

SoundEffects



An Interdisciplinary Journal of Sound and Sound Experience

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Contemplating the voice apparatus

AGF's Source Voice at the limits of 'poemproducing'

www.soundeffects.dk



SoundEffects | vol. 7 | no. 2 | 2017

issn 1904-500X

ABSTRACT

*This article is a study of the nexus between voice, technology and vocal enunciation in the work of AGF (aka Antye Greie-Ripatti), an electronic musician, producer, composer and singer based in Hailuoto, Finland. It offers a definition of AGF's 'poemproducing', a technique, practice and poetic that radically challenges the centrality of 'human' and embodied voice in enunciation and instead thinks voice as immediately entangled in the complex web of a natural/cultural/linguistic/technological apparatus. Starting from this definition, the article discusses the aesthetic and political consequences of this approach, focussing on its most radical example, the album *Source Voice* (2013), read through Giorgio Agamben's definition of gesture and means without ends.*

AGF (aka Antye Greie-Ripatti) is an electronic musician, producer, composer and singer based in Hailuoto, Finland. Born in East Germany, AGF is part of the generation of artists that consolidated the role of Berlin as the world capital of electronic and experimental music at the turn of the millennium. This article proposes an introduction to AGF's 'poemproducing', her original take on the nexus between poetry, technology and vocal enunciation. It explores this practice through a reading of its most radical example, the album *Source Voice* (2013), seen as the basis for an interpretation of her poetics. As the title *Source Voice* suggests, the only sonic source in this album is the human voice, AGF's voice; and yet, paradoxically, what can be heard sounds human only very rarely. We hear drones, beats, loops, noise, wind, something akin to white noise, we hear nature, we hear breath: Any easy referential reading (Bailes & Dean, 2009)¹ or inference of a subject or identity beyond, behind or before the technological apparatus is frustrated, to the point that such an inference ceases to 'be the point'.

Giorgio Agamben's definition of apparatus as 'anything that has in some way the capacity to capture, orient, determine, intercept, model, control or secure the gestures, behaviours opinions, or discourses of living beings' (Agamben, 2009, p. 14) and Deleuze's articulation of it as 'a tangle, a multilinear ensemble [in which] the lines in the apparatus do not outline or surround systems that are homogeneous in their own right, object, subject, language, and so on, but follow directions [...], now drawing together and then distancing themselves from one another' (Deleuze, 1992, p. 159) point towards an ontological reading of this nexus between voice and digital technologies. The term apparatus, introduced by Michel Foucault in his *History of Sexuality* (1978), is developed here to become the category through which an ontology can be articulated. Agamben proposes a definition that sees, in a Heideggerian sense, beings being 'incessantly captured' by the apparatus (Prozorov, 2014, p. 18) and thus both determined and oriented by it: 'On the one hand [...] lies the

ontology of creatures, and on the other hand, the economy of apparatus that seek to govern and guide them' (Agamben, 2009, p. 13). The subject, in this sense, is 'defined as the product of the relation between the two' (Prozorov, 2014, p. 18), and subjects come into being in/as the apparatus which governs them.² My general argument in this contribution is that AGF's way to produce music, voice and poetry comes from an awareness of this ontology: 'Poemproducing' sees voice and subject as immediately, intrinsically thrown in the contingencies of the apparatus and its economy, as intrinsically the product of a 'tangle' and 'multilinear ensemble' of technologies. 'Poemproducing' implies a voice that is radically immanent, a voice which ultimate truth lies in its contingency. Furthermore, I will argue that from this understanding, AGF performs a poetics that leads to a possible challenge of the economy of the apparatus. In other words, I see *Source Voice* as a display of poetic strategies that can exhibit, question and challenge the inherited means (discourse, language, body, software, genres etc.) through which her very art is possible.

