice and space in various contemporary cultural spheres. From a variety of perspectives, it aims to demonstrate the complexity with which vocal-acoustic space presents itself and in the process to examine what distinguishes the voice as a spatial phenomenon and as an event in space. Explorations of vocal and auditory spaces can be found in a wide range of contemporary cultural spheres. Artists in the fields of theater, film, radio drama, sound and installation art engage in creating atmospheric spaces by means of the voice, using the full spectrum of acoustic technologies and media to create novel auditory and tonal spheres. The (dis-)locality and (dis-)orientation of the self and the other in space has become a recurring theme in the arts. Meanwhile, sound designers, urban planners and architects explore possibilities for the auditory configuration of public spaces. Voice navigation and

information systems in cars, museums and public transportation systems guide visitors through cities and buildings, while consumers are stimulated and seduced into purchasing by psychedelic music and appealing voices from loudspeakers.

Acoustical media and technologies play a central role in the production and perception of auditory spaces in contemporary culture. Edison's invention set off an ongoing spatial and temporal expansion of the voice by means of records, telephone, radio, CD, television, film and computer; not only that, changing media technologies also alter concepts of private and public space, social, geographic and economic territories and boundaries. Today the public auditory sphere is constituted by the sound of machinery, audio technologies and a babble of voices. The fragmentation, acceleration and amplification of the space-time continuum interfere with the structures by which the world and the self are apprehended and perceived. Acoustic media and technologies bring both innovations and problematic developments; issues of the acoustic and technological configuration of the environment create problems of environmental and noise pollution.

To examine the complexity of the relationship between voice and space, the conference will focus on three areas which also make up the sections of the symposium: The first section, "Interspaces", examines the interactive spaces between vocal articulation and perception, between speakers and listeners. How can this space of communication be understood in a way that transcends the traditional conception of a sender-receiver system with its implications of activity versus passivity, the self and the other? To what extent have medial and technological inventions in the 20th century contributed to the alteration and/or stabilization of communicative behavior?

The second focus, "Technological Spaces", addresses the configuration, generation and perception of acoustical spaces by means of technology and in new (acoustical) media. How are vocal-acoustical spaces created in advertising, film or radio drama, and which perceptions and effects are involved? What is the status of the voice in acoustical-technological space? What does it signify for the concept of the human being when we are able to detach the voice from the body?

Finally, the third section, "Emotional Spaces", examines the voice's sensual-affective spectrum. Which emotions can be produced and perceived through the voice, and how are they staged in the opera, film, theater and politics? What constitutes the appellative and affective power of the voice, how does it move and touch the listener? What conceptions of emotion, gender, power and (inter-) subjectivity are involved?

The following speakers have been invited: Andreas Ammer, Gernot Böhme, Janet Cardiff, Petra Gehring, Joachim Hörisch, Martina Löw, Dieter Mersch, Jens Roselt, Tiina Rosenberg, Frank Schätzlein, Holger Schulze, Christoph Tholen, Philip Ursprung