Creative production is increasingly dependent on, and almost inseparable from, digital technologies. At the same time, the landscapes of our everyday lives are defined by our relationships to digital and networked cultures more than ever before. *VOICE: Vocal Aesthetics in Digital Arts and Media*, edited by Norie Neumark, Ross Gibson and Theo Van Leeuwen, is a collection of essays dedicated to the mediated voice in digital cultures—both the artistic and the quotidian. This book will appeal to readers with an interest in the many ways that the voice has been shaped by new technologies and concomitantly, how the voice, language and vocalization have also contributed to the shape of digital cultures. Featuring nineteen chapters authored by a multidisciplinary array of scholars and creative practitioners, *VOICE* offers a comprehensive overview of digital technologies and the human/posthuman and embodied/disembodied voice. Divided into four main sections—‘Capturing VOICE’; ‘Performing VOICE’; ‘Reanimating VOICE’; and ‘At the Human Limits of VOICE’—this anthology brings together critical perspectives from fields such as philosophy, history, anthropology, musicology, psychology, media and communications, film studies and gaming studies, among others.

Neumark’s introductory chapter entitled ‘The paradox of the voice’, surveys oft-cited literatures on the voice by the likes of Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida, as well as more recent discourse. Giving the book a robust academic foundation, Neumark introduces the reader to some general questions regarding embodiment, alterity and signification, techniques of the voice, and vocal modalities that illuminate perceptions of normal vocal operations. Importantly, Neumark opens up discussions around the quotidian voice as already culturally and politically mediated thus suggesting to the reader that digitally manipulated voices are, in fact, remediated.

As the section title suggests, Section One, ‘Capturing VOICE’, explores both historical and more recent technologies that have been used to record, synthesis, store, distribute, transmit and approximate the voice. Grappling with questions of authenticity and the quest for ‘humanness’, Theo van Leeuwen opens this section with a fascinating history of technologies that have sought to represent and reproduce the human voice. Thomas Y. Levin offers readers a concise history of voicemail proposing that it ‘reveals speaking as inscription, as translation, as writing’. Turning our attention to more recent technologies, Virginia Madsen and John Potts present an interesting account of podcasting, arguing that this new media form has not only changed the landscape of public broadcasting, but potentially opens up new ways of distributing the voice through space and time. Theresa M. Senft offers an elegant and provocative autobiographical account of her experiences with telephone sex, Cancer care cassettes, voice recognition software and sound art. To conclude this section, Martin Thomas takes us to Arnhem Land in his discussion of Indigenous knowledges, traditional languages, loss and the role of sound-capturing technologies. The cultural preservation and social justice aspects of Thomas’s chapter makes it particularly engaging and underscores the value of these debates beyond the aesthetic.

Section Two, ‘Performing VOICE’, considers the voice in relation to performance and performativity in the context of contemporary art—dance, poetry, digital art and Web 2.0 media. Norie Neumark’s chapter focuses on what she calls ‘an authenticity effect’. Drawing on a range of media such as instillation art and YouTube video blogs among other things, Neumark calls our attention to the inherent performativity of vocal performances often deemed as essential or symbolic of a pregiven body. While one may not expect dance to feature in an anthology on voice, Meredith Morse’s chapter, which addresses the dance performances of Simone Forti and Yvonne Rainer, makes an insightful contribution to the predigital debate and Lewis Mumford’s idea of the ‘cultural preparation’: ‘the voice, in essence’, she argues, ‘sounds the digital’s contingent past’. Similarly, Brandon LaBelle’s
theoretically dense analysis of sound poetry pays detailed attention to the paradoxes of vocalization set out in the book’s introduction. While dense, this chapter effectively wrestles with complex questions of ontology, signification and embodiment. Amanda Stewart’s chapter is again a welcome change of voice. While still addressing the shifts between analogue and digital technologies, her experiential account of vocal performance and composition is particularly enjoyable to read because of its imitate and reflexive take on language and vocalization. Also somewhat autobiographical, Mark Amerika’s chapter concludes this section with ‘Professor VJ’s Big Blog Mashup’. This is an entertaining postmodern adventure in prose that does not shy away from asking some big questions about identity and selfhood.

Section Three, ‘Reanimating VOICE’, focuses primarily on vocal manipulations in relation to more mainstream recorded music, film, animation and gaming. Of particular interest to me as a music scholar was Ross Gibson’s chapter on the ‘digital behaviou’ of Jamaican music culture. Here, Gibson offers some insightful transnational and postcolonial critiques of Dub vocal production and argues that the production aesthetics of Jamaican artists such as King Tubby have an enduring legacy. Isabelle Arvers’s chapter provides a thorough and fascinating introduction to the twenty-first-century world of machinima. For the uninitiated, this is a new cinematic genre: an amalgamation of cinema, machine and animation. Like Mark Ward does in his chapter, which also examines the role of the voice in contemporary gaming, Arvers and Ward situate the voice as the human element, linking playing and avatar. Axel Stockburger’s also elaborates on the function of the voice in gaming extending his discussion to non-linguistic sounds. While unique in their style, approach and context, these three chapters highlight how voice gives personality to and can lend emotional familiarity to a virtual landscape. Writing on film sound, Helen Macallan and Andrew Plain’s contribution to this section is particularly innovative, gesturing towards an epistemic shift in the way the filmic voice is addressed in film studies and digital culture.

The final section of the book, ‘At the Human Limits of VOICE’, explores the magical, spiritual, uncanny, ghostly and monstrous renderings of the voice. Michael Taussig begins this section with some delightful musings on humming. Touching on a range of examples – from Winnie the Pooh to Iroquois rituals to Allen Ginsberg – Taussig impresses the spiritual qualities and creative force of humming. Nermin Saybasili’s chapter powerfully engages with film and sound instillations that address migrant experience in Europe. Here, Saybasili argues that the ‘ghostly’ or disembodied foreign voice – the voice of Otherness – which feature in these creative works potentially ‘inspire a deeper rethinking of the relationship between… the foreigner and the citizen’. Exploring the hybridization of the human body and machine in the spaces between online and offline networks, Giselle Beiguelman’s chapter provokes us to think about the digital voice not in common terms as ‘an upgraded version of the human voice’ but as ‘the presence of the networked body in our daily life’. The book concludes with a chapter by Philip Brophy. Again of particular interest to me as a music scholar, Brophy draws on a wide range of musical examples to show how the posthuman voice can be moulded and vocalized and how the human voice, particularly in pop, already enunciates far beyond what we might consider human.

While I appreciate that one cannot expect a single anthology to cover all aspects of a topic that spans as many disciplines and forms of creative practice as the mediated voice does, I was a little surprised that current Auto-Tune technologies were not taken up by any of the volume’s contributors. Famous for it use in Cher’s ‘Believe’ (1998) and now championed by the likes of contemporary pop starts such as Ke$ha, the debates surrounding the use Auto-Tune within the popular music industry and on popular reality television singing competitions such as The X Factor surely provoke critical enquiry and cultural analysis. That said: this book is by no means disappointing in the breadth of topics it covers and the interdisciplinary of its approach to the voice in digital and networked cultures. This book is both an important addition to the field of voice studies and a provocative avowal of the voice in digital arts and media practice and criticism.

E-mail: jodie.taylor@griffith.edu.au