TOWARDS A GEOGRAPHY OF VOICE-HEARING

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Abstract

The social psychiatrists Marius Romme and Sandra Escher argue that boundaries are of critical importance in the therapeutic treatment of so-called 'auditory verbal hallucinations' (AVH), or, what is better known as, 'hearing voices'. Limiting voices to a specific time and place, they argue, helps 'voice-hearers' to take back control from their voices. This paper draws inspiration from contemporary debates on sonic geographies to explore what it means for voice-hearers to engage in a complex relationship with their voices. We analyse a range of material and affective spaces to understand what it means for a voice-hearer to transcend, mediate and rework the boundaries between interior and exterior worlds. Besides a detailed conceptual discussion on the geography of voices and voicehearing, we conducted semi-structured interviews with a sample of thirty voice-hearers in North-East and South-East England to gain insight into their voice geographies. The participants move us to appreciate how voice-hearers construe relationships with their voices in complex and ambiguous ways. Some voice-hearers were able to challenge and even change the balance of power, allowing them to be 'in control', while others were not. The paper is aimed at introducing voice-hearing to a growing body of work on geographies of the voice.

TOWARDS A GEOGRAPHY OF VOICE-HEARING

Where does the voice come from? Where do we hear it? How do we tell the external voice from the voice in the head? This is the first ontological decision, the first epistemological break, the source of all subsequent ontology and epistemology

(*A Voice and Nothing More*, Dolar, 2006: 80)

INTRODUCTION

It is estimated that 5 percent to 15 percent of the general population hears voices that are not heard by others (Beavan et al. 2011). Other accounts indicate that this number could be as high as 28 percent (de Leede-Smith and Barkus 2013). Despite its widespread pervasiveness, so-called 'voice-hearers' face rampant social and medical stigmatisation (Beavan and Read 2010). Socially diminished to a status of eccentricity, while medially their experiences are diagnosed as a symptom of an underlying psychological illness (Romme and Escher 1989). This article contributes to a growing body of literature in the medical humanities (Woods 2013, 2017, Woods et al. 2015, Blackman 2000, 2012, Leudar and Thomas 2000) and critical psychiatry (Romme and Escher 1989, 1993, 2000, 2008 and McCarthy-Jones 2013) that challenges such views. Instead of categorising voices as a symptom of something else, disregarding them as meaning*less*, this more critical body of work pursues an approach that conceives of voices as meaning*ful*, affective and constitutive expressions of, what Nancy (2007) has described as, the "resonant subject". This paper aims to contribute to this alternative field by exploring how voice-hearing is experienced spatially. In particular, we analyse what it means for a voice-hearer to assert and rework the boundaries between interior and exterior worlds.

An analysis of voice-hearing starts with the voice. The historically Western emphasis on language and meaning in discussions of the voice, granting it the position of the "guarantor of truth and self-presence" (Weidman 2014: 39), has meant that other aspects of its communicative potential are underexplored. In our geography of voice-hearing, we draw on an emergent body of literature that focuses on the possibilities for alternative modes of listening and hearing. Extra-linguistic and non-representational approaches to the voice, which transgress the traditional emphasis on the interrelationship between voice, speech and the abstraction of language, comprise a creative field of enquiry that covers a range of intersecting subjects. These include, but are not limited to, political geographies of speaking and listening (Kanngieser 2012, Bennett et al. 2015, Nieuwenhuis 2019), sensory and affective sound geographies (Doughty et al. 2016, Duffy and Waitt 2013), practices of embodied listening (Blackman 2000, 2012, Paterson 2015), voice geographies of childhood (Mills 2016), ontologies of voice-listening (Nancy 2007, Dolar 1996, 2006, Simpson 2009) and others. This emergent field has expanded and transformed traditional understandings of communication as solely a semantic relation between an active speaker and passive listener. Instead, we have come to revisit voices as dynamic, active and multisensory processes of "socio-material assemblage" (Revill 2017).

