

WHY VOICE MATTERS

CULTURE AND POLITICS AFTER NEOLIBERALISM

NICK COULDRY



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In memory of my mother, Lilian Couldry (1921-2006)

‘The thing to avoid, I don’t know why, is the spirit of system.’

Samuel Beckett¹

‘We can hope for something better than the humanization of the inevitable.’

Roberto Mangabeira Unger²

‘Only a crisis – actual or perceived – produces real change. When this crisis occurs, the actions that are taken depend on the ideas that are lying around. That, I believe, is our basic function: to develop alternatives to existing policies, to keep them alive and available until the politically impossible becomes politically inevitable.’

Milton Friedman³

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Preface and Acknowledgements

As Milton Friedman acknowledged more than 25 years ago, major crises can precipitate major shifts in thinking.⁴ In autumn 2008 the world faced a deep financial crisis, the long-term economic, social and political consequences of which are, and will continue to be, most serious. The causes of that financial crisis derive directly from the implementation and normalization of the neoliberal doctrines with which Friedman was so closely associated. While reports of the death of neoliberalism are surely exaggerated, we can at least ask whether a new shift in thinking will now occur. Only, following Friedman's insight, if the ideas that articulate those shifts are 'lying around'. This book aims to make a modest contribution to that pool of ideas.

The basis of that contribution lies in affirming the value of voice in response to the parallel crisis of voice that is inseparable from the long ascendancy of neoliberal discourse. Voice as a process – giving an account of oneself and what affects one's life – is an irreducible part of what it means to be human; effective voice (the effective opportunity to have one's voice heard and taken into account) is a human good. 'Voice' might therefore appear unquestionable as a value. But across various domains – economic, political, cultural – we are governed in ways that deny the value of voice and insist instead on the primacy of market functioning. Part of this crisis of voice is our own hesitancy in invoking the value of voice to challenge, even identify, such rules as voice-denying. Identifying this crisis and reviewing the resources that might help us think beyond it are the aims of this book.

The resulting story gains some general interest, I hope, from neoliberal discourse's own pretence to normative universality. However, the story told here could be told in radically different ways, depending on what position in global power hierarchies provides its context, for example from China whose millennia-long centralization of power in the state now meets the more recent rise of a huge Chinese working class,⁵ or from countries where neoliberal discourse was violently imposed as a condition of multilateral external finance, whether in Latin America⁶ or (with the added burden of a racist colonial history) in Africa.⁷

Instead I am writing this book from Britain. In spite of the obvious limitations, there are some good reasons for telling this story from here. Britain was not only one of the sites where neoliberal doctrine found an enthusiastic home in the late 1970s; it is also one of the developed countries most shaken by the current economic crisis. My reading and writing for this book began in

early 2007 but the surrounding context has changed rapidly: a global financial crisis, the emergence of Barack Obama as a credible challenger to the neoconservative regime of George W. Bush, Tony Blair's accelerated resignation as UK Prime Minister in mid 2007. The particular clarity in Britain of neoliberal democracy's contradictions still offers a salutary tale of what is wrong with neoliberalism.

* * *

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I am very grateful to Mila Steele, my commissioning editor at Sage, for her enthusiasm and support for the book's project since summer 2007. Among the friends who have given me needed encouragement in the conceiving and writing of this book, I want to single out Henry Giroux, Jeremy Gilbert, Dave Hesmondhalgh, Jo Littler and Clemencia Rodriguez, for support and inspiration over many years; Jeremy Gilbert specifically for a trenchant and timely criticism of an earlier version of Chapter Five; Robin Mansell for inspiring the engagement with economics, and particularly the work of Amartya Sen, that led eventually to Chapter Two; and Sarah Banet-Weiser for the inspiration (even after my manuscript was submitted) of a talk on her latest work on 'self-branding'. Stephen Coleman, James Curran, Melissa Gregg, Kate Nash, Angela McRobbie and Bruce Williams all generously gave their time to comment on chapter drafts. Thanks to audiences at ANZCA 2009 (held at QUT, Brisbane, Australia), McMaster University, Hamilton, Canada, and Nottingham University, UK, for their responses to earlier versions of my argument. Thanks to colleagues in Australia (Bob Lingard, Jo Tacchi, Tanja Dreher) for alerting me to important references that I might have missed. The responsibility for any remaining errors and confusions is mine alone.