In order to address these points I will first undertake a reading of the complex entanglement that constitutes AGF's voice and map its phenomenology, moving beyond the dialectic between 'human' and 'technology', to encompass a further series of active variables that work together as constitutive parts of vocalising. Throughout this discussion I will show that *Source Voice* questions or, better, disregards a series of dichotomies that are often implicit in the discussion of voice: external/internal, embodied/disembodied, natural/cultural, linguistic/non-linguistic, original/manipulated etc. I will posit that AGF's work avoids the nostalgia for a 'natural voice' or something intrinsically internal/interior. A first goal of this contribution, in this sense, is to demonstrate how AGF's practice provides an accurate description of voice and voicing, and how *Source Voice* 'exhibits voice'. My second goal is to spell out the implications of this exhibiting. Here is where this study opens to the theoretical insight articulated earlier, into the relationship between subjectivity and the means of its actualisation, and outlines a possible poetics of voice and voicing inside the constraints that these means constitute. In other words, if voicing is not only an intention of the subject, but an event in the wider context of a fluid assemblage, the question about agency needs to be articulated accordingly. Furthermore, if voicing is performed inside the context of inherited discourses and power, its critical strategies are also a form of politics. Following the reading of *Source Voice*, I will call this possible poetics, borrowing a lexicon from Agamben, 'contemplation' and 'suspension' (Agamben, 2014).³ This is an attempt to add interpretive concepts to a tradition, comprehensively surveyed by Paci Dalò and Quinz, that refers to Deleuze's ideas of 'de-territorialisation' to build a practice of electronic experimental music at the turn of the millennium (Paci Dalò & Quinz, 2006). From the *Mille Plateaux* music label to the experiments with found voice recordings by the early Scanner and the manifesto of Paul D. Miller, aka DJ Spooky (Miller, 2004), the

core of this practice is focussed on process and on music and technology as modes of actualisation, rather than song or tunes as object or product. AGF's originality, I will argue, lies in the radical contemplation of the means of this actualisation in a static, meditative fashion, the implications of which will form the core of my analysis.

What is 'poemproducing'?

Since her solo debut with *Head Slash Bauch* (2002), AGF has made her name through her particular way of working with composition through voice. This style of composing implicitly extends the tradition of sound poetry, and the orality and technology nexus (Davidson, 1997), and reframes it in the digital realm, bringing it into a dialogue with other traditions, such as global hip hop (and its very different ties with subculture, poetry and orality) (Mitchell, 2001), experimental and a variety of genres of electronic music. 'Poemproducing' is a compositional and vocal practice that privileges the performative. Even when it begins, in a concrete poetry fashion, with a pre-existing list of words, syllables, phonemes, 'poemproducing' does not put the written at the centre; rather it develops from vocalisation and improvisation. Words, alone or in strings, and non-linguistic emissions are captured and immediately processed (through gear, patches, plugins, a series of effects etc.), recorded, looped and played back to the composer. Her preference for a phrase synthesiser and looper like the Korg Kaossilator, for example, is evidence that the use of live manipulation is a fundamental part of AGF's early compositional practice, one that introduces the technological element as an essential tool. The same can be said for her use of tablet apps such as 'Singing fingers', in which vocalisation is combined with live drawing on the touch pad to create a recorded manipulation, freely playable as a visual keyboard.

The track *BqColor* offers a useful example for understanding this first development of 'poemproducing'. Here, the reading of a text, including its punctuation (e.g. the closed bracket is vocalised as *Klammer zu*), is looped, manipulated and edited at different times throughout the track, until the content fades into the background and is overtaken by prosodic, rhythmic, musical aspects of the voiced text. But this is just one instance of a wider practice of experimentation that includes AGF reading HTML in German, playing with random words⁴ and recording, as in *Letters have no Meaning* (from *Words are Missing*, 2008), the entire German alphabet, only to sample it, chop it and loop it into a dance beat etc. The poem grows organically from this process; it does not precede the process. It is not translated, so to speak, into music.

