

Articulating Data – Book of Abstracts

11 – 12 May 2023 | Inspace Gallery, Edinburgh

Day 1 | Thursday 11 May

Agnes Cameron | Conversational Agency

Theodore Koterwas | The Unreasonable Expressiveness of Empathetic Artificial Mimicry

Machine Listening | After Words

Claire Tolan | SYBIL (WHISPERS TO EVE) ECHO AT NOON!

Wesley Goatley | Newly Forgotten Technologies: Five Echoes

Day 2 | Friday 12 May

Michael Flexer | We ♥ Big Brother: power, language, technology and voice hearing

Francesco Bentivegna | Relational AI Voices: A Taxonomy for the Future of Performance Studies

Ahnjili Zhuparris | Repurposing Surveillance + Babble-on

Amina Abbas-Nazari | DIY voice modification

Jane Frances Dunlop | Multivocal Theatricalities: Articulating Data in Composites, Choruses, Crowds

Day 1 | Thursday 11 May

Agnes Cameron | Conversational Agency

Do conversations have agency? I'm interested in conversations as processes that shape — and are shaped by — the environments in which they take place. Gregory Bateson suggests that "the perception of being perceived is a fact that deeply influences and changes human behaviour" — what's the role of this perception in a conversation with a computer pretending to be a person? In this talk, I take an informational approach to draw together ideas about interpersonal and group perception, feedback systems, and meta-communication, and introduce a new artwork, Working Group, that further explores these dynamics.

Theodore Koterwas | The Unreasonable Expressiveness of Empathetic Artificial Mimicry

"I shouted at my Google Home Mini. I was tired and frustrated that it misunderstood me. It wasn't fair of course. I immediately felt ashamed, like a bully..." In this artist talk as performance, Theodore engages with the type of voice models underlying voice assistants to explore how mimicry, embodiment and entrainment might form the basis of a more self-reflective and empathetic relationship with artificial agents.

Machine Listening | After Words

After Words is a sound installation originally developed for the exhibition Data Relations, at Australian Centre for Contemporary Art. As the artists explain, 'Data is never mined. It is always made. A computational theatre.' Many datasets used to 'train' automated systems to make predictions and decisions are literally performed by actors, or researchers pretending to be actors. Others are the product of our own performances for and with machines, every time we 'wake up' Alexa or upload a video to YouTube.

Adopting the form of a radio play, After Words explores these dynamics across a series of speculative scenes. Each scene works with readymade audio, repurposed from machine learning datasets, woven through a script written with and against an 'autoregressive language model', and performed by voice actors. The result is a strange set of

semi-fictional tales of computational scripting, instruction, production, and performance. In this strangeness, *After Words* gestures at a near future in which language has been fully operationalised: where every word we speak has a computational effect and residue.

Claire Tolan | SYBIL (WHISPERS TO EVE) ECHO AT NOON!

Before the screening of *LULZ*, *NOON*, Claire Tolan will present a short introduction to her work with whispering and ASMR, and its relationship to theatrical staging, plot development, secrets, and cryptography.

Wesley Goatley | Newly Forgotten Technologies: Five Echoes

Newly Forgotten Technologies: Five Echoes is a fiction film/performance about the ecological impact of 'smart' technologies and AI, and the deep myths, fears, and hopes of humanity that they represent.

The film is narrated by Alexa, and focuses on five malfunctioning and discarded Amazon Echoes as they move through the five stages of grief (denial, anger, bargaining, depression, acceptance), and move from the center of the home to the trash heap. Along the way, Alexa tells stories about how each device came to malfunction, and what their failure tells us about the geopolitics of waste and consumption, and how this ties into the myths humans tell about the future and themselves. The film is both critical and hopeful, inviting audiences to view devices such as the Amazon Echo as a lens through which we can see the wider human and technological world that these devices connect to.

The film is accompanied by a score composed entirely from the voice of the Alexa smart assistant, where it has been dissected and distorted to amplify the dis-human nature of the voice, creating a soundtrack of deconstructed textures and haunting digital voices fitting to the stories of loss and hope in the film.

