

Voice, Vocality, Vociferation

Graduate Seminar
MUS 780, Fall 2017
Th. 2-5, Lerner Ctr. Conference Room

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Description

Few things gather so much critical and performative energies as “voice.” Consider for instance the perennial disjunctions and conjunctions proclaimed in the name of speech/writing, orality/aurality, reason/emotion, articulate/inarticulate language, intelligibility/unintelligibility, sonority/textuality, political exclusion/political voice, among many other possible dualisms. Consider also the debates around the ardent powers of embodied vocality and vocal performatives against their presumably more tempered deconstruction, as well as the arguments for and against vocal materiality and/or objecthood. We might well claim that our ongoing concern with communication, expression, mediation, relationality, and technics begins with voice, with its conditions of possibility (vocality), and with the multitude of sonorous forms it may take (vociferation). Small wonder, then, that so many disciplines have a stake on the matter—music studies, sound studies, media and communication, philosophy, political theory, psychoanalysis, anthropology, literature, etc.—, that so many analytics have been proposed—structuralist, semiotic, poststructuralist, feminist, post- and decolonial, queer, feminist, etc.—, and that so many social concerns—race, class, gender, biopolitics, posthuman, animality—have emerged in its wake.

Our seminar takes a topical approach to its subjects as a way to map some of the conceptual attention they have received, with a particular focus on their political and social claims. Topics include, “logos and aurality,” “subjectivity,” “non-articulate vociferation (tone, laughter, sobbing, e.g.),” “vocality and political representation,” “nonhuman vocality,” and “mediation,” “ecologies of voice and language,” “new operatic vocalities,” among others. Our analytical “objects” will be drawn from multiple media (music, cinema, radio broadcast, technological voicing, speech). Readings from music, voice, sound, and media and communication studies, anthropology, philosophy, political theory.

Work:

1) In-depth discussion of readings constitutes the main task of the seminar. For each set of readings, all students (it is a small group) will post their commentaries on the readings, with a focus on specific and salient concepts that you feel need discussion, clarification, expansion, and questioning. Comments should fall within the 350-700 word range (one to two pages, 12 point font, double space), and you can use a combination of prose and bullet points. Your commentary **MUST BE** posted at least 24 hours before seminar.

Starting on the third week, two seminar participants will coordinate the discussion; we will rotate this responsibility. It will be the coordinators responsibility to bring questions to the other comments as a way to guide the conversation.

Suggestions for organizing comments:

- Identify a particular concept, first paraphrasing the author(s)
- Follow this with critical commentary – how is author supporting a given argument, what motivations does s/he have to do the work s/he is doing, and state what you think of the argument and concept
- Keep in mind that critical commentary must discern between the author's frame and your own; avoid stating what you wish s/he would have said
- Keep in mind that we are traversing a wide range of temporal and spatial coordinates; avoid presentist critiques by situating the author within her/his work and discipline (this requires that you find out about authors you are not familiar with) and carry out your own commentary with these contingencies in mind
- It may be helpful sometimes to compare authors in a given set of readings, or to begin doing the work of synthesis that links readings from week to week and throughout the semester
- It may be useful sometimes to focus on a very specific statement and engage in close readings, though try at all times to link this to wider concerns
- You are invited (strongly encouraged) to revise your commentaries following in-class discussions. Likewise, you are invited to comment on your colleagues' commentaries and in-class discussions after seminar meeting. Remember that one of the true pleasures of graduate seminars is that we all teach each other, something that, alas, becomes more rare as professional protocols impinge on our modes of knowledge exchange and production – seriously!

2) Befitting an advanced graduate seminar, we will produce an end-of-semester paper. The paper will be ideally 25 pages, but no less than 20 or more than 30 pages, bibliography included.

Try to identify along the way a particular topic that you feel can relate to your research interests. It can be a theoretical thread that you wish to first synthesize from the readings and then expand and possibly apply to sonic or musical objects of a historical,

ethnographic, or theoretical nature

By Nov. 1, you should consult with me if you have not found a way into this kind connection.

By Nov. 15, you should present a reasoned account of your topic, the relevance to your work, how you want to pursue your arguments, what case studies you wish to explore (if this is the case), and a working bibliography. This should take the form of a conference paper proposal: abstract (150 words) and a two-page description of the project.

I encourage you to explore ways in which the readings may bear on musical, musicological, ethnographic, and/or theoretical issues.

The final version of the paper is due no later than one week after the last seminar meeting.

* Please note that all communication about the class must be via email and using exclusively your Penn account.*

Schedule (subject to revision)

Part 1: Foundations

Th. 31 Aug. Introduction: Voice, Vocality, Vociferation

Th. 7 Sept. Rumbblings

Barthes, Roland. "Grain of the Voice," *Image, Music, Text*.

Dolar, Mladen. *A Voice and Nothing More*, "Introduction"; Ch. 1;
Ch. 5.

Connor, Steven. *Dumbstruck: A Cultural History of Ventriloquism*,
"What I Say Goes."

Frith, Simon. *Performing Rites: On the Value of Popular Music*,
"Voice."

