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## **‘The subject’ and Voice: Cross-Chapter Discussion**

### **Rachel Cockburn and Konstantinos Thomaidis**

**Konstantinos Thomaidis:** Thank you for sharing your chapter and its engaging discussion of a difficult ‘&’ – that of performance studies and political philosophy. There are a couple of points in particular that prompted further thinking for me. Let me start with the notion of the subject, for example. The second definition of the subject you provide refers to experts engaging in a disciplinary act (analysing or effecting performance, for example). I wonder what other categories could be productive in discussing their practices. Focusing on the person, the doer, for a moment, a couple of other terms, with different genealogies and resonances, come to mind: the individual and the self. Juxtapositions with ‘the subject’ might be of use in interdisciplinary exchange, specifically because they reveal the histories, assumptions and values each term connotes, in other words, specifically because they shift the emphasis from knowledge-as-object to knowledge-as-practice. When a ‘performer’ is (seen, understood, discussed, trained as) an *individual*, I sense an underlying opposition at play; the performer is an individual rather than part of a collective or ensemble, or is idiosyncratic, distinctive within the marketplace of performance. The performer as *self* comes with the tools and concepts of psychoanalysis; what shapes the self as an artist? What hinders the expression of ‘the true self’? How does the performer find their self? On the other hand, the performer as subject, to my eyes, partakes in the nexus of ideology; the term or appellation refers to what the performer believes is performance, how it should be practised, for what reasons and for whom (in accordance with a set of generally accepted values).

As my inclination is always to return to voice(s), I tend to think of Althusser when referring to the ideological making of the subject in his famous 'hailing' scene, when an individual is addressed by a policeman and responds to the call. It is in that moment that the individual becomes a subject, by accepting the call, recognising themselves in the call, and by simultaneously establishing and perpetuating the power relations that go with participating in such a call-and-response. Extending this scheme, if we are to speak of the subject of performance studies, who does the calling? And who responds? For what reason? Who decides when an individual/scholar – or why not, a self (someone for whom conducting research 'rings true'/'close to home' or is a practice fundamentally definitional for who they are) – becomes a subject/scholar?

**Rachel Cockburn:** A generous response, with many interesting thoughts. Though first, which might not be as clear as I had intended in the chapter, but the main disciplines I initially aimed to address were performance and political philosophy, performance in the context of performance studies – and the tricky concept of the 'subject.' Performance studies was something thrown my way further down the path, and I am still grappling with negotiating that and political philosophy. I say this just as a way of giving a sense of the direction I am coming from. And in turn, how it informs my response.

There are many slippery and tricky terms in this terrain, and certainly I think considering the three – the individual, the self, and the subject – is both extremely interesting and quite the can of worms. The sense of opposition at play you point to in terms of the individual/self and the subject, while I see it can be understood as an opposition, for my part I do not see them in actuality as oppositions. Though they are oppositions in terms of how they are understood perhaps.

In terms of political philosophy at least, whilst Althusser's notion of interpellation is very apt, I see the constitution of 'the subject' as something more immanent to the individual themselves. For example, following a biopolitical way of thinking – though I am cautious not to go down that rabbit-hole here – the networks, technologies and regimes of self are not external to the individual but shape the very way we understand ourselves as individuals, the very way we might come to identify our 'true self,' and we can only do this if we are subjects. Arguably, is the notion of a 'true self' not also an ideological construction?

**KT:** This is precisely the point that I am getting at. I am not trying to establish a(n essentialist, ahistorical and presupposed) distinction between terms or positionalities. I am more interested in the *circumstances and contexts* of their use and application – which means, in *when and for what reasons* someone chooses to examine (or address) the performer as a subject, as a self, or as an individual. Returning to voice-related practices for a brief moment, a performer can simultaneously be a self (to be deconstructed and restructured according to the way a specific training understands the 'true self'), an individual (that builds on the above scenario of selfhood in a personal way so as to be marketed as unique), and a subject (enacting a tacit politics of participation and/or exclusion from professional communities). The question for me would be: why does the trainee voicer need to be addressed as (such) a self in the first place? Are there ways to resist this delineation or foreground the *ideological* workings of such modes of address and such practices within voice pedagogy?

**RC:** Not knowing much at all about voice studies/practice in performance or forensics, I am responding to this from the outside a little. The thing that came to mind reading your chapter, time and again was the classical political distinction first set out by Aristotle – that between voice and speech – *phone* and *logos*. I am brutally paraphrasing here, and perhaps you know

it better than me, but basically *logos* is political speech, *logos* being that which distinguishes the qualified life of *bios politikos*, whereas *phone* is voice – babble, incoherent utterances, belonging to the animal. Of course, that distinction set out so bluntly by Aristotle has been softened down the centuries, but certainly there is the distinction still present in the world we live in today... And I was very interested in this sense of how you are looking at the voice – not speech – and taking it in its material, affective, utterance form so to speak, rather than speech. But at the same time, the voice is qualified through a scientific frame, or ‘expert’ that renders it intelligible and validated, to be spoken about.