This conceptual reframing enables a returning to and reopening of older questions of what a voice is, what it does and can do. Indeed, as the Slovene philosopher and Lacanian psychoanalyst Mladen Dolar (2006: 31) writes, the "voice is endowed with profundity: by not meaning anything, it appears to mean more than mere words, it becomes the bearer of some unfathomable originary meaning which, supposedly, got lost with language". The retrieval of the potentiality of a voice beyond language

operates through a modality of listening which, if we were to follow Nancy (2007), reverberates and echoes its soundings, constituting and producing space. Listening to a voice is a surrounding, immersive and embodied experience of being-with. This shared "vocalic space", to use Connor's (2000: 12) terminology, is a space that mediates ephemerally, yet meaningfully, invisibly, but not immaterially, in-between, but also within bodies. It produces the affective, political and ambiguous space in-between the body of the 'mouthed' self and that of the 'eared' Other.

It seems unclear where the interior world of the voice ends and where the exterior begins. Indeed, to whom does the voice belong to, where does it come from, or perhaps more interesting still, is it even an 'object' that can be possessed or, rather, does it take possession of the body? Do I 'find' my voice, or does a voice find me? Do we speak only with one voice, or with many? Sensory geographies, such as the one proposed by Serres (2008: 141, 142), question entrenched ontologies of a sealed and impermeable bodily self, arguing instead for immersion and embodiment:

> We live in noises and shouts, in sound waves just as much as in spaces, the organism is erected, anchors itself in space, … I am the home and hearth of sound, hearing and voice all in one, black box and echo, hammer and anvil, echo chamber, music cassette, pavilion, question mark drifting through the space of meaningful or meaningless messages, emerging from my own shell or drowning in the sound waves… In many languages, to listen is to obey: seduced by a voice, the body follows.

"By the ear", Serres (1995: 7) writes elsewhere, "I hear: temple, drum, pavilion, but also my entire body and the whole of my skin. We are immersed in sound just as we are immersed in air and light, we are caught up willy-nilly in its hurly-burly." Finding a path of meaning amidst such excessive aural immersion requires sensible

'orchestration'. Sensory distinctions, however, are not primary, but appear organised socially, historically and geographically.

Drawing on Mikhail Bakhtin's idea of many layered voices within a single utterance, for which he used the term "heteroglossia", sound anthropologists have observed how "consciousness" results from "artful orchestration" (Hill in Weidman 2014). "[T]he author/narrator 'chooses an orientation among the moral and ideological implications of the voices of the heteroglossic world' [Hill in ibid: 43]... [W]e come to know ourselves and position ourselves in society by echoing, transforming, or silencing the voices of others" (Minks in ibid).

What happens, however, if, contrary to the focus of dominant discourses on listening and soundscapes, including even the most progressive ones, the speaker and the hearer are the same person? How to account for the vocalic space shared only within the private circuit of the manifold self? A self that speaks (with) many voices, sometimes in conflict, sometimes in tandem, narrating experiences of both the past and present. Indeed, little phenomenological or geographical research exists that considers listening to voices that only one person hears.[i] How do these ambiguities shape the possibility and idea of an affective geography of voice-hearing? It seems, we think, that what might be required is a conceptually grounded understanding of the spaces in which voice-hearing unfolds.

We draw on both critical psychiatric and (post)phenomenological literatures to nurture and cultivate more attentive and affective sensitivities towards the aural self-communication that voice-hearing is and, more interestingly, *does.* We engage with different bodies of literature, which converge in a shared effort to think beyond voice as only language, to propose a geography of voice-hearing that is 'attuned' to the

unique spatiality of voice-hearers. If it is correct, as suggested by Anja Kanngieser (2012: 337), that there is "a geography of voice" as "voice and space – co-create one another", then how would a geography of voice-hearing sound like?

We start to approach this and other, connected, questions by analysing the voice(s) of voice-hearers as a medium — albeit not restricted by definitions of language or even 'sound' — through which boundaries of the self and the other, the interior and the exterior are negotiated, made and remade. A voice, if we were held to account for the fluidity, ambiguity and plurality of its meanings, is not exclusively the 'stuff' that comes from me and travels to you, but is, in a similar fashion as we think about the breath that carries it (Nieuwenhuis 2019), closer to an elemental medium that spatializes the self, the other and the endless possible worlds that unfold in this open-ended relational process. A voice is not autonomous to the self, it is not singular, nor is simply a 'thing' that a supposedly sovereign self can enact upon, but, instead, it constitutes and (re)produces a subjectivist and sensorial self. "To say that we produce ourselves in voice is to say that we stage in our voice the very distinction between speaking and hearing which provides the setting in which the voice can resound" (Connor 2000: 6).