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* * *

This is a book not only about voice, but also about what happens when voice is missing or obstructed: the hope of voice can never be separated from the threat of silence. I dedicate this book to the dear memory of my mother, Lilian Couldry who, through her deafness later in life, endured much silence.

NICK COULDRY, LONDON, SEPTEMBER 2009

Notes

- 1 Beckett (1975: 8).
- 2 Unger (1998: 28).
- 3 Friedman (1982: ix).
- 4 See note 3. Naomi Klein (2007: 6) uses this quote too.
- 5 Qiu (2009).
- 6 Unger (1998).
- 7 Mbembe (2001: 73-77).

Chapter 1

Voice as Value

Human beings can give an account of themselves and of their place in the world: ‘we have no idea’, writes Paul Ricoeur, ‘what a culture would be where no one any longer knew what it meant to narrate things’.¹ Treating people as if they lack that capacity *is* to treat them as if they were not human; the past century provides many shameful examples of just this. Voice is one word for that capacity, but having a voice is never enough. I need to know that my voice matters; indeed, the offer of effective voice is crucial to the legitimacy of modern democracies, while across economic and cultural life voice is offered in various ways. Yet we have grown used to ways of organizing things that ignore voice, that assume voice does not matter. We are experiencing a contemporary *crisis* of voice, across political, economic and cultural domains, that has been growing for at least three decades.

Telling the story of this crisis is important, since one of its aspects is a loss of the connecting narratives that would help us to grasp many specific breakdowns as dimensions of the same problem. In countries such as the UK and the USA, we can easily miss the wider pattern: offers of voice are increasingly unsustainable; voice is persistently offered, but in important respects denied or rendered illusory; and at the root of these contradictions is a doctrine (neoliberalism) that denies voice matters. My aim in this book is to name that crisis and identify some resources for thinking beyond it.

That involves using the word ‘voice’ in a particular way. Two senses of the word ‘voice’ are familiar. First, we can mean the sound of a person speaking: yet while the sonic aspect of voice generates important insights (discussed in Chapter Five), this usage does not capture the range of ways, not necessarily involving sound, in which I can give an account of myself. Second, we have in the sphere of politics become accustomed to equating ‘voice’ with the expression of opinion or, more broadly, the expression of a distinctive perspective on the world that needs to be acknowledged. This political use of the word ‘voice’ continues to be useful, especially in contexts where long-entrenched inequalities of representation need to be addressed; it has been applied, for example, to media’s role in development settings.² But in other circumstances it is in danger of becoming banal – we all have ‘voice’, we all celebrate ‘voice’ – so how far can using the term in this sense take us?

I would like, however, to use the term ‘voice’ differently, in a way that distinguishes between two levels: voice as a *process* (already relatively familiar) and voice as a *value*. First, we need to get clearer on voice as a value. This dimension

is particularly important at times when a whole way of thinking about social political and cultural organization (neoliberalism) operates on the basis that for certain crucial purposes voice as a process does *not* matter. By voice as a value, I shall refer to the act of valuing, and choosing to value, those frameworks for organizing human life and resources that *themselves* value voice (as a process). Treating voice as a value means discriminating *in favour* of ways of organizing human life and resources that, through their choices, put the value of voice into practice, by respecting the multiple interlinked processes of voice and sustaining them, not undermining or denying them. Treating voice as a value means discriminating *against* frameworks of social economic and political organization that deny or undermine voice, such as neoliberalism. Valuing voice then involves particular attention to the conditions under which voice as a process is effective, and how broader forms of organization may subtly undermine or devalue voice as a process. This reflexive concern with the conditions for voice as a process, including those that involve its *devaluing*, means that 'voice', as used here, is a value *about* values or what philosophers sometimes call a 'second order' value.

Why should this distinction be important? What can the term 'voice', used in this special way, add to other terms, such as democracy or justice, in helping us think about political change? The reason lies in a historically specific situation. A particular discourse, neoliberalism, has come to dominate the contemporary world (formally, practically, culturally and imaginatively). That discourse operates with a view of economic life that does not value voice and imposes that view of economic life on to politics, via a reductive view of politics as the implementing of market functioning. In the process of imposing itself on politics and society, neoliberal discourse evacuates entirely the place of the social in politics and politics' regulation of economics. These moves have been implemented in various ways in different countries, whether or not they are formal democracies and to greater or lesser degrees using the disguise of democracy. The result is the crisis of voice under neoliberalism.