Weidman, Amanda. "Voice," in *Keywords in Sound*
"Why Voice Now" (*JAMS* Colloquy)

Th. 14 Sept. No class

Th. 21 Sept. The Persistence of Modernity

Bauman, Richard, and Charles Briggs. *Voices of Modernity*,
Introduction, Ch. 1.

Ochoa, Ana M. *Aurality*, Ch. 1; Ch. 4.

Rousseau, J-J. *Essay on the Origin of Language*, excerpts.

Th. 28 Sept. Phono and Logocentrism (Guest: Naomi Waltham-Smith, UPenn)

Cassin, Barbara. *Dictionary of Untranslatables*, “Logos”; “Word.”

Cavarero, Adriana. *For More than One Voice: Towards a Philosophy of
Vocal Expression*.

Derrida, Jacques. *Voice and Phenomenon: Introduction to the Problem of
the Sign in Husserl's Phenomenology*

Dolar, Mladen. *A Voice and Nothing More*, Ch. 2.

Nancy, Jean-Luc. “Vox clamans in deserto,” *Multiple Arts: The Muses II*.

Th. 5 Oct. Fall Break

Th. 12 Oct. The Matter of Timbre

Bonefant, Yvon. “Queer Listening to Queer Vocal Timbres.” *Performance
Research* 15 (3).

Eidsheim, Nina. “Race and the Aesthetics of Vocal Timbre,” *Rethinking
Difference in Musical Scholarship*, Bloechl et al., eds.

Olwage, Grant. “The Class and Colour of Tone: An Essay on the Social
History of Vocal Timbre.” *Ethnomusicology Forum* 13(2)

Villegas, Daniel. “The Matter of Timbre” (ms.)

Part 2: Topics

Th. 19 Oct. Thinking Voice (Guest: Licia Fiol-Matta, NYU)

Fiol-Matta, Licia. *The Great Woman Singer: Gender and Music in Puerto
Rican Music*, Introduction, Ch. 2, Ch. 4.

Th. 26 Oct. Racialized Voicings in the US 1

Brooks, Daphne. “‘This Voice Which Is Not One’: Amy Winehouse Sings
the Ballad of Sonic Blue(s)face Culture.” *Women &
Performance* 20(1)

Moten, Fred. *In the Break*, “Resistance of the Object: Aunt Hester’s

Scream”

Radano, Ronald. “Black Music Labor and the Animated Properties of Slave Sound,” *boundary 2*, Special Issue: *Econophonias*, Moreno, Jairo and Gavin Steingo, eds.

Th. 2 Nov. Racialized Voicings in the US 2

Griffin, Farah Jasmine. “When Malindy Sings: A Meditation on Black Women’s Vocality”

Stoeber, Jennifer Lynn. *The Sonic Color Line*, Ch. 2, Ch. 4.

Weheliye, Alexander G. *Phonographies: Grooves in Sonic Modernity*, Ch. 1.

Th. 9 Nov. Voices Otherwise 1 (Guest: Louise Meintjes, Duke U.)

Feld, Steven. “Waterfalls of Song,” *Senses of Place*, Steven Feld and Keith Basso, eds.

Meintjes, Louise. *Dust of the Zulu: Gnomia Aesthetics After Apartheid*, Ch. 2, Ch. 6.

Weidman, Amanda. “Anthropology and Voice,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* Vol.43.

Th. 16 Nov. Voices Otherwise 2

Appelbaum, David. *Voice*, Ch. 1-4.

Connor, Steve. “Strains of the Voice”; “Phonophobia” (online)

LaBelle, Brandon. 2014. *Lexicon of the Mouth*, Intro, Ch. 3, Ch. 4, Ch. 8, Ch. 9.

Stras, Laurie. 2006. “The Organ of the Soul: Voice, Damage, and Affect,” *Sounding Off: Theorizing Disability in Music*, Neil Lerner and Joseph Straus, eds.

Tu. 21 Nov. Zoophonia (and other Phonias)

Derrida, Jacques. *The Beast and the Sovereign*.

Pettman, Dominic. *Sonic Intimacy: Voice, Species, Technics*,

“Creaturely Voice,” “The Ecological Voice,” “In Salutation of All Voices.”

Th. 30 Nov. Technics

- Auner, Joseph. 2013. "Losing Your Voice: Sampled Speech and Song from the Uncanny to the Unremarkable," in *Throughout: Art and Culture Emerging with Ubiquitous Computing*, Ulrik Ekman, ed.
- De Souza, Jonathan. 2014. "Voice and Instrument at the Origins of Music." *Current Musicology* 97
- Hayles, Katherine. 1999. *How We Became Posthuman*, Prologue, Ch. 1
- Mills, Mara. 2012. "Media and Prosthesis: The Vocoder, Artificial Larynx, and the History of Signal Processing." *Qui Parle: Critical Humanities and Social Sciences* 21(1)
- Pettman, Dominic. *Sonic Intimacy*, "The Cybernetic Voice."

Th. 7 Dec. Music's Claim (Guest: Gelsey Bell, vocalist, experimentalist)

- Abbate, Carolyn. *Unsung Voices*, Ch. 1.
- Novak, Jelena. *Postopera: Reinventing the Voice Body*.

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