The specifics of a voice-hearer's geography, which we will come to explore in more detail in a moment, starts with the collapse of the boundaries of inside/ outside that are normally, but not unproblematically, associated with speaking and hearing. Voice-hearing constitutes a dissolution of such boundaries, which compels voice-hearers to filter and structure sounds in new and interesting geographies of meaning. To be sure, the fact that a voice-hearer's voice(s) is not audible for ears 'outside', or that their larynx is not the originator of its sounds, does not exclude the reality of a

voice that speaks. The voice(s) of the voice-hearer *does* speak; their voices are real.[ii] Their origins, however, are ambiguous and diffused corporally, temporally and spatially.

A voice-hearer's voice is historical, geographical and social, as much as it is medical and embodied. One of us conducted semi-structured interviews with a sample of thirty voicers hearers in North-East and South-East England to understand the ways their voices are spatialised. Many of the voice-hearers whom we interviewed felt distressed by their voices. Such an anxious psychic experience has the potential to involve disruptive senses of borders between the conscious and unconscious. We looked at how individuals experience their voices and emotions within parts of their bodies, including their limbs and brains, but also in a variety of exterior spaces. Analysing the geography of voice-hearing is important because, as we argue, hearing a voice involves both emotionality and spatiality. It is thus helpful for researchers to consider more carefully the ways in which different spaces may have a bearing on how voice-hearers relate to their voices and emotions. We hope that our engagement can shed an early light on the ways geographies of voice-hearing permeate within and in-between the body's interior and its exterior environment. Focusing on the spaces voices inhabit should not only be of interest for voice-hearers but could also contribute to broader discussions on the place of the voice in embodied and sonic geographies.

The first section of our paper provides a review of relevant literature on voice-hearing and listening. In our analysis, we build the case for a meaningful voice that operates on a separate plane from 'formal' language. This voice reverberates in aural thoughts, but also other sounds of meaning, which makes listening an affective, but

also a spatially diffused exercise. Following on from this conceptual framing, the second section focuses on the ways voice-hearing can be 'attuned' to. Voice-hearing, we argue, has a specific geography that is premised on a distinctive aural spatiality that blurs divisions of inside and outside. We argue that this compels voice-hearers to negotiate and assert boundaries of and for the space of the self. In the third section, we offer an empirical analysis of the voice-hearing geography of eight respondents to demonstrate how these boundaries materialise in imagined, physical and embodies spaces. Space has an immediate impact on how and where voice-hearers engage with their voices. The conclusion reiterates our call for a geography of voice-hearing, and offers avenues for potential future research.

VOICES IN THE LITERATURE

The ability to hear in the 'absence of an external stimulus' is in conventional medical literature described as an 'auditory verbal hallucination' (AVH) (Woods 2017, Rojcewicz and Rojcewicz 1997). A leading psychiatric article on the link with schizophrenia, a psychopathologic diagnosis often associated with AVH, describes the 'hallucination' (from *alucinari*, 'to mind wander') as an experience in which "inner speech is mistaken for an external event and misattributed to an external source" (Johns et al. 2001: 701, see also Bentall 1990). This "error of mind…, which [alters] representation", to quote Foucault (2006: 241), is largely accepted as a sensory failure to recognise the sounds that can be heard on the inside as being different from those that occur outside. A consequence is that AVH historically has been stigmatised as an abnormality, a neurological illness and/ or a cultural signifier of 'madness'. The 'inner voice' is said either not to be or, at best, not equal to the 'outer voice'. [iii] "The hearing of voices is a signifier of deficit, disease, pathology, and lack,

indicating that a person has lost certain psychological propensities and is unable to function as a responsible citizen" (Blackman 2000: 57). Hearing voices, which signifies an inability to control the senses, as if a foreign entity has taken possession of the 'true' self, is framed as something alien and even dangerous.