This highlights a particular relationship with the apparatus that determines its coming into being. The apparatus is here not cast as a negative constraint, something that needs to (or could) be overcome, but rather as the constitutive element of any actualisation, the phenomenology and potentialities of which need to be

explored. The dialectic between a 'natural' or 'human' voice and a mechanical/digital/technologically mediated one ceases to be a point of reference, either positive (to be embraced) or negative (to be criticised). As Frances Dyson points out, the privileged locus where a perception of the subjective nature of voice takes place is nevertheless a technology (2009). In general terms, 'prior to any utterance, the voice is already [...] caught within particular circuits, switchboards, or machines that both literally and figuratively encode, transmit and give meaning to vocal acts' (Dyson, 2009, p. 18). For Dyson, even Roland Barthes' famous 'grain of the voice', that 'body in the singing voice' (Barthes, 1991, p. 273), is framed by Barthes himself through metaphors 'tied to the recording' and the technologies of the phonograph (Dyson, 2009, p. 19). In 'poemproducing' this implicit connection is made explicit.

The discussion of the relationship between technologies and vocal emission has often taken place in works that focus on the art of the last century or explicitly thematise the implications of the so-called 'digital turn' (McCaffery, 1997; Morris, 1997; Neumark, 2010b; Young, 2015). To say that this relationship is in fact constitutive of voice actualisation calls for a look back at the western origins of performative voicing. The genealogy of acting and voicing that engages with ancient Greek technology of masks in rituals and tragedy provides a useful illustration of the consequences of this 'lack of distinction' between vocal emission and technology in the context of performance. A V century Greek, in fact, had no words to distinguish a mask from a face and used the same word for both: *prosōpon* (Vovolis, 2009, p. 31; Wiles, 2007, p. 1). The apparatus and the skin of the face are in this sense indistinct. Following Wiles' argument on the Dionysian/ritual element in tragedy, the use of the mask can thus be re-inscribed as a positive, performative act in which 'donning a face was not negative act of concealment but a positive act of becoming' (2007, p. 1). On the one hand, 'the mask [...] guarantees for the performer the possibility of acquiring a different identity' (2007, p. 2); on the other, 'the spectator must project onto [the mask], and the mask feels alive when the viewer has a sense of existing in the mask's eyes' (2007, p. 284). In other words, the actor does not play or *represent* a character *through* a mask, but *becomes* (and is recognised as) the character *as* the mask. The coming into being of the subject is intended here as social/dialogical, technological, embodied/disembodied and performative. This provides a useful framework for thinking about vocal emission. If, on the one hand, thanks to works and experiments of craftsmen and researchers such as Donato Sartori, it is agreed upon that the ancient mask did not have the function of a megaphone or a 'loud-speaker' (Sartori, 1984); on the other, Wiles (2007, p. 62), Vovolis (2009) and Dario Fo (1989, p. 208) are amongst the actors and scholars who understand masks as providing nevertheless a further resonating chamber between skin and material, a technology that requires the development of specific techniques of vocal emission in order to exploit its potential. 'Poemproducing' uses digital technology as a *prosopōn*,

as an element of a complex apparatus (e.g. air, body, language, architecture etc.) through which a technique is developed and voice (and the subject) performatively comes into being. Voice as apparatus is thus the starting point for a composition that develops to encompass further elements according to a similar framework. In this sense digital beats, field recordings, other voices etc. enter into a horizontal relationship with AGF's voice, one in which clear distinctions between human and non-human are not a concern, and a so-called 'human voice' is part of a sound continuum that works as a non-hierarchical musical and poetic palette.

Aesthetics and politics of 'poemproducing'