I offer 'voice' here as a *connecting* term that interrupts neoliberalism's view of economics and economic life, challenges neoliberalism's claim that its view of politics as market functioning trumps all others, enables us to build an alternative view of politics that is at least partly oriented to valuing processes of voice, and includes within that view of politics a recognition of people's capacities for social cooperation based on voice. I use one word – voice – to capture both the value that can enable these connections and the process which is that value's key reference-point. The term 'voice', as used here, does not derive from a particular view of economic processes (consumer 'voice') or even mechanisms of political representation (political 'voice'), but from a broader account of how human beings are. The value of voice articulates some basic aspects of human life that are relevant *whatever* our views on democracy or justice, so establishing common ground between contemporary frameworks for evaluating economic, social and political organization (for example, the varied work of philosophers Paul Ricoeur and Judith Butler, development economist Amartya Sen, social theorist Axel Honneth and political theorist Nancy Fraser); and it links our account of

today's crisis of voice to a variety of sociological analyses (from diagnoses of the contemporary workplace to accounts of particular groups' long-term exclusion from effective voice). All are resources for addressing the contemporary crisis of voice and thinking beyond the neoliberal framework that did so much to cause it.

This book, then, attempts to work on multiple levels, each interacting with the others: first, there is the primary process of voice, the act of giving an account of oneself, and the immediate conditions and qualities of that process (more on this shortly); then there is the 'second order' value of voice (the commitment to *voice that matters*) which is defended throughout; third, there is the work of connecting the value of voice to other normative frameworks and uncovering their implicit appeal to a notion of voice (see Chapter Five); and finally, there is the work of uncovering the processes which obstruct voice, what Judith Butler calls the 'materialization' which allows some types of voice to emerge as possible and others not (see Chapters Six and Seven), and reflecting on how those processes might be resisted.

It is also worth commenting on the relation between 'voice', as I use the term here, and politics. The concept of 'voice' operates both within and beyond politics. It starts from an account of the process of voice which is not necessarily political at all. This is important if 'voice' is to be a broad enough value to connect with diverse normative frameworks and be applied in multiple contexts beyond formal politics: whether in the economic/political sphere (Amartya Sen's work on development and freedom, discussed in Chapter Two) or in the social/political sphere (Axel Honneth's work on recognition discussed in Chapter Three). The price of making these multiple connections is, inevitably, to shake each loose of the detailed philosophical traditions from which it emerged, but the benefit is to reveal a broader consensus around voice that can mount a combined challenge against the discourse of neoliberalism, and on terms that go beyond the exclusive domain of representative politics. The book's argument remains, however, oriented all along to politics in a broader sense as the space where struggle and debate over 'the authoritative allocation of goods, services and values'³ takes place. It argues for a rejection of neoliberalism's reductive view of democratic politics and its replacement by a view of politics as broad mechanisms for social cooperation that can be traced back to the early twentieth-century US political theorist John Dewey. Free of the straitjacket of neoliberal thinking, we can even identify a broader consensus here, going beyond Dewey, Sen and Honneth, to include recent work on social production and social media (for example, Yochai Benkler's work on networks and Hardt and Negri's work on 'the common').

Admittedly, my use of the term 'voice' cuts across Aristotle's well-known discussion in the *Politics*⁴ where he distinguishes *mere* 'voice' (*phoné*) from 'speech' (*logos*); for Aristotle only the latter is the medium of political deliberation and action, the former being the capacity that humans share with most animals of communicating basic sensations of pain and the like. But there is a reason for my emphasis on the word 'voice'. The modern integration of lifeworld and system, intensified practically in the work regimes of the digital media age and ideologically by neoliberal doctrine, disrupts the

basic space of voice/expression which Aristotle felt could safely be assumed 'beneath' political speech. Workers' rights are not relatively, but absolutely, excluded by fundamentalist market logics; migrant workers are not relatively, but absolutely, excluded from membership of most territorially-based citizenships.⁵ The nature of social and political organization under neoliberalism requires us to focus on how the *bare preconditions* of speech are being challenged (a parallel with Giorgio Agamben's work on 'bare life'),⁶ and to reaffirm the need to meet those basic conditions of possibility. So this book is about the value not just of speech, but of something more basic and more fundamental: voice.