'Madness', which is to be understood as a social and historical category, rather than a fixed and individual medical condition (Foucault 2006), often has been presented to express itself through the medium of voice (see e.g. Leudar and Thomas 2000). Dominant perceptions of madness in Western psychoanalytic and cultural discourses are articulated primarily through the voicing of 'non-language' (e.g. McCarthy-Jones 2013). A consequence is that AVH often is reduced to "a dysfunction in language processes" (Waters and Jardri 2014: 533). Internal voices are contrasted with and considered opposite to the authoritative rationality of (a) language that communicates 'outwards'.[iv] Contemporary clinical approaches to AVH continue to be characterised by historical methods that explain the 'imagined' voice in purely neurological and, typically, in negative terms.[v] In other words, these voices are diagnosed as the psychotic symptoms of an underlying medical condition rather than the inexhaustible potential for communicative expression of someone's bibliographical, social, ontological and interpersonal being. McCarthy-Jones (2013: 2), in one of the first systematic historical overviews of the meaning and causes of AVH, warns that the term is "one [that] has been created by a professional class who do not typically have the experience themselves, and which is rejected by those who do."

Since the late 1980s, there has been an emergent body in the alternative and applied psychiatric literature (e.g. Romme and Escher 1989, 1993) and, more

recently, in the medical humanities (e.g. Woods 2013, 2017 and Woods et al. 2015) that has started to veer away from conventional psychotherapeutic diagnoses. Rather than attempting to subdue or silence the voice, risking estranging the voice-hearer from their voice(s), they propose a mode of healing that considers the experiences of voice-hearing through alternative and broader modalities of communication. The voice-hearer, they explain, is a "figure, symbol or category of identity… [that individuals can] inhabit, and mobilise in order to lay claim to a view of voice-hearing as meaningful within" (Woods 2013: 264, 268). To hear voices, in other words, does not refer to a (false) sense of perception, but to an attempt of creating meaning and making sense of the self. The voice(s) is an expression of a version of the self, oftentimes a traumatised self of the past, to the self that is today. Voice-hearing, as Blackman (2010, 2012) reminds us, is a corporal affectivity.

In a large mixed-methods investigation into AVH phenomenology, medical humanities scholar Angela Woods (2013, 2017, Woods et al. 2015) explains that voice-hearing "is an experience which can take many forms and occur in a wide variety of clinical and non-clinical contexts" (Woods et al. 2017: 1). Participants in their study (Woods et al. 2015) used a number of terms to describe their hearing, including "intuitive knowing", "telepathic experience", or identifiers such as "alters", "parts", or "fellow system members". Some of the "voices" express themselves as auditory sounds, but at least a fifth were experienced as "thought-like" or non-verbal (e.g. cries, laughter, but also music, wind blowing sounds, animal calls, water falling etc.) (Nayani and David 1996, Waters and Jardri 2014). In other research, voice-hearers show an ability to extract speech from apparent noise and ambiguous sounds (Alderson-Day et al. 2017). Voices, in short, do not have to be based on person-like experiences (Woods 2017). Blackman (2016: 257), arguing for the need

to develop progressive biopsychosocial approaches, writes that "voice-hearing is distributed across the senses and encompasses modalities of sense-making that exceed narrow conceptions of cognition and thinking".

There appears to be a growing consensus, at least in this more interdisciplinary section of the literature, to see voice-hearing not as a homogeneous medical condition, or even an exclusively auditory experience that can be reduced to language lateralisation, but rather as an alternative modality of affective transference. Such a reading permits the possibility to approach the diversity of voice-hearing experiences in a more phenomenological and embodied frame of analysis. More specifically, it provides us with an opportunity to rethink and broaden the scope of what a voice is and, more importantly, beyond its obvious semantic and aesthetic qualities and properties, what the voice *does*.

Voice studies recently have become a popular field of enquiry and, interestingly for our paper, have shifted away from linguistic theories of meaning. Deconstructive and psychoanalytic thinkers such as Mladen Dolar (2006:15) describe the voice as an elusive "excess…. [The] voice is precisely that which cannot be said. It is there, in the very act of saying, but it eludes any pinning down, to the point where we could maintain that it is the non-linguistic, the extra-linguistic element, which enables speech phenomena, but cannot itself be discerned by linguistics". Speaking, therefore, does not limit itself to the spoken word, but, as Kanngieser (2012: 337, see also Nieuwenhuis 2019) in another vein writes, transgresses into the "the extra-linguistic elements of communication: the soundings, gestures and affective transmissions that make up our different relations… The voice, in its expression of affective and ethico-political forces, creates worlds".

