Chapter 1 Voice as a 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 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







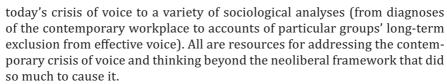
is particularly important at times when a whole way of thinking about social political and cultural organization (neoliberalism) operates on the basis that for certain crucial purposes voice as a process does not matter. By voice as a value, I shall refer to the act of valuing, and choosing to value, 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







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 broadly 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 (Keynsianism), 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

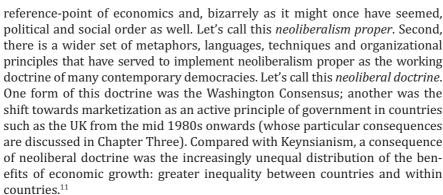
The elites and adviser circles involved in developing this new 'rationality' of economic and political management were more than technical consultants; they were, in Peet's words, 'centres of the creation of meaning'. 10

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









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 multibillionaire 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. 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 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 current 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, we 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





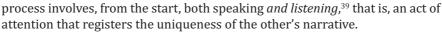
materiality of voice, the 'matter' without which voice is impossible; like most matter, they are unevenly distributed. A non-social (or purely individual) account of voice would therefore miss a vital dimension. We touch here on a wider point about human experience as productive beings that geographer 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'. But this implies that an effective process of voice always means more than just being able to speak. Voice as a social







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', 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' (*Lebensunwerten Leben*) from Nazi medical, legal and psychological thinking







on which Giorgio Agamben and others have reflected. 46 As the historian of Nazi medicine Robert Proctor put it: 'the social policies ultimately favoured by the [Nazi] government equated value of life with ability to work ... the goal of occupational medicine likewise became a worker who would remain productive until retirement and then pass away shortly thereafter'.47

Much more common, thankfully, are rationalities that do not directly deny the value of voice outright (indeed, in some contexts they may celebrate it), but work in other ways to undermine the provision of voice at various levels. Is neoliberalism perhaps a voice-denying rationality in this different but important sense?

Countering neoliberal rationality

Neoliberal discourse emerges from an extreme generalization of the advantages of markets and the disadvantages of other modes of social and economic organization. Of course, markets are an important way of organizing human affairs and distributing goods. Few would deny that the operation of markets may provide opportunities for consumption that enables individual or group expression, under particular conditions, has political consequences. The point therefore is not that markets, as they operate in practice, have nothing to do with voice; indeed, there are historians who argue that the development of consumer markets in early modernity was a key contributor to the gradual diversification of expression and voice, 48 while some cultural commentators stress the importance of everyday consumption as a site of identity and indeed action, particularly when opportunities for some traditional forms of politics are reduced or denied.⁴⁹ But neoliberal rationality relies on an excessive valuation of markets that goes much further than acknowledging these basic truths about markets, and it is this excessive valuation that must be rejected.

Neoliberalism insists that there is no other valid principle of human organization than market functioning. The tension between neoliberal doctrine and the value of voice becomes clear then we consider how markets work. Markets match inputs and outputs in regular ways at the level of individual transactions and at what the political economist Robert Lane calls the level of 'species' benefits.⁵⁰ All that matters for market functioning is this matching; it is no part of market functioning that a particular individual's sequence of inputs and outputs match in a particular way, let alone in a way that matches with that individual's reflections on that sequence. Markets do not therefore function to provide voice. The value of market functioning is not explicitly, or implicitly, equivalent to - or even isomorphic with - the value of voice. Market functioning does not require the exchange of narratives between reflexive, embodied agents; but voice does. Voice in our sense is what economists would call an externality of market functioning.⁵¹

This becomes a problem when, like the leading proponent of neoliberalism Milton Friedman, you argue that markets are the best (indeed the only good) model for social and political organization.⁵² The consequence is to





understand social and political organization, from the start, on terms that, without necessarily intending to do so, exclude the possibility that voice matters. From one perspective this might seem puzzling: the 'freedom' that neoliberalism celebrates can sound rather like a celebration of voice since what we do as participants in markets can, under some circumstances, contribute to voice, whether individual (consumer boycotts or buycotts), collective (fan communities or user groups) or distributed (the type of clothes I buy, the food choices I make).53 But, as we will see in Chapter Two, the notion of freedom underlying neoliberalism is abstracted from any understanding of the social processes that underpin 'voice' in its full sense as an embodied process of effective speech. Market populism, which claims markets as the privileged site of popular voice, is based on a category error, confusing market functioning with the sort of process that in itself can provide the conditions for sustaining voice. As Thomas Frank points out, that error was ideologically motivated, since the rise of US market populism coincided with one of the most extreme periods of upwards wealth redistribution in democratic history.⁵⁴

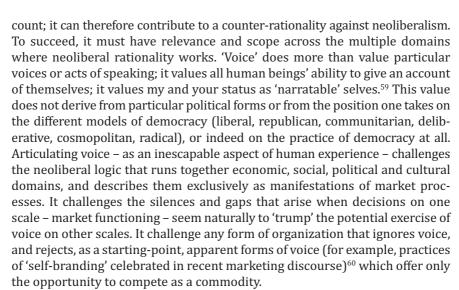
Political theorist Wendy Brown argued in 2003 that we were in the middle of an epochal shift towards a political order characterized by the absolute prioritization of market logics across the whole of social life, which 'while foregrounding the market, is not only or even primarily focused on the economy; rather it involves extending and disseminating market values to all institutions and social action'. The force of this transformation, Brown argues, is that it does *not* operate through force, or political rule, but through the internalization of rationality. Its values come, as it were, pre-rationalized, as part of 'the given'.

Neoliberal rationality is reinforced not just by explicit discourse but through the multiple ways in which that discourse and its workings get embedded in daily life and social organization. Neoliberal rationality provides principles for organizing action (in workplaces, public services, fields of competition, public discussion) which are internalized as norms and values (for example, the value of entrepreneurial 'freedom') by individuals, groups and institutions: in short, they become 'culture'. Through this process neoliberalism, over time, crowds out other rationalities, other ways of organizing. As neoliberal rationality becomes institutionalized culture, it shapes the organization of space. Some types of space become prioritized, others fall out of use and so stop being imagined; because voice is embodied, this matters hugely for the effectiveness of voice, since neoliberalism literally changes where we can and cannot speak and be heard.⁵⁶ Agents whose needs and interests once seemed necessarily linked (for example, by common conditions of work) become visible only as individuals, linked, if at all, by diverse networks. The result is what Zygmunt Bauman in another context called 'the social production of distance', 57 disabling particular types of group voice (for example, trade unions), and often leaving individual voices out of account. The only way of challenging such an all-encompassing rationality is, as Brown notes, through a 'counter-rationality - a different figuration of human beings, citizenship, economic life, and the political'.58

The value of voice is offered here as part of such a counter-rationality. Valuing voice means valuing something that neoliberal rationality fails to







Articulating voice means challenging the distance that neoliberal logic installs between subjects and a key dimension ('voice') of what gives their lives meaning. It draws strength from thinkers who have worked to redefine the *ends* of contemporary economics or politics (the economist and philosopher Amartya Sen on the *ends* of economic life; social and political theorist Axel Honneth, echoing John Dewey, on the *ends* of democratic politics). It connects also to a broader tradition across philosophy, literary theory and sociology that emphasizes the role of narrative in human life, as the embodied form of our actions and reasoning about the world.

Structure of the book

The principles I have just outlined underlie the rest of the book. They generate an argument that falls into two parts: a critical account in Chapters Two to Four that identifies the neoliberal conditions that currently undermine voice and a positive account in Chapters Five to Seven of our resources for building a counter-rationality to neoliberalism.

The contemporary crisis of voice ...

Within the *economy*, discussed in Chapter Two, contemporary labour conditions demand of workers an intense personal commitment (indeed, a narrative performance of commitment or 'passion'), as a condition of their having a place in the labour market, yet offer in return minimal security and minimal support to sustain employees' underlying capacities to work. Paradoxically, those conditions may deny voice in work-based decision-making, while appearing to mobilize voice via the commitments they demand from workers. At the same time, the market logics, which govern the distribution of work





opportunities, offer precious little scope for the exercise of individual or collective voice.

Within *politics*, discussed in Chapter Three, there is increasingly a gap between individuals' or groups' capacities for voice and the process whereby policy gets made. When politics is dominated by external market forces, policies become not so much options for genuine disagreement than 'facts of life', what 'modernization' or 'global competitiveness' requires, in short, a matter of necessity. In neoliberal regimes the potentially authentic domain of political voice is translated back to voters as force, as the 'delivery' of decisions about which no choice has been possible. This outcome is reinforced by an ideology that installs neoliberal *economics* as the dominant frame for politics.

We can develop a parallel argument too within the cultural domain if, that is, we set aside the crude populism that automatically equates demand - as registered in markets for cultural goods - with the satisfaction of populations' need for cultural voice and expression. Cultural products such as reality TV may not only fail to deliver voice, but may normalize a framework of value that helps undermine voice's exercise across various domains. This process is reinforced from another direction when the organizational principles of neoliberal government become locked into a media cycle that requires fast outcomes and fast sanctions, not the slower, more uncertain process of genuine deliberation and consultation about public ends. While the market logics that drive media institutions' contributions to these processes are, of course, distinct from the dynamics of neoliberal discourse, market logic and discourse converge in their effects, leaving few routes left in mainstream media through which the value of voice can be sustained: Chapter Four discusses these processes. This remains true, even when in other areas of media (particularly online) forms of individual voice are expanding.

My argument, then, will be that neoliberal doctrine, as embedded within economic practice, politics and culture, produces a series of painful contradictions, which I focus particularly through the case of contemporary Britain. Britain today, after 12 years of New Labour and 18 years of Thatcherism, embodies the *oxymoron* of 'neoliberal democracy', which had generated what Neal Lawson characterized as a 'social recession'⁶¹ even before the current economic recession. But the case of Britain only shows in clear way the contradictions more widely present in the neoliberal notion of the 'market state',⁶² and these contradictions are relevant wherever neoliberal doctrine is made into a principle of politics.

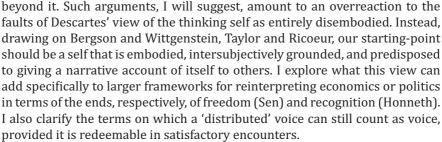
... and thinking beyond it

If the book's first part is devoted to laying out an analysis of the contemporary crisis of voice, its second part, more positively, reviews what resources we have to promote a counter-rationality of voice.

One key stage (Chapter Five) is to look back critically at our philosophical resources for understanding voice. Some versions of post-structuralism have indeed been deeply sceptical of 'the subject', proclaiming that we must move







Chapter Six explores the resources for a positive sociology of voice that can be gathered from a variety of writers – from Richard Sennett to Carol Gilligan, W. B. du Bois to Judith Butler, Danilo Martuccelli to Bev Skeggs – across sociology, cultural studies, psychology and philosophy. All of them have in various ways helped us understand the conditions that support or obstruct the practice of voice. I also consider the methodological commitment to listening that sociologies of voice involve. These approaches are important since they help us contextualize what is undoubtedly an online explosion of speaking, writing and exchanging (blogs, image and video exchange sites, social networking sites) that do not necessarily constitute social processes of voice, and need to be interpreted in the light of deeper exclusions.

The concluding chapter (Chapter Seven) turns more explicitly to the key questions that must be addressed if a post-neoliberal politics is to be built that more adequately embodies the value of voice. This is anything but easy because it involves articulating principles of voice that have become dormant or never been developed in neoliberal democracies and yet remain insufficiently developed even in new forms of transformative politics such as the anti-corporate globalization movements.

The role of critical sociology

Surely, you object, talk of a crisis of voice is exaggerated. But consider *The Good Childhood Report*, published in Britain in February 2009, whose lead author, Richard Layard, is an economist. This report discusses Britain's growing inequality and its education system focused more on government targets and market incentives than on the quality of the educational process. The problem requires, its authors believe, urgent solutions. So they look for an underlying factor that might explain *'both* income inequality and poor child outcomes'. They find this in a *moral* lack, in 'inadequate respect between people', tracing this moral lack to faulty values, 'excessive individualism'.⁶³ Another recent report by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, based on consultations with more than 3,000 respondents, also identifies 'individualism' as the main 'evil in contemporary Britain'.⁶⁴ But excessive individualism has been the cry of modernity's reformers since at least the mid nineteenth century.⁶⁵ More important is the close fit between excessive individualism and the narrow market-based values that are the legacy of neoliberalism. We will look in







Chapter Two at Boltanski and Chiapello's subtle account of how apparently positive values (freedom, spontaneity, flexibility, the conviviality of the network) are tied up with social costs that the discourse of 'market freedom' fails to grasp. Meanwhile, in the wake of public outcry over excessive rewards paid to bankers and investment traders, even mainstream commentators such as economist John Kay argue for 'a comprehensive reappraisal of ... the economic and political role of the [UK's] financial services sector'.66

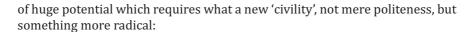
A crisis of values, then, is being registered in mainstream debates, but not yet answered. In such circumstances, the role of a critical sociology must be to provide some resources through which alternative values can be articulated. This book has no choice but to address an unstable mix of 'real world' and 'academic' issues, venturing beyond the safe boundaries of a single discipline. The book will trespass into other territories (political theory, philosophy, economic thought) far beyond my own area, sociology of media. This is dictated both by the lack of any distinct disciplinary area that examines the conditions for voice – reflections are scattered across sociology, political anthropology, feminist studies, media and cultural studies, literary theory, and philosophy – and by the pervasive challenge that neoliberal rationality poses. The result is a book that risks, as Raymond Williams once put it, 'an extension and variety of themes well beyond the limits of any kind of academic prudence'.⁶⁷

For this I make no apology. Nothing less bold will address neoliberalism's affront to the very idea of a socially grounded democratic process, a democracy that is more than formalism. If this recalls Raymond Williams' vision of a 'full democratic process'⁶⁸ which animated cultural studies at its outset, this is no accident. While this book makes no claim to be 'cultural studies' – at most it is written *after* cultural studies – it does seek to 'reoccupy'⁶⁹ in a modest way, aspects of the original project opened up by Raymond Williams half a century ago when he articulated his dissatisfaction with the British democracy of his time.⁷⁰

Just as important in providing the normative framework and imaginative provocations that have shaped my argument is recent social, political and economic theory. Axel Honneth's theory of recognition reconnects with, and regrounds, John Dewey's vision of democracy as a 'social ideal', a pervasive principle of social cooperation, addressing, unlike Habermas's more formal model of democracy, the wider 'field of moral-practical conflicts [that] ... lie hidden behind the façade of late capitalist integration. 71 Meanwhile in economics, Amartya Sen has insisted on reconnecting economic discourse to ethical questions about the ends of human life through his notion of human capabilities (that is, 'the actual ability of [a] person to achieve those things that she has reason to value').72 Behind this revival of normative frameworks lie broader calls for rethinking the basis and nature of politics. Political theorist Nancy Fraser argues that the partly transnational constitution of contemporary politics makes urgent new second-order questions about the justice of 'relations of representation', questions about 'who is included in, and who excluded from, the circle of those entitled to a just distribution and reciprocal recognition.'73 Etienne Balibar, also influenced by the challenge of transnational politics, particularly in the contested space of 'Europe', suggests that we are in a moment







a politics of politics [aimed] at creating, recreating, and conserving the set of conditions within which politics as a collective participation in public affairs is possible, or at least not made absolutely impossible.⁷⁴

In a different way Pierre Rosanvallon insists on a new attention to indirect democracy, calling for the repoliticization of administrative and other procedural aspects of government that have fallen out of the political domain: this 'rediscovery of ordinary politics' approaches the question of voice, and the politics of politics, by rethinking the scope of everyday political action.⁷⁵ These attempts to reopen the normative horizon of politics are shared with other influential approaches, such as Hardt and Negri's writings on 'multitude'.⁷⁶

There is always the danger, however, that once we define our aims at this abstract meta-level, we lose focus. As Zygmunt Bauman remarks in *The Individualized Society*, there is little value in general critiques of individualism that fail to note its interlocking with more particular processes: what he calls 'the political economy of uncertainty'. It is here that historically more specific work – Michel Foucault's late lectures on the foundations of neoliberal thought, Boltanski and Chiapello's rich account of the 'new spirit of capitalism' and its networked hyperindividualism – provide essential resources. And behind all these lies a long-standing tradition that for three decades, in parallel to the strident discourse of neoliberalism, has quietly been insisting on the detailed role of narrative in human life (Charles Taylor, Paul Ricoeur, Alaisdair MacIntyre, Adriana Cavarero).

In all these ways, a rethinking of politics and culture beyond the horizon of neoliberalism is now in progress to which a critical sociology of voice an interrogation of the conditions for, and against, voice - can contribute. But this very project involves taking a normative stance. Neoliberalism's discounting of voice is so deeply embedded that alternative discourses that value voice will not simply emerge as if from a vacuum. They must be worked for, in opposition to forces that, even after what many regard as the worst financial crisis the world has seen in late 2008 (a crisis in which doctrines of market self-correction were acknowledged to fail even by their proponents), insist that nothing in neoliberal discourse, beyond perhaps a few superficial slogans, needs to change. It is here that Jonathan Lear's book Radical Hope provides inspiration. Lear reflects on the possibility of surviving absolute cultural loss, the sort of loss that faced American Indian peoples such as The Crow when the activities of inter-tribal territorial conflict that had oriented their way of living were made illegal by an arbitrary external power (the US government). As Lear makes clear, the point of his narrative is to illuminate situations far beyond that exceptional and tragic case,78 and to ask how human beings in general face times of great uncertainty through 'radical hope ... directed toward a future goodness that transcends the current ability to understand what it is'.79





like voice:

Radical hope rests, Lear explains, on at least three things: addressing a current crisis as openly and clearly as possible; facing the unknowability of the transformations which a current way of living will undergo; and finding some underlying principle from the past which can be sustained into a future period whose features cannot yet be anticipated. This returns us to voice's status as a second order value: its insistence that, whatever transformations social, political and economic structures undergo, none will be acceptable unless they are based on valuing individuals' ability to give an account of themselves and the conditions under which they live. Voice's apparent vagueness can, from this perspective, be seen as its strength, since it is only a flexible, second order value of this sort that can be expected to survive major transformations. Another strength is its link with the working principles of past democracy; something must be carried over from the past. And yet, in a crucial respect, voice is neither vague nor backward-looking: it articulates a direct response to neoliberalism's own second order value, market functioning, the card that trumps all considerations of voice. It is striking how Lear's vision of 'radical hope' is itself grounded in valuing a process much

although we may be corrected in various ways by others, we take ourselves to have authority when it comes to the narratives of our own lives. ... in general, we think it constitutive of a person having a life that he or she claims some authority over saying what is happening in it.⁸⁰

It is only from the perspective of humans as 'self-interpreting animals' with 'narratable lives',⁸¹ that the depth of loss to which radical hope was for Lear a possible answer comes into view: so too for the losses generated by neoliberal discourse. Only by facing and naming those losses do we have a chance of developing, over time and from many sources, a counter-rationality that can succeed neoliberalism and a 'counter-expertise'⁸² that generates new directions for policy and politics.

So if you expect from this book 'solutions' already to the political, social and infrastructural problems which the global financial and market crisis has generated, let alone proposals for the concrete forms in which, for example, markets can be better regulated in accordance with political values and social need, you will be disappointed. More specifically, this book will not address the extremely difficult question of whether implementing the value of voice requires some specific transformations of contemporary institutional structures, or even more broadly a transformation of contemporary structures of capitalism.⁸³ It may well do, but those questions go beyond the scope of this book. My hope, however, is that this book's attempt to develop some elements of a counter-rationality to neoliberalism will provide material for such discussions. We need first, I believe, to find the right starting-point from which such solutions and proposals might come into view, a different starting-point from that of neoliberal rationality. The task of







this bookis therefore modest, but for that reason perhaps more immediately helpful: to review our resources for describing the social world as if, once more, voice mattered.

Notes

- 1 Ricoeur (1984b: 28).
- 2 Deane (2004), Buckley et al. (2008), Tacchi et al. (2009). See also www.voicesindia.org.
- 3 Easton (1965) quoted Delli Carpini and Keater (1996: 12).
- 4 Aristotle (1992: 60)
- 5 Hardt and Negri (2006); Benhabib (2004).
- 6 Agamben (1998).
- 7 Peet (2007: 111-112).
- 8 Peet (2007: 4). For broader sociological accounts, see Sklair (2001), Smith (2008: chapter 4).
- 9 Harvey (2005); Peet (2007: 77).
- 10 Peet (2007: 27).
- 11 For useful summary, see Peet (2007: 7-8).
- 12 Frank (2001).
- 13 Unger (1998), Stiglitz (2002), Soros (1996).
- 14 El Pais 21 November 2002, quoted Juris (2008: 295).
- 15 Hirschman (1969). For a recent discussion, see Flew (forthcoming).
- 16 See Gray (2007: chapters 3 and 4).
- 17 Gramsci (1970). For discussion, see Gilbert (2008: 172–174) on Clarke (2004: 89). Compare Harvey (2005), Grossberg (2005), Giroux (2004a).
- 18 Boltanski and Chiapello (2005: 11).
- 19 Peet (2007).
- 20 See Background Note.
- 21 The first meaning of 'term' is 'a limit in space or time' (Shorter Oxford English Dictionary, 2000 edition).
- 22 Quoted Juris (2008: 120).
- 23 Juris (2008: 286).
- 24 Butler (2005).
- 25 Macintyre (1981: 194).
- 26 Taylor (1986).
- 27 Hirschman (1969: 30).
- 28 Taylor (1989), Ricoeur (1992), Butler (2005).
- 29 Marx (1973: 84), discussed by Harvey (2000: 118-119).
- 30 Macintyre (1981: 203). Cf. Ricoeur (1992: 161).
- 31 Cavarero (2000: 88).
- 32 Arendt (1958: 193).
- 33 Discussed by Honneth (2007: 222, 233).
- 34 See Honneth (2007: chapter 11) for discussion of the differences between Dewey and Habermas.
- 35 Harvey (2000: 118, added emphasis).
- 36 Cavarero (2000: 41).
- 37 Bourdieu (1999) on the 'space of points of view'.
- 38 Cavarero (2000: 21).
- 39 Spivak (1987: 59).
- 40 Cf. Hannerz (1980).
- 41 For this general sense, see Ricoeur (2005).
- 42 Butler (2005).
- 43 Du Bois (1989 [1903]: 3).







- 44 Levi (2000 [1961]: 26, 69).
- 45 Arendt (2004 [1951]: 583).
- 46 Agamben (1998); Proctor (1999: 314 n179) and Hilberg (1985: 872).
- 47 Proctor (1999: 118).
- 48 Brewer and Porter (1993).
- 49 Willis (1990); McRobbie (1997).
- 50 Lane (2000: 95).
- 51 As noted earlier, economist Albert Hirschman had already noted this in the 1960s (Hirschman 1969).
- 52 Friedman (1982: 135).
- 53 On the history of politics focused on consumption, see Cohen (2003), Littler (2009).
- 54 Frank (2001: 7-8).
- 55 Brown (2003: para 7).
- 56 Cf. Harvey (2000: 130) on embodiment and spatial organization.
- 57 Bauman (1989: 192).
- 58 Brown (2003: para 42).
- 59 Cavarero (2000: 33-34).
- 60 Banet-Weiser (forthcoming).
- 61 Lawson (2007).
- 62 Bobbitt (2003).
- 63 Layard and Dunn (2009: 135, 4, added emphasis).
- 64 Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2009b).
- 65 Lukes (1973: 196-197).
- 66 Kay (2009, added emphasis).
- 67 Williams (1961: 9-10).
- 68 Williams (1958: 318).
- 69 Hans Blumenberg's term (1992).
- 70 Williams (1989: 152) distinguishes between cultural studies' 'project' and its detailed practice.
- 71 Honneth (1995a: 207).
- 72 Sen (2002: 10).
- 73 Fraser (2005: 75).
- 74 Balibar (2004: 114). On the 'politics of politics', see also Beck (1997: 99).
- 75 Rosanvallon (2006: 244, 250).
- 76 Hardt and Negri (2006).
- 77 Bauman (2001: 52).
- 78 Lear (2006: 68).
- 79 Lear (2006: 133, 103). 80 Lear (2006: 3, 56).
- 81 Taylor (1986); Cavarero (2000).
- 82 Peet (2007: 194).
- 83 See especially Gilbert (2008).