The neoliberal context

What type of object do we understand neoliberalism to be? The economic policies with which neoliberalism is associated are well known and are easily listed, for example in the form of the orthodoxy which emerged as the conditions imposed in Latin America and elsewhere in return for multilateral finance in the 1980s and 1990s. These came to be known in economist John Williamson's phrase as 'the Washington consensus': strong fiscal discipline, reductions in public expenditure, tax reform to encourage market investors, interest rates determined by markets and not the state, competitive exchange rates, trade liberalization, the encouragement of foreign direct investment, privatization of public services and assets, deregulation of financial and other markets, and the securing of private property rights.⁷ But neoliberalism has also been a policy framework adopted voluntarily by many rich countries such as the USA and the UK. Neoliberalism, then, is not just the Washington Consensus but more broadly the range of policies that evolved internationally from the early 1980s to make market functioning (and the openness of national economies to global market forces) the *overwhelming* priority for social organization. Neoliberalism did not start as a theory about politics, but as a new economic 'policy regime' in Richard Peet's phrase.⁸ Neoliberalism took root as the rationale behind a particular interpretation of the 1970s global economic crisis and policy responses to it. By reading that crisis as the result of the failure of a preceding economic policy regime (Keynesianism), neoliberalism authorized a quite different approach to politics *and* economics which saw *market competition* as their common practical and normative reference-point, with state intervention in the economy now the aberration.⁹

The elites and adviser circles involved in developing this new 'rationality' of economic and political management were more than technical consultants; they were, in Peet's words, 'centres of the creation of meaning'.¹⁰

We need, however, to distinguish different levels on which neoliberalism works as the creation of meaning. First, there are the market fundamentalist principles of Ludwig von Mises, Friedrich von Hayek, Milton Friedman, and other thinkers which explicitly install market functioning as the dominant

reference-point of economics and, bizarrely as it might once have seemed, political and social order as well. Let's call this *neoliberalism proper*. Second, there is a wider set of metaphors, languages, techniques and organizational principles that have served to implement neoliberalism proper as the working doctrine of many contemporary democracies. Let's call this *neoliberal doctrine*. One form of this doctrine was the Washington Consensus; another was the shift towards marketization as an active principle of government in countries such as the UK from the mid 1980s onwards (whose particular consequences are discussed in Chapter Three). Compared with Keynesianism, a consequence of neoliberal doctrine was the increasingly unequal distribution of the benefits of economic growth: greater inequality between countries and within countries.¹¹

At this point, however, you might ask: does neoliberalism still *need* to be opposed a decade into the twenty-first century? Weren't the follies and hollowness of 'market populism', particularly in the USA but also in the UK and elsewhere, fully exposed by Thomas Frank almost a decade ago?¹² Weren't the unimaginativeness and contradictions of the 'Washington consensus' also exposed by a range of thinkers from the Brazilian social and legal theorist Roberto Unger to figures much closer to economic policy-making such as Joseph Stiglitz, former Chief Economist at the World Bank, and multi-billionaire investor George Soros?¹³ Didn't a decade of spectacular protests since the Seattle World Trade Organisation meeting in 1999 help provoke such a realization? And didn't the President of the World Bank James Wolfensohn himself announce in 2002 that 'the Washington consensus is dead'?¹⁴ Going even further back, the development economist Albert Hirschman pointed out his fellow economists' inattention to 'voice' as a crucial dynamic in economic life in a book that, in academic circles, had considerable impact as early as 1969.¹⁵

Yet none of this stopped neoliberal doctrine from operating as a dominant working principle in the Bush and Blair/Brown governments of the 2000s and working through to many levels far below explicit government policy during the same period. So when we now try to think beyond the horizon of neoliberalism, it is at the end of an extended history of neoliberalism's *normalization*, the *embedding* of neoliberalism as rationality in everyday social organization and imagination: this is the third level of neoliberalism as meaning, to which we must pay attention. It is a level which may have been challenged by aspects of the recent financial crisis, but has certainly not been abolished by it. Note also that my concern is with neoliberalism, not with the particular brand of religion-fuelled utopianism ('neoconservatism') that developed alongside neoliberalism under the particular leaderships of Tony Blair and George W. Bush, important though that may be from other perspectives.¹⁶ The embedding of neoliberalism provides already a broad enough focus.