Voice geographers, including Simpson (2009) and Gallagher (2020), analyse the ways in which sonorous aspects of speech produce environments and ecologies, emphasising the need, as others (Gallagher et al.: 2017) suggest, to expand geographies of listening. "An expanded conception of listening concerns the responsiveness of bodies encountering sound – bodies of any and every kind, in different ways and contexts" (ibid.: 620). Writing about the human body, Simpson (2009: 2569) observes that "in listening we become embodied", in the sense that we are listening with our body. Listening, in other words, enables the sound of a voice to resonate within us. The experience of listening may "equally disturb or unsettle us" or make us "feel at peace" (ibid.: 2571).

What happens, however, if there are no apparent sounds that ears can either hear or listen to? We caution against myths of soundless silences. If we were to agree, and we do, that a voice is as much a 'sound' as a 'relation', more attention would need to be drawn to the link between "acoustic perception and thought" and "the somatic and multisensorial features of auditory hallucination" (Woods et al. 2015: 330). Voice-hearing, therefore, begs for a rethinking of what casually is referred to as 'hearing' and 'listening'. It bridges and blurs the lines of division between these supposedly distinct practices. Voices of the 'internal other' (ie. those that are experienced and felt as not belonging to the 'self') merge the activity of hearing, as an embodied, emotional and psychological sensory process, with the act of listening, as a distinct cognitive process. Voice-hearing also redefines hearing and listening as active rather than passive practices. In other words, voices *make* sense, meaningfully, emotionally and sensorily — categories which should not be considered separate from each other, but fluid and connected. Voice-hearing is able to approach and connect with the "unrepresentable", the "unspeakable" and "unknowable" (Blackman

2010: 165), where other, more conventional modalities of listening often find themselves limited to and dependent on language or, in more progressive forms of listening, to the receiving cochlea (Paiva 2018).

Voice-hearing does not only help us in questioning what the voice could be or what it could do, but also raises the question where and when a voice is. Voice-hearing respondents in a study conducted by Leudar and Thomas (2000: 172), for instance, were able to localise their voices in particular areas of the brain, doing "almost as well as the state-of-the-art PET scanners", while others stated to hear voices through their ears, or inside other limbs and body parts. We explore such experiences in more detail in a later section in this paper. In her study on bodily memory and trauma, Blackman (2010) explains that the voice does not even have to reside in the present or within the individual body. She alludes to a voice constituted by a multiplicity of past selves. In a similar vein, Cho (2008: 182) explores the disembodied transgenerational "spectral voice" that continues to haunt the post-War Korean "diasporic unconsciousness". These and other such voices speak through an "affective transfer" (Blackman 2010) that interlinks and reverberates, often subconsciously, across different times, spaces and bodies. In fact, it is the inevitably and deeply embodied nature of the voice, always inscribed by class, race and gender, that affectively transfers affect and emotion across time and space.

SPATIAL ATTUNEMENT

Voices, past and present, speak in anticipation to be heard and listened to. The voices of voice-hearers are modalities of embodied being, equipped with specific subjectifying and emotional traits that, instead of being ignored or silenced, are meant to be engaged with, because, as Connor (2000) explains in his cultural history

of ventriloquism and Nancy (2007) so eloquently posits in his phenomenology of listening, voices echo and form (part of) a worlding self.

> What a voice, any voice, always says, no matter what the particular local import may be of the words it emits, is this: this, here, this voice, is not merely a voice, a particular aggregation of tones and timbres; it is voice, or voicing itself. Listen, says a voice: *some being is giving voice* (Connor 2000: 3, 4, emphasis added).

"Affective transfer", Blackman (2010: 168) writes, is a modality of listening that allows "memory, perception, the senses and the psyche to be decoupled from a bounded, singular and distinctly human body, and the foregrounding of an examination of practices that were considered marginal, exceptional and – by many – to be a sign of pathology or irrational perception." Arguments for an alternative modality of listening, albeit from an altogether different angle, also have been expressed by Nancy (2007:1, original emphasis), who, in his critique of Western philosophy, raises the simple yet effective question whether "listening is something of which [Western] philosophy is capable? Or… hasn't [it] superimposed upon listening... something else that might be more on the order of *understanding*?" Both Nancy and Blackman, but also others (e.g. Connor 2000, Dolar 2006), deal with the question of how a voice can be listened to. They arrive at different answers, which sadly we cannot discuss in detail, but they converge on the idea that listening should move beyond "the kinds of distinction between the outside and inside that psychiatric definitions of voice-hearing rely upon" (Blackman 2000: 139).