In theoretical terms, 'poemproducing' is in line with the fundamental assumptions of a series of ontologies of voice. It sees voice as relational and taking place in a dialogic context of call and reply (Cavarero, 2003). It sees voice as performative: '[I]t doesn't just describe and represent but performs and activates [...], it enacts and makes evident' (Neumark, 2010a, p. 96). However, in this sense, it is not, as Norie Neumark puts it, a 'mediation' (2010a, p. 97), not in the sense of a subjective, original voice 'mediated' by a whatever medium: Voice is (in) medium. Voice is embodied, but not in the sense that the body is its original home. Voice, in 'poemproducing', takes place in (as) the apparatus. In other words, it is not, as Mladen Dolar puts it, *unheimlich* (2006, p. 7), precisely because it is in fact 'at home' in/as the apparatus, and it is not concerned with its acousmatic aspects (Dolar, 2006, p. 70). Certainly, from the radical immanence of 'poemproducing' I would argue that there is a relation with a 'voice' (or Voice with a capital V, to adopt Giorgio Agamben's terminology) that is present 'before' and parallel to (Dolar, 2006) its actualisation, a *condicio sine qua non* for the utterance, language and its semiotics: the *phonè* of the *logos*. A *phonè* that, in his *Language and Death*, Agamben describes as impossible to experience in itself, if not in its 'turning away', its disappearing in the enunciation of a *logos* (Agamben, 2008). It is only from an actualisation, from a contingent vocal emission, from a voice entangled in an apparatus, that a 'Voice', a *phonè* can be experienced, if only as a negative absence. 'Poemproducing' can be thought of as a practice that explores and exploits the complexities of this possibility. What is interesting to stress, however, is that in doing this, it is clearly foreign to a metaphysical striving towards this Voice/*phonè*, towards a liberation from its constraints, so to speak. A nostalgia for an 'origin' is foreign to 'poemproducing', and so is a return to the immediacy of the 'mimetic hearing' of a newborn (Sowodniok, 2016, p. 52): Any attempt to capture an unintentional, bodily, a-linguistic, intrinsically subjective voicing (Appelbaum, 1990) is not on the agenda. The unintentional, in 'poemproducing', is experienced and performed inside the workings of the apparatus, the digital machinery and its interactions with a variety of input etc.

‘Poemproducing’ is in line with a series of current practices in electronic music, from the rhizomatic poetics of artists such as the Mille Plateaux Label, Mouse on Mars, Scanner, DJ Spooky etc. to current artists such as Maja Ratkje and Holly Herndon, who in many ways continue to develop AGF’s exploration of the nexus between electronic and vocal composition. However, ‘poemproducing’ does not subscribe to the necessity to ‘deconstruct voice’ and with it problematise identity constructions (Neumark, 2010b). This, as discussed, is somehow given for granted, and thus the prescriptive aspect of its poetics necessarily lies elsewhere. But where? The question for us, in this sense, is not only to stress the particular understanding of voice in AGF, but also to analyse what consequences AGF draws from this analysis. In other words, if voice is at the same time external and internal and produced by technology, language, inherited discourse, biological, cultural, historical, relational, contextual elements etc., voice is also the product of a variety of human/natural/material agents at play (the coding of a software, the building of a recording studio, the hegemony of particular discourses etc.). It is inside this complex and fluid web that a poetic, an aesthetic and a politics are developed. What kind of agency is possible? What kind of change? Some paths inside this field can be mapped and, at the extreme limit of AGF’s practice, will find what I consider the most original take on these questions.

Parallel to the original path beginning with *Head Slash Bauch*, at least two other streams can be outlined, often necessarily interwoven inside a single album and both, albeit in different ways, ‘political’: one that engages with pre-existing literary texts, and one more overtly activist, embodying other voices from public or original recordings, interviews etc., with the clear intent of commenting on topical social and political issues. The main example of the first stream is a trilogy of albums devoted to the poetic tradition of Germany, Finland and Japan, respectively (*Gedichterbe*, 2011; *Kuuntele*, 2013; *A Deep Mysterious Tone*, 2015), with a focus on more and less canonical texts. In this context AGF’s intent (Angelucci, 2015) is to re-discover a poetic culture from a woman’s perspective, beginning with the oldest poems by women writers and moving through history as a sort of original, idiosyncratic alternative canon. This endeavour undoubtedly has great merits, and the specific choices of artists and text could open a fruitful discussion;⁵ my question, however, has to do with voice: What are the links between the framework of voice as/in apparatus and these albums?