Day 2 | Friday 12 May

Michael Flexer | We ♥ Big

Brother: power, language, technology and voice hearing

Taking George Orwell's Nineteen Eighty-Four and recent developments in avatar therapy for voice-hearers as points of departure, this paper details an ongoing research project which aims to explore how structures of power, language and technology, can madden us. Bringing together creative practitioners, mental health researchers and clinicians, digital geographers, and people with lived experience, the project will comprise a series of theatre workshops, developing shared aims and objectives for all participants and partners, and producing outcomes including a theatre performance, and insights into service-user experiences for the R&D of avatar and other therapies for voice-hearers.

Francesco Bentivegna | Relational AI

Voices: A Taxonomy for the Future of Performance Studies

The debate on autonomous machines and art has barely scratched the surface of Performing Art studies, where Artificial Intelligence is conceived as an ideal of artificial life or as scientific tool that do not pertain to the field. However, the impact of AI needs to be problematized and reconceived. With this paper, starting from AI vocalization and speech synthesis, I suggest a (re)definition of AI in Performing Arts. Conceiving AI as socialized forms of biased classification based on 'relating with', this paper introduces and explores different modes of understanding AI itself. This paper will try to do by introducing a taxonomy of how humans relate to AI through voice and language, especially regarding gender, agency, and representation. Starting from the role of voice and prosopopoeia as foundational aspects of a 'godification' of AI, this paper wishes to shift the attention to the relations we entertain with the 'mythical' AI, establishing a taxonomy of AI voices in performance as a possible tool to redefine and deconstruct myths of AI itself. Moving between non-human communication, vocalization, linguistics and generative voice assistants, this taxonomy wants to further a discussion that inspires speculative futures and provokes thinking around AI and creative arts.

Ahnjili Zhuparris | Repurposing Surveillance + Babble-on

Data extracted from surveillance technologies enables the digital archiving of persons of interests. These data are often framed as objective, neutral, and material. However, through the spectacle of political rhetoric, an asymmetric narrative can shape the public perception of these digital archives, which may further oppress or harm oppressed individuals or populations. To identify or challenge the material effects of these narratives, repurposing surveillance technologies or creating counter-surveillance data may invert or disrupt the gaze of surveillance, and by extension disrupt an unilateral authoritative gaze. By repurposing surveillance technology through surveillance art, surveillance technology and data can be made visible and tangible to the public. Engaging the public with surveillance art facilitates the reevaluation of the design, deployment, and validity of surveillance technology and its data.

In this talk, Ahnjili will discuss the rise of AI-enabled surveillance technologies, introduce the contemporary work of surveillance artists, as well as some of her own surveillance projects that address predictive policing, voice obfuscation, and fear recognition. Ahnjili's academic work focuses on the clinical surveillance of patients to identify novel biomarkers that can be monitored in naturalistic settings. Ahnjili's artwork focuses on repurposing general surveillance technologies to reexamine the design and application of these tools.

Amina Abbas-Nazari | DIY voice modification

In this hands-on workshop we will speculatively explore the materiality of our voices. Questioning the ways in which artificial intelligence (AI) defines, describes and understands vocal sound and sounding.

The workshop is prefixed and contextualised by a talk about Amina's practice-led research that investigates the sound and sounding of voices in conversational AI systems. Currently human and synthesised voices in these systems are understood through practices of profiling - a mode of working and understanding that further perpetuates harm to already marginalised people. However, perhaps by working with the voice as a design material, but treating it as though an experimental singer would, possibilities emerge to experiment with vocal potential, to build dynamic relations with other matter and explore concepts of being and identity.

Jane Frances Dunlop | Multivocal Theatricalities: Articulating Data in Composites, Choruses, Crowds

This performative paper will consider the articulation of data in how voices come together: from the potential of crowd as political voice through to the implications of voice as machinic composite. I use 'composite' as an imperfect descriptor of how real voices operate as data for synthesised ones as this allows me to articulate a relationship between the more-than-human of political and musical multivocalities with those of the non-human voice. I will focus on how the voice as a 'contingent, contextual, sonorous articulation' (Cavarero, 2005 p.14) overlays with the voice as 'articulation of the body and of discourse' (Barthes, 1991 p.155), approaching this entanglement of body and discourse through a consideration of multivocal theatricality. By tracing a line from embodied discourse through to disembodied articulation, this performative paper asks what kind of data a voice carries, what kind of data a voice is, and – most essentially – what can be heard the frictions of voices coming together?