> To listen is to enter that spatiality by which, at the same time, I am penetrated, for it opens up in me as well as around me, and from me as well as toward me: it opens me inside me as well as outside, and it is through such a double, quadruple, or sextuple opening that a 'self' can take place (Nancy 2007: 14).

The idea of a blurring of borders between the self's interior and exterior enables a departure from the supposed singularity of the voice and offers an opportunity to pursue a more socially diffused attunement to its where, when and whom. Boyle (2002: 271) writes that a "fuller understanding of voice-hearing will involve acknowledging that voice-hearing is a social phenomenon, involving those immediately around the voice-hearer as well as social authorities and wider cultural practices."

Romme and Escher (1989, 1993, 2000 and 2008) were among the first to care for the broader social, historical and geographic structures that underpin voice-hearing. The two researchers, who also are the founding members of the influential *Hearing Voices Movement*[vi], start from the premise that there is not a definite "connection between the characteristics of hearing voices and specific psychiatric illnesses... If this is the case," they argue, "then there should be a connection between hearing voices, life history and living circumstances" (Romme and Escher 1996: 138). Their inclusive, subtle and attuned approach pursues the view that voices act "as a representation of real experiences that, oftentimes, can be traced to traumatic past experiences of the hearer" (Romme and Escher 2008: 19, see also Corstens and Longden 2013). The objective of therapeutic 'intervention', therefore, should not set on denying or forcing the voices to go away, as this would be neither possible nor desirable, but to find ways to learn to live with them in less harmful ways.[vii] This learning to live-with the internal Other(s) includes, as Blackman (2000) writes, a considered sensitivity towards the affective, embodied and lived experience felt in the relationship(s) with the voice(s).

Listening to experiences of voice-hearing requires recognition of the different ways in which and places wherein voices are situated. This is also because, as Connor (2000: 12) writes, "the bodily or phenomenological conditions of the voice determine and are determined by cultural and historical orderings of space… [T]the voice may be grasped as the mediation between the phenomenological body and its social and cultural contexts". The voice is both of and beyond the body, it is historical and at the same time contemporary, one and many. It is not, as Revill (2017: 59) warns, the product of "sovereign individual utterance" but of "spatial complexity" and "polyvocality".

Finding an appropriate way to attune to a voice rests on considering the wider spatial and historical context from which it 'reverberates'. Katy Bennett et al. (2015: 13) describe a mode of listening that involves, what Nancy (2007: 4) identified as, a process of "being attuned to" [*être à l'écoute*], which is mindful of differences in voice, but also one that "matures and evolves alongside… feelings and experiences". 'Inner' voices are just as complex and layered, albeit not necessarily for the same reasons, as those that appear to reside only 'outside' (see also Hayward 2003). Inwards voices enjoy similar intonations, affective resonances, silences and other emotional characteristics as those possessed by 'external' voices. These properties create and mediate temporal and spatial distances that are formative of the self.

Romme and Escher (2000, see also Hayward 2003) suggest that this pattern of relating, a process based on subjectivity and affectivity, mirrors the relationships with 'regular' voices, and that, just like in 'normal' relationships, in which communication is mediated through a complex web of power relations, it is important to situate those

relationships in similar social, historical and geographical contexts.[viii] To be sure, this means, as Woods (2017: 254) explains, that a phenomenology of voice-hearing is "fundamentally constituted through a network of social relations which cannot be abstracted from wider logics of race, class, gender, sexuality and history".[ix] This makes it important to listen to and work with what the voices say, but also consider from *where* and *when* they 'speak'. Listening, in other words, has to attune to the temporality and spatiality in which voices are heard.