I see this link as an expansion of the approach to the apparatus itself and as a more explicit concern with language and inherited discourses. In all three albums pre-existing poetic material enters the processes of ‘poemproducing’. In doing this, it becomes a variable in the aesthetic process, one that is actualised inside voicing and enunciation and yet does not take centre stage, always avoiding falling into the clichés of a ‘poetry reading’. AGF re-actualises these poetic traditions by enter-

ing into a dialogue with them or, better said, by developing a dialogic structure that replicates her approach to voice. A determined poem thus enters into a network with AGF's voice/technology, the voice of guests and a series of references to electronic music genres usually popular in the country of choice. In *Gedichterbe*, for example, AGF originally reworks elements of techno, while in *A Deep Mysterious Tone* the soundscape of noise music works as a palette, together with a more expanded use of manipulated field recording from a dedicated residence in Sapporo. In this sense, poetic texts from various periods enter a contemporary soundscape and change with it, acquiring new relevance. A clear paradigm of this is *I am/New Woman*, a track based on a text by the anarchist feminist activist Hiratsuka Raicho (1886-1971). The text, sung in English and Japanese by AGF and the experimental pop artist Tujiko Noriko, is reframed through a soundscape that hints at a martial anthem-like beat, allowing the words to resonate in their symbolic importance, before being reworked and further layered inside the developing musical texture. This stresses an inter-generational and intercultural connection that reactivates the original, whilst allowing AGF to express a feminist perspective in ways that, as per her own admission, she would never have written herself (Angelucci, 2015). Further to this, *I am/New Woman* became the soundtrack for a video composed of the images from the Tumblr page of the female:pressure visibility project, an international network of women artists involved in electronic music, coordinated by AGF. Once again, the original texts enter an intertextual dialogue that re-actualises the meaning and political message of all the parts at play. The language/discourse of Hiratsuka Raicho, in this sense, is treated as one of the many interwoven elements of the apparatus, and it is produced and re-produced as one of its variables, fundamental and yet never fully central. The message is clear, but only as a product of a multifaceted, multimodal and de-centring construction. The same is the case for the more overtly political, activist stream of AGF's production, of which the recent *Kon:3p>UTION to: e[VOL]ution* (sic) is the epitome.

But what are the consequences of this 'giving voice' to a specific language/discourse, albeit in a dialogical fashion? AGF shares some concerns in a recent interview (Angelucci, 2015) that revolve around her genuine interest in a culture being misinterpreted as cultural appropriation. The more general implication here is that the re-actualisation of the text, albeit dialogical and fluid, is still essentially the product of a process involving an author and, in this sense, necessarily becomes the author's message, with all the positive and negative consequences. In other words, a particular discourse, a message, is voiced against other messages; it engages with a hegemonic power (the male canon in poetry, political power in *Kon:3p>UTION to: e[VOL]ution* etc.) by voicing an alternative power, fighting for recognition and/or revolution, in the form of power substitution. The concerns are in this sense the same of many artistic avant-gardes, as Agamben synthesises: '[T]he most part of the

practice of the artistic avant-gardes and of political movements of our time can be seen as the attempt at actualising a destitution of the work, that ended up recreating in every place museifying apparatuses and the same powers that were set to depose' (2014, p. 347).

At the limits of 'poemproducing', however, in the most radical experiments, the specific message ceases to be the point, and with this also the concerns vanish.

Source Voice as radical 'poemproducing'

In his 1967 Harvard lectures Luciano Berio reflects on his work on voice through a particular definition of gesture: '[F]or what concerns me, gesture should not be intended [...] in the sense of a spontaneous new act that needs to be unconditionally accepted and appreciated because it happens for the first time, without an apparent reference to a history' (Berio, 2013, p. 60). In this sense, 'the expressivity of gestures is linked with a sense that has been already acquired' (2013, p. 62).⁶ While electronic music allows the composer to consider vocals and consonants as 'relatively periodic sonic structures that have to be developed, combined, linked and related to other sonic structures' (2013, p. 64), Berio sees his work as an attempt at combining a poetic structure that goes beyond the tonal system with vocal gestures that still carry a cultural history and meaning outside that poetic (2013, p. 61): murmurs, vocalisations, laughter, cough, heavy breathing, interwoven with movement of the body, walking, clapping hands etc. (2013, p. 67). In this sense, the experimental interest for the semantic of voice (the 'periodic sonic structures', understood inside a sonic continuum) leads to an exploration of its semiotic possibilities. In this passage at least Berio seems to see his work as a practice that introduces a series of traditionally extra-musical communicative elements from the realm of the quotidian back into contemporary vocal composition and performance.