What must be opposed, then, is not just neoliberalism proper but a whole way of life for which neoliberal discourse provides the organizing metaphors, a 'culture' of neoliberalism if you like. This task is particularly important in those countries I will call 'neoliberal democracies' (such as the USA and the UK) where neoliberalism proper and neoliberal doctrine have become

deeply embedded in political culture and in the processes of government. Neoliberalism, though it can serve specific ideological ends, is much more than an ideology as traditionally understood (a set of false or illusory beliefs). It is better understood as 'hegemony', Antonio Gramsci's word for the broader horizon of thought that sustains, as acceptable, unequal distributions of resources and power by foregrounding some things and excluding others entirely from view.¹⁷ Although French sociologists Boltanski and Chiapello retain the term 'ideology', they capture better than anyone how hegemony works: the 'schemas' of thought and performance on which the 'strong as well as the weak ... rely ... to represent to themselves the operation, benefits and constraints of the order in which they find themselves immersed'.¹⁸ Neoliberalism, in short, is a 'hegemonic rationality'¹⁹ and like all rationalities it reduces the complexities of what it describes. The fundamental term in neoliberalism's reduction of the world is '*market*': neoliberalism presents the social world as made up of markets, and spaces of potential competition that need to be organized *as* markets, blocking other narratives from view.

Given neoliberalism's strategy of simplification, it is no objection to this book's argument to say that neoliberal doctrine's *actual* implementation in policy practice is much more complicated than the term 'neoliberalism' allows. Of course it is! But the point of hegemonic terms is to convince us to treat, as similar, things that are very different; that is why such strategies must be opposed, by name, in a reverse strategy of simplification (which is not to deny, of course, the importance or interest of the complex variations which a neoliberal framework may undergo under particular political circumstances).²⁰ Resisting the hegemony of 'neoliberalism' means identifying it as a *bounded* discourse, a 'term' – in the double sense of word and limit²¹ – whose limitations we can think and live beyond.

By suggesting that neoliberalism is the type of object that can and should be opposed on the level of *meaning*, I will seem to some to be starting in the wrong place. Some see neoliberalism as part of a broader intensification of global economic pressures that evacuate entirely the site of conventional politics, requiring a complete rebuilding of social, economic and political life from the bottom up. To represent this position, here is Pau from the Movement for Global Resistance, quoted by anthropologist Jeffrey Juris: 'when the economic system is globalized, a government can't do much to change things in a single place. ... [G]overnments no longer have the credibility to promote real change. They have created a system in which transformation can no longer come through the state'.²² While I don't intend to argue that a post-neoliberal politics can be built *without* major adjustments to the practice of politics (see Chapter Seven), I think we need to notice the caution of Juris himself in his important account of the 'anti-corporate globalization movements' where he notes that what the transformation activists such as Pau insist upon is very much a 'long-term process' that 'is likely to produce few immediate results'.²³ We need, however, to address the crisis of voice, and the vacuum of effective politics, in formal democracies such as the UK that results. It is because of that immediate challenge that I focus here not on possibilities for entirely new forms of social organization (important though visions of utopian change certainly are), but

on resources already available, if only we would use them, for contesting the rationality of neoliberalism as it continues to work in the body politic.

Voice as a process

Let me now run through some principles which capture what is distinctive about voice as a process. Some details of this approach will have to be deferred until Chapter Five, but I will try to explain enough to help us grasp why such a process might be worth valuing.

By voice as a process, I shall mean, as already suggested, the process of giving an account of one's life and its conditions: what philosopher Judith Butler calls 'giving an account of oneself'.²⁴ To give such an account means telling a story, providing a narrative. It is not often, perhaps, that any of us sits down to tell a story with a formal beginning and end. But at another more general level, *narrative* is a basic feature of human action: 'a narrative history of a certain kind turns out to be a basic and essential genre for the characterization of human actions'.²⁵ This is because, as Charles Taylor put it, man is 'a self-interpreting animal'.²⁶ What we do – beyond a basic description of how our limbs move in space – already comes embedded in narrative, our own and that of others. This is why to deny value to another's capacity for narrative – to deny her potential for voice – is to deny a basic dimension of human life. A form of life that systematically denied voice would not only be intolerable, it would, as Paul Ricoeur noted in the quote at the start of this chapter, barely be a culture at all. Recognizing this is common to a wide range of philosophy from the Anglo-American tradition (Alisdair MacIntyre, Charles Taylor) to the continental tradition (Paul Ricoeur) to post-structuralism (Judith Butler, Adriana Cavarero).