Voices speak in particular geographies, shaped by spaces of historical and emotional resonance, which makes boundary-making an important instrument to (re)assert "control and create a balance with everyday life" (Jackson at el. 2010: 490). Control over space, ensuring that dialogue unfolds in a bounded safe place at a self-determined time, enables voice-hearers "to maintain and manage feelings of agency" (McGrath and Reavery 2015: 115). Hearing is an activity, more unconsciousness perhaps than seeing, which, as we alluded to earlier, requires a mediatory orchestration of filtering, coding and structuring the dynamic and excessive 'noise' of the world. "In giving sounds a structure, we attempt to fix and spatialise... what is in its nature transient" (Conner 2000: 17). The act of hearing, an orienting and embodying exercise, is for voice-hearers, as it is for other hearers, first and foremost a boundary-making practice. As noted earlier, the boundaries between voice-hearers' inner and external worlds can be unclear. The geographer Liz Bondi (2014: 65) notes that "psychoanalysis understands the boundary between interior and exterior to be unstable, porous and mutable. Boundaries, and the distinction between inside and outside, are intrinsically spatial ideas". What sets voice-hearing apart from other modes of hearing, however, is that the task of boundary-making is an internally negotiated process. The voice-hearer is thrown into a regulatory

position in which she has to negotiate a sense of self by delimiting inside from outside.

A failure to draw boundaries may result in an ontological crisis in which divisions between interior and exterior break down. Blackman (2012: 141) writes that the risk of "otherness", the experience of "being other to the self," usually involves "a dissolution of boundaries, which can be enacted and felt cross-modally - that is the experience might involve all the senses... People often feel sensations under their skin; they might experience an overwhelming sense of being polluted or feeling contaminated or possessed". In a different vein, Parr (1999: 675, 682), drawing on the psychoanalytic work of James Glass, describes how "delusional experiences involve disruptive senses of borders, boundaries, and borderlessness and that these have differing implications and effects at the differing scales of the body, home, and city… Having such experiences on a daily basis in the home means that usual domestic and social functioning within this space is disrupted, itself causing, for some, a crisis of identity".

The significance of asserting, reworking or even remaking boundaries, whose first breaching contributed to the original trauma (e.g. abuse, bullying, neglect, loss), has been observed in a number of case studies (Longden 2010, Jones et al. 2016; Jackson et al, 2010, de Jager et al. 2016; Hayward et al. 2014). Sometimes place boundaries are built metaphorically (Longden 2010), and at other times they are located within the body or outside of it. Jones et al. (2016: 331) describe how one of their respondents compared her voices ("delusions") to "big networks" that she drew onto large "word-map-looking things of words with lines between them". Another of

the respondents explains how she "could push people… to a different area of the brain or to a different area of the cavity in the skull" (ibid).

What these different boundaries seem to have in common is an attempt to format, demarcate, negotiate and carve out a geography of and for the self. Divisions made between inside and outside enable the self 'to put things into place'. It facilitates a mode of orientation / orchestration from which the self is transformed into an intelligible subject without abandoning the voice(s) that are part of it. In the next section, we offer a series of vignettes and reflections from our interviews in which we listen to how voice-hearers map both physical and embodied boundaries in an effort to mediate the self between interior and exterior, the past and present, and the self and the other.

GEOGRAPHIES OF VOICE-HEARERS

Research Design

For this study, we conducted a series of interviews with 30 voice hearers[x] Participants were members of the public who heard voices. As part of a doctoral research project, one of us interviewed our respondents over a period of twenty months at mental health conferences and in two community mental health centres in South East England and North East England. Participants were over the age of eighteen, and none was currently an inpatient in a psychiatric hospital. All were English speaking. A large proportion of the participant group was unemployed, which, unfortunately, is not unusual (Nithsdale et al., 2008). We chiefly recruited our interviewees from two community mental health centres focused on service-users that are distressed by their voices. We found our participants through purposive

sampling, with the aim of generating "insight and in-depth understanding" (Patton, 2002: 230). Purposive sampling involved selecting participants on the basis that they would be able to provide "information-rich" data on experiences of voice-hearing (Patton, 2002: 230). By recruiting from two community mental health centres, we were exposed to a broad range of frameworks of understanding that people had for their voices.

