Playing with Voice:
Listening for Audiovisual Expressions and Representations of Voice, Vocality, and Speech Acts in Games

Special Issue of *The Journal of Interdisciplinary Voice Studies*

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The intersection of voice studies and game sound studies is a growing area of interest among scholars of music and media (Cheng 2014; Gibbons 2019; Medina-Gray 2023, 2021; Smith 2021; Stingel-Voigt 2020; Tatlow 2020). While voice acting is an important component of many contemporary video games, there are a range of other audiovisual approaches to expressing and representing player and non-player character vocality, communication, vocal gesture, and expressing, reinforcing or even negatively caricaturing voice-based identity markers that we wish to explore in tandem with voice acting in this special issue.

As in other media such as animation, voice acting performance recordings are combined with characters onscreen; but the interactive nature of games means that these characters are brought to life through the voice actor's performance in a radically different way. As games become more cinematic, with more sophisticated virtual characters, voice acting has become a central element. The practices of transmedia remediation and localization (the process of translating games for different languages and locales) engage in vocal rearrangement, introducing additional layers of complexity and meaning across versionings. Voice-centered analyses addressing representation and reception are productive spaces to examine a range of historical and contemporary sociocultural topics, however, analog games are sonically- and vocally-rich play spaces that grapple with comparable issues. Nina Sun Eidsheim, for instance, draws on her and her family's experience of vocal erasure, mishearing, or recognition while playing an enhanced version of *Monopoly* that featured a new voice banking option where the digital banker listened to and interpreted their individual accented English, interpreting each of their speech transactions with varying ease or error (2023).

Not all designers *and* players crave sonic realism and actual human voices. While technological advances have enabled expanded options for voice acting in games with arresting and affecting results, as Medina-Gray observes (forthcoming, 2023; see also 2021), sound designers and composers continue to experiment with abstract representations and renderings of voices. Similarly, for certain fan communities, as William Cheng in *Sound Play* (2014: 57–92) has observed in his analysis of Celes' voice in the infamous *Final Fantasy VI* (1994) opera vignette, fans frequently prefer the synthesized timbre approximating vocality of the original release over cover versions and interpretations recorded by actual human singers and the vocal treatment featured in the *Final Fantasy VI Pixel Remaster* (2022). In the world of online games, players use technological voice modification and vocal deepfakes or "voice skins" to maintain anonymity and safety in online chats with strangers, to ease gender dysphoria, or prevent gender identity discrimination and harassment, among other motivations.

To support our authors who will be at different career stages we will workshop the contributions and complement and promote the special issue we will host a virtual study day using the

platform Zoom. By creating this space for authors and their research materials to enter into a productive dialogue it is our intention that the individual contributions will speak to each other and create a cohesive special issue. This study day will also be free and open to the public who register in advance for the Zoom link.

Article topics could include, among others:

- abstract representations of the voice and vocality
- ethnographic inquiry with voice actors and performers (including auto-ethnographic approaches)
- player communication, including vocality, vocal modification, deepfakes, gender masking, and performance across game chat spaces
- ways of thinking with and listening to accent in games
- sound/text relations in non-voice acted speech and narrative
- the treatment of voice in localization practices
- questions of race, gender, disability, age, and/or class and voice
- the reproduction and reparations in games of voice and listening technologies that carry and repeat social bias, discrimination, and racism
- audiovisual strategies for expressing vocal timbre
- uses and functions of "silent" voices
- posthuman, nonhuman, and beyond the human communication and systems of voicing
- issues of representation, rearrangement and translations of voice and characterization in transmedia franchises
- examinations of voice components and controls beyond digital video games, including arcade and analog games

We welcome proposals for research articles of **5,000-7,000 words** and shorter pieces grounded in practice-based research for the Voicings section of the journal. We are requesting articles on the shorter side to include multiple voices in this issue and curate a collection of essays that can be used in research and easily adopted as class readings. Critical interviews with practitioners contextualized through a research framing are also welcome. Research articles and practice-based research writings for the Voicings section are both double-blind peer reviewed.

For further details about the journal see
https://www.intellectbooks.com/journal-of-interdisciplinary-voice-studies

Please submit initial abstracts for consideration of **250-300 words** to the editors at
gallok2@rpi.edu

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to email.

Special Issue Timeline
Abstracts Due: May 10, 2023
Authors Notified: May 25, 2023
Author Zoom Symposia: late August 2023 (in consultation with authors)
Articles Due for Review: September 15, 2023
Final Issue Due to Publisher for Production: late February/early March 2024

Works Cited

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