The aspect of voice which matters most then for voice as a value is people's practice of giving an account, implicitly or explicitly, of the world within which they act. It is worth noting that this approach to voice is some way from the more abstract formulation given by Albert Hirschman in his pioneering early work in economics, which defined voice as 'any attempt at all to change, rather than escape from, an objectionable state of affairs'.²⁷ This abstracts somewhat from the content that is distinctive of voice – the practice of giving an account – concentrating instead on the effects of voice's exercise in market systems. If, by contrast, we define voice at one level as the capacity to make, and be recognized as making, narratives about one's life, some further general principles follow.

Voice is socially grounded. Voice is not the practice of individuals in isolation.²⁸ This is for two reasons. First, voice depends on many prior conditions, above all the shared resources of material life, and the specifically social resources (including but not limited to language) that enable and sustain practices of narrative. Having a voice requires resources: both practical resources (language) and the (seemingly purely symbolic) status necessary if one is to be recognized by others as having a voice. Both are part of the

materiality of voice, the ‘matter’ without which voice is impossible; like most matter, they are unevenly distributed. A non-social (or purely individual) account of voice would therefore miss a vital dimension. We touch here on a wider point about human experience as productive beings that geographer David Harvey notes, quoting Marx: ‘production by an individual ... outside society ... is as much an absurdity as is the language without individuals living together and talking to each other’.²⁹ Second, and more fundamentally, narrative as a process is unimaginable except as part of an ongoing *exchange* of narratives with others. As MacIntyre put it, ‘the narrative of anyone’s life is part of an interlocking set of narratives’;³⁰ Cavarero is even more eloquent when she writes of ‘an identity which, from beginning to end, is intertwined with other lives – with reciprocal exposures and innumerable gazes – and needs the other’s tale’.³¹

Voice is a form of reflexive agency. The exchangeable narratives that constitute our voices are not random babblings that emerge, unaccountably, from our mouths, hands and gestures. Voice is a form of agency, and the act of voice involves taking responsibility for the stories one tells, just as our actions more generally, as Hannah Arendt argues, ‘disclose’ us ‘as subjects’.³² Voice therefore is always more than discourse, and its intrinsic links with the wider field of our actions, emphasized by John Dewey,³³ will become important when in Chapter Seven we link the value of voice to Dewey’s reinterpretation of democracy as social cooperation, rather than (as in approaches influenced by Jürgen Habermas) deliberation or speech.³⁴ Such a view of voice does not, however, commit us to a naïve view of agency, only to the view that we cannot understand voice except by linking it, as Harvey notes once more, to what “‘individuals”, “persons”, or social movements might want or be able *to do* in the world’.³⁵ A key part of that agency is *reflexivity*. Since taking responsibility for one’s voice involves telling an additional story – of oneself as the person who *did* say this or do that – voice necessarily involves us in an ongoing process of reflection, exchanging narratives back and forth between our past and present selves, and between us and others. This process is not accidental, but necessary: humans have a *desire* to narrate, as Cavarero puts it, a desire to make sense of their lives.³⁶

Voice is an embodied process. The voice of each of us, our history of reflection and self-interpretation, is part of our embodied history: this results from the relation between voice and action. It follows that voice is irreducibly plural. Even if the resources on which each voice draws are inherently social, the *trajectory* of each voice is distinct. Since voice involves the reflexive narrative trajectory of each individual, it cannot be read off at a distance, like purchase data, from the details of that trajectory. For voice is the process of articulating the world *from a distinctive embodied position*.³⁷ Failing to respect the inherent differences between voices means, once again, failing to recognize voice at all. Yet voice does not involve a claim to a unique interiority, but only a claim that the way we are each exposed to the world is unique: to quote Cavarero, ‘uniqueness is an embodied uniqueness – this and not another, all his life, until who is born dies’.³⁸ But this implies that an effective process of

voice *always* means more than just being able to speak. Voice as a social process involves, from the start, both speaking *and listening*,³⁹ that is, an act of attention that registers the uniqueness of the other's narrative.

This necessary plurality encompasses not just external differences between voices, but also the *internal diversity* within a particular voice. It would be absurd to imagine that a life comprised just one story, or just one continuous sequence of action. The inherent internal plurality of each voice encompasses the processes whereby we reflect from one narrative stream on to another, and think about what one strand of our lives mean for other strands. This is especially important in modernity where almost all of us are embedded in multiple narrative settings (family, work, leisure, public display).⁴⁰ Of course, none of us is able continuously to reflect, let alone tell a satisfying story, about all the potential connections between the many aspects of our lives. But to block someone's capacity to bring one part of their lives to bear on another part – for example, by discounting the relevance of their work experience to their trajectory as a citizen – is, again, to deny a dimension of voice itself. It follows that the potential *injuries* to voice may easily, perhaps particularly, work across more than one domain (see Chapter Six).

Voice requires a material form which may be individual, collective or distributed. Voice does not simply emerge from us without support. We saw earlier that voice requires social resources, but more than that it also requires a form: both are aspects of the materiality of voice. Since voice is a process, so too is the sustaining of voice's material form. But the material form of voice need not be under the exclusive control of the individual; often I recognize myself in a collectively produced voice: this, incidentally, is to use the term 'recognition' in a general sense, not yet the specific sense in which Honneth uses it.⁴¹ Sometimes we can recognize ourselves in the outcome of a production where specific individual and collective inputs cannot easily be separated from a broader flow. This form of voice is not individual or collective but 'distributed'. Under conditions we discuss in detail in Chapter Five, it can count too as voice and is a feature today of all networks, and much online production, as many commentators have noted.

The material form of voice cannot, in any case, be exclusively individual: we do not generate the means by which we narrate, we emerge as subjects into a narrative form.⁴² So 'voice' as a value does not involve individualism (for example, liberal individualism), or disregarding the importance of collective forms of action. Defending voice as a value simply means defending the potential of voices anywhere to matter.

If, through an unequal distribution of narrative resources, the materials from which some people must build their account of themselves are *not* theirs to adapt or control, then this represents a deep denial of voice, a deep form of oppression. This is the oppression W. B. Dubois described as 'double consciousness', a 'sense of always looking at oneself through the eyes of others';⁴³ Chapter Six will draw on what we have learned from histories of racism and class, feminism and sexuality to develop this point. Voice is a continuing process of reflecting back and forth between actions, experiences and thought, an open-ended process of giving an account in which each person is engaged. If

the material form of voice obstructs such reflexivity for one reason or another, then the form of voice also *fails to fit* the conditions of experience; as a result, once more, there is no effective voice.

We may take for granted the fit between experience and a voice's form, when the latter is individual. I may assume I will always have the chance to register an account of my life with others in some relatively durable form; 'my' voice may *seem* transparent. That it is not becomes clear in those terrible cases when individuals are denied control even over the individual form through which voice can be expressed. This happened in the Nazi death camps. As Primo Levi put it in *If This is a Man*, his account of Auschwitz: 'nothing belongs to us any more; they have taken away our clothes, our shoes, even our hair; if we speak, they will not listen to us, and if they listen, they will not understand'. The only outlet was dreams: 'why', Levi wrote, 'is the pain of every day translated so constantly into our dreams, in the ever-repeated scene of the unlistened-to story?'⁴⁴ The extreme Nazi denial of voice continued to the end of life, intensifying that denial's retrospective force. As Hannah Arendt put it:

the concentration camps, by making death itself anonymous (making it impossible to find out whether a prisoner is dead or alive) robbed death of its meaning as the end of a fulfilled life. In a sense they took away the individual's own death, proving that henceforth nothing belonged to him and he belonged to no one. His death merely set the seal on the fact that he had never really existed.⁴⁵

There are many less drastic ways in which voice can be undermined at the collective or social level through an inadequate fit between the forms of voice and experience: when collective voices or institutional decisions fail to register individual experience; when institutions ignore collective views; when distributed voice is not reflected in opportunities to redeem voice in specific encounters. Above all, voice is undermined when societies become organized on the basis that individual, collective and distributed voice need not be taken into account, because a higher value or rationality trumps them.

Voice is undermined by rationalities which take no account of voice and by practices that exclude voice or undermine forms for its expression. Voice can be undermined in subtle ways through the organization of social relations. Not just individual lives but social life and social space are organized in part by narratives that set reference-points, relevances and values. So models for organizing life that *place no value* on voice may, when applied, undermine voice not just by failing to acknowledge it, but also by blocking alternative narratives that would authorize us to value voice. Let's call a narrative of this sort a *voice-denying rationality*.

Once again, for the most extreme case of a voice-denying rationality we must turn to Nazi Germany and its health policy, because this worked not indirectly through a chain of partially intended consequences but directly, by organizing resources on the explicit basis that some individuals' voice and life had no value. Its clearest expression was the doctrine of 'Life without Value'