Establishing trust with the voice-hearers was important for ethical reasons, as this meant that they could "feel comfortable disclosing personal information" (Braun and Clarke, 2013: 81). Rapport was therefore a key component in collecting meaningful qualitative data (Reinharz in ibid). We gave service-users a verbal and an aural summary of our research, and offered them the opportunity to ask questions. We then asked participants to sign a consent form, agreeing to be included in our research. Emily Knoll decided to make the disclosure early on in the therapeutic sessions that she was a survivor researcher, so that service-users were more comfortable with her being present. Once she had built relationships with service-users, she recruited participants for the interviews.

One of our research aims in the interviews was to explore the ways in which voice-hearers attempt to invoke a boundary or a border with their voices, and how this affects the emotional dynamics that are active in voice-hearing. Our interviews reveal that the experience of hearing voices can be both disturbing and comforting to voice-hearers. We explored how voice-hearers sought to create more distance from their voices, or conversely invited them into their space. The conversations allowed us to study what it means for voice-hearers to engage in an active relationship with their voices in a variety of spaces, which range from external spaces of emotional

significance, to the interior spaces of the body. Of special interest to us, as explained in the previous section, is the complex emotional interplay between material and affective spaces in voice-hearers' accounts, and how voice-hearers make use of these spaces to mediate ongoing social relationships with their voices. In particular, we analyse what it means for a voice-hearer to rework boundaries in and between interior and exterior worlds, as they negotiate relations of power with their voices. This leads to a discussion of how voice-hearers experience control in different geographies.

Exterior Voices

We explored earlier how boundaries materialise in embodied spaces, and how boundary-making is an internally negotiated process. The boundary that a voice-hearer invokes is affected by their emotional response to a warm or a malicious voice. As the geographer Yi-Fu Tuan (1991) suggests, warm or malicious gossip can transform the feel of a room. The listening experience may "equally disturb or unsettle us" or make us "feel at peace" (Simpson, 2009: 2571). When a voice is only heard by the voice-hearer, however, the way/s in which that voice is interpreted in a real or an imaginary space will determine whether or not they feel able to "turn towards" the voice, that is, invite it into their space (see also de Jager et al., 2016: 1409). In this section, we follow the experiences of voice-hearers and their spatial modes of engagement when listening to their voices.

Peter's mother died several months before our interview took place. By the time we met him, he had moved into his mother's flat. Whereas other participants were frequently fearful of their voices, Peter spent long periods of time in the flat where he actually sought out his mother's voice. Pels (in Hockey et al. 2005: 140) writes that

"humans are moulded, through their sensuousness, by the 'dead' matter with which they are surrounded". Peter's deceased mother's presence seems here shaped into a spiritual form. The home space of her (former) flat and all that is contained within it, including her photos, come to embody the past and shape the present. The psychologists Mark Hayward et al. (2012: 67) observe that "research has shown that many people have two-way conversations with their voices." Peter told us:

> So I connect… I feel her presence there, and always have done. And there are things there to remind me of her. Like photos on the wall of her, so she is present…. [The voice is] not really a physical entity. More of a kind of like spirit. It's hard to fully kind of categorise that, or define it. But I feel like it's a sort of presence. A mental presence, a physical soul or spiritual presence.

Peter, who is in a position of experiencing grief, seeks out the domestic space, which, to him, does not seem to have changed with the loss of his mother. His mother's flat is a site in which their relationship was lived out, and now, in this material environment, he mediates an ongoing social relationship with the voice by listening and speaking to it. The voice does not appear to him to be generated internally, but instead sounds like his mother's voice and has a felt physical presence to it. The work on mourning by the critical psychoanalyst John Bowlby (1998: 47-48) conceptualises grief reactions as a special case of "separation anxiety". Anxiety arises when there is a separation of a vulnerable individual from their care-giver. Only in the case of bereavement is this separation irreversible. For Peter, who acknowledges that he has not "grieved for [his mother] as such", the voice acts as a bridge between him and her. Listening to his mother's voice, allows him to retrieve and access shared experiences with his mother whilst gaining a feeling of safety.

Voice-hearers, as we conceptualised earlier, spatialize their geographies when meditating ongoing social relationships with their voices.

In contrast to Peter's case, three of the other voice-hearers we interviewed (Janet, Adrian and Patrick), who also heard their mother's voice, did not hear a kind voice. They never enjoyed the soothing affect of a motherly voice, but now instead hear a harsh, negative voice. Voices