I have mapped some of the ways in which AGF works inside this tradition. The work on voice and its minute analytics happen in the context of a manipulation in which vocal elements enter into a continuum with other sounds, a 'palette' that 'expands' the semiotic possibilities of her tracks. Inside this vocal practice the goal is the communication of a meaning, however expanded and however extreme the de-structuration of its linguistic aspect. And, as seen, both her poetics and her politics usually lie inside this meaning.

With *Source Voice*, however, the track, the product, the 'message', lose their central place. With this album, the practice and the experience of voicing and 'poemproducing' become the only message. From a specific semiotic, AGF thus moves to a contemplation of the semantic. In other words, research into the communicative possibilities of voiced language – research on *parole* (as a particular instance of

voice/discourse) – becomes with *Source Voice* a reflection on *langue* (as a reflection of the actualisation itself) (Agamben, 2016, p. 38).

The occasion for this shift is her collaboration with the Los Angeles label LINE imprint. The minimalist brief of the label is far from AGF's usual production, and the framing of this project inside the sub-series 'LINE SEGMENTS', devoted to 'works that stray from the norm... more maximal, maybe... louder, maybe... noisier maybe... beat-oriented, maybe' ('LINE SEGMENTS', n.d.), already stresses a tension and indicates a line of research towards 'abstraction', which AGF pursues by focussing on her voice as the only sound source for her compositions. *Source Voice* is, in this sense, an experimental *a cappella* album. The way for AGF to engage with this minimalist abstraction is an interest in the traditional singing of the Sami people of northern Finland, an overtone technique with ritual implications and often associated with shamanism (Edström, 2003) called *joik* (or *yoik*). Of this tradition, AGF takes some fundamentals: '[T]he performer *joiks* something rather than *joiks* about something' (Ramnarine, 2009, p. 188), with *joik* seen as 'having the power to encompass and express the reindeer, the bear or the person referred to and recalled'. The songs are improvisations with a concrete theme (Ramnarine, 2009, p. 189), and there is a lack of narrative, representational and programmatic qualities, 'since musical representation does not correspond to the concept of *joiking* something' (Ramnarine, 2009, p. 190). Not least the technique implies melodic and performative (and in some cases ritual) aspects. In very practical terms this investment strips AGF's music of narrative and referentiality; phonemes are absent, the only remaining linguistic reference being the title of each track. Inside a *joik*-inspired framework each track is a performance of its title: *the human condition*, *breathing in lines*, *voice count*, *hum pitch play* etc.

This is the context in which the particular understanding of human voice discussed above acquires its crucial aesthetic importance, as something disinterested in a postulated inner self or in the grasping of an 'original' or 'individual' voice. It avoids specific explorations of voice embodiment, as in the poetic and concrete vocal emissions of avant-garde artists such as Henri Chopin (McCaffery, 1997). It also avoids specific work on identified thresholds of voice production, such as mouth, breath etc., as comprehensively mapped by Brandon LaBelle (2014). AGF's engagement with the complex human/technological apparatus radically calls into question both origins and intentions of vocal emission.