I was particularly interested in terms of the distinction you make in the end between voice - stable and predetermined, and voicing as unruly and processual. Does speech not come into this as the predetermined? Or where does speech come into this at all? Why not? Is this interesting to consider at all in terms of the political aspect of the work, and more specifically in relation to the ‘subject’? Perhaps this distinction between voice and speech is moot, but I was just interested thinking this through in terms of some political theory distinctions.

**KT:** There is much debate around the terms and their respective genealogies. Currently, I tend to deploy ‘voice’ as a more open term that can encompass speech but, crucially, other material manifestations of phonation (non-verbal sounds, for instance), voices understood as internal (voice of conscience and verbal hallucinations), and voice as a metaphor (the voice of the oppressed). This use helps me go beyond a politics of speech (exchange of formulated ideas) towards a politics of voice, which *can* refer to linguistic political discourse but also an embodied politics of vocality.

Taking cue from your text and response here, but thinking mostly of my practice as a voice practitioner-scholar, let me divert further towards voice. This is a highly personal(ised) take, but going through the philosophical and critical literature of/on voice, it appears that there are

two, fundamentally apposite, approaches to voice and subjectivity-making. One strand conflates voice with subject; voice announces the self and claims its (personal, social or political) 'place' in a unique, unmistakable way. Whenever someone voices, the unheard underlying 'sub-text' is 'This is me saying: ...' Think of seeing a friend on the street. They turn to you saying 'Good morning'; according to this strand of thought, your friend delineates themselves as separate, unique, unrepeatable in addressing you: '(This is me, your friend, and I say to you) "Good morning."' This understanding of voice has been taken up by sociology and political analysis, assigning 'voices' to groups, or helping marginalised and disenfranchised groups 'find their voice'. The other strand, drawing on psychoanalytical theory, presents a more complex scenario: the embryo hears the mother's voice as a surrounding, resonating presence inside her body, the voice literally bathes the embryo into a 'one-ness' with the mother and it recognises her voice as its own – or as an extension of the connection that is the dyad it forms with the mother. When the newborn starts developing a sense of the self as separate from the mother, the voice also emerges as a separation: the baby starts experiencing the voice as something the mother responds to with her own voice. The realisation comes that they both have a separate voice; the personal voice is an outcome of a separation, of the breaking down of the assumption of oneness. According to this line of thinking, each voicing act is underlined not by an announcement of identity but by a yearning for that lost oneness, for a voice that will resound back. In the above example, the sub-text in your friend's address would be: '(I am addressing you and I yearn for a response to my voice when saying) "Good morning."' In the first case, voice is an excess of selfhood, in the second a fundamental lack. Practically, I am not convinced that any uber-scenario stands its ground as an overarching, all-applicable formula, but the distinction helps me ask: is your critique addressed to 'the subject'/knower as excessive, delineated, concrete, announcing him/herself? Are there ways to generate 'the subject' as lacking and vulnerable, as always intersubjective?

**RC:** The political philosopher Ernesto Laclau has a very interesting distinction of ‘the subject’ and ‘subject positions,’ which is informed quite a lot from Lacan’s work around the subject and, of course, lack. He makes the distinction between the subject which is the unrepresentable ‘empty place’ – I think he means here the ‘I,’ and ‘subject positions.’ There is a lack of full identity in the subject and it is for this very reason that the subject necessarily has to invest in socially determined subject positions – ‘artist,’ ‘academic,’ ‘student’ etc. – and the values, beliefs, modes of knowledge within which these are articulated. This process of identification involves a struggle, so to speak, of the various subject positions. And, thinking about what you say above, perhaps it could be possible to think of this struggle in terms of the identifications of the subject/self/individual, and the voice/speech. If when the subject identifies with a specific subject position, the subject is reduced to a specific subject position, then this struggle is exciting to think about in terms of practice – whether it be the practice of the scholar or the voice practitioner, or both.

What I am asking here is can the performance studies scholar resist reduction into a subject position and what practice might that generate, or not? Certainly, this is interesting to consider in terms of the distinction of voice and speech. How do we understand the voice within performance studies scholarship beyond that of simply the authorial voice? The question for performers – how does a performer resist being a performer ‘subject position’, and work from the place of the subject – particularly in terms of a disciplinary practice? And not necessarily as the ‘true self’ or some *via negativa*. Of course addressing these questions is not necessary in the making of performance practice, though it is an important consideration if we want to ask how the ‘political’ subject of performance might be understood. I think this is getting at your point at the end of this last section.