Digital Yoik, the fifth track of the album, is the chronological starting point from which *Source Voice* was conceived and developed. In some ways, its structure, more than any other track on the album, hints at this development. The movement from a 'recognisable' vocalising voice, looped and increasingly manipulated, to a sort of harmonising choir of overlapping voices with various degrees of manipulation and finally to an abstract arrangement of the sampled material in which the introduc-

tion of effects and patches is at moments decisively overt, could easily be interpreted as parallel to the movement of the *joik* singer from his/her voice to the 'thing he/she sings'. But how is this understood? On the one hand, an expansive sense of openness could lead us to frame this as ambient music, with its lack of beats and non-specified 'nature'. The title may prompt us to think of an imagined or experienced northern Finland, one suggested in other tracks, for example *Breathing in Lines*, through reverbs and convolutions. Is this voice becoming nature? Is it calling for a kind of referentiality? On the other hand, the album has a tendency towards unspecified noise. Is this a voice that aims at becoming an unspecified continuum? Is this a way to push technological sound manipulation to a limit point, at which it becomes nothing more than an undefined showing of itself? Again, the title of the track gives us some hints in this sense. *Digital Yoik* can be interpreted as 'a joik achieved with the help of the digital', but also as '*joik of the digital*'. The voice is 'digital voice', and the only thing it sings is itself. It does not tell us something about voice; rather it exhibits it: It is an album made up entirely of voice that exhibits the means of its own production. And those means, as discussed with the term 'poemproducing', are the complex, fluid and entangled apparatus involving body, air, nature, culture, analogic and digital technology etc.⁷

In trying to articulate voice as taking place in a context of pure immanence in/as an apparatus I moved my framework, developed through Agamben, into proximity to Deleuzian ideas of virtuality and his late definition of life as a singularity without a subjective consciousness (Deleuze, 2005). In other words, my reading of AGF is a way to address a possible poetic of the relationship between virtuality and actualisation. Agamben himself, in his essay on absolute immanence (Agamben, 2005, pp. 377-404), explicitly draws some parallels. He characterises Deleuze's vitalism as 'potentiality without action' (2005, p. 395),⁸ thus, as Audrone Žukauskaite correctly points out, equating rather explicitly 'his own notion of potentiality with [...] virtuality' (2012, p. 632). 'Resistance to power' (Agamben, 2005, p. 394) is thus played out as a particular relationship with this 'impersonal life, [which] coexists with the one of the subject, without merging with it' (2005, p. 390). Agamben sees this as 'pure contemplation beyond every subject or object of knowledge, pure potentiality that keeps without acting' (2005, p. 396). In his comment on Deleuze's work on Beckett (Deleuze, 2015), Agamben once more reinterprets Deleuze's strategies, translating them into his particular definition of gesture: '[T]he last figure of the human is not posture, but gesture. It does not posit nor impose anything – it exhibits only' (Agamben, 2015, p. 86); it is a 'potentiality that, in the act, keeps itself as such' (2015, p. 85). My argument is that *Source Voice* is gesture, it is a radical form of contemplation.

This idea of gesture differs quite crucially from Berio's definition. It is not a widening of the semiotic possibilities of vocal expression: It is not, in this sense, a widening of a language. In the sense proposed by Agamben: 'If producing is a means in

view of an end, and praxis is an end without means, the gesture [...] presents instead means that, *as such*, evade the orbit of mediality without becoming, for these reasons, ends' (2000, p. 57). What is at stake here is the 'exhibition of a mediality: it is the process of making a means visible as such' (2000, p. 58). 'The gesture, in this sense, is communication of a communicability' (2000, p. 59). A poetics of gesture, in this sense, is not expanding the possibilities of communication, it is not expanding or questioning a particular language/discourse, but rather orients itself towards the experience of enunciation. This is what AGF's album seems to do. Titles such as *Breathing in Lines*, *Voice Count*, *Hum Pitch Play* etc. are thus pointing at the contemplation of these potentialities: The tracks seem to present possibilities, more than choosing any of them in particular as a determined output; they share a rather static, meditative aspect. Therefore, it would be wrong to call this a new language for AGF's voice or the beginning of a 'new direction'. These tracks are, rather, an experience of the means through which a direction can take place.

This has a series of consequences in terms of the poetics/politics nexus. Above I have discussed how the more overtly political work of AGF grapples with the difficulties of fighting hegemonic powers within an agenda of substitution. *Source Voice*, however, is much closer to Agamben's articulation of a 'destituent' power: the deactivation of an established power without aiming at taking its place (2014, pp. 333-351). Gesture is a critical strategy here:

The cat who plays with a ball of yarn as if it were a mouse [...] knowingly uses the characteristic behaviors of predatory activity [...] in vain. These behaviors are [...] deactivated and thus opened up to a new, possible use. But what sort of use? [...] It has joyously forgotten its goal and can now show itself as such, as a means without an end. The creation of a new use is possible only by deactivating an old use. (Agamben, 2007, pp. 85-86).

In the same vein, *Source Voice* playfully (in the sense quoted above) exhibits the potentiality of voice and, in doing so, makes voice available to a new use, without determining what this new use is/should be. Rather than a fast movement through ever-changing determinations or a strategy of Deleuzian de-territorialisation (Quinz, 2008), this is a static, meditative, 'suspended' work of contemplation. And 'suspension' is in fact the term I would like to propose as an interpretive concept.

If the enunciation in/as voice/apparatus is the nexus of subjectification and its determinations (identitary, linguistic, discursive etc.), AGF's contemplation sits within this process (it is immanent) and, for the time of its duration, suspends it.

Conclusions

Agamben's investment in the concept of potentiality and in gesture is a way to open a political sphere. The notion of gesture addresses poetics (and politics) as ontology

in ways that are radically different from the dialogic work within/against shared discourses, genres, modes and practices of AGF's 'political' albums. It is precisely in this sense that *Source Voice* is radical: It does not engage with a particular actualisation, discourse, identity, voice etc., but rather with voice itself as a mode of actualisation.

Identifying in the voice the *locus* of this attempt is also of crucial importance. For Agamben, the articulation of voice and *logos* takes place in the act of enunciation (2008, pp. 43-44). He does not, however, pursue an analysis of a possible poetics of enunciation, he does not offer a 'voice technique' or a practice through which his general strategies (e.g. gesture) can be deployed, nor does he outline a practice that specifically takes into consideration the complexities of the apparatus of vocal utterance (technological, biological, contextual etc.). As Piergiorgio Giacchè points out (2007, p. 182), voicing should indeed be the privileged place from which to re-think an engagement with *phonè* and subjectivity. *Source Voice* sits precisely at this juncture, as an important and seminal example of a possible articulation of voice as gesture.

At the beginning of my discussion we have seen how the mask works as a technology of becoming, an apparatus in/through which the subject/actor is the character, in a space between ritual, performance and theatrical representation. We have also seen how *joik* operates in a similar fashion, as *joiking* is not a 'singing about', but a singing *it* (the thing, the animal, the person). But what does it mean to 'joik the voice'? It means, from within voice and voicing, to exhibit voice in/as its complex apparatus: exhibiting voice without deciding for one particular voice.

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Notes

- 1 Bailes and Dean survey a research practice that ‘explores how associations are formed between environmental sound and a sound source’ in terms of ‘mental stereotypes’ (2009, p. 57). Source Voice leaves the results of this process decisively undecidable.
- 2 Sandro Chignola (2014) effectively addresses the differences between the two definitions, a discussion of which exceeds the scope of this article. That said, my focus throughout this contribution on a radically immanent poetics and politics takes into consideration and is in debt with Chignola’s analysis.
- 3 ‘Suspension’ is not a term in which Agamben invests to develop his theory; we hope that my discussion will show the importance of it in the context of my research on the poetics of voice.
- 4 AGF self-describes her approach to vocality in this video for Dubspot: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nLRcsQpCKZU>
- 5 A discussion of the choice of texts for these albums would be revealing, but exceeds the scope of this article.
- 6 The implicit comment to action painting and abstract expressionism is rather clear, but exceeds the scope of this analysis.
- 7 These lists sound quite coherent with Jane Bennett’s new materialist approach (Bennett, 2010). My consistency in conceptually framing this as apparatus is my way to implicitly stress a reticence to move away to a phenomenological framework, thus acknowledging that my appreciation in/as/of the apparatus is based on a subjective (and thus ‘human’, in the ways we outlined) perception.
- 8 Translations from Italian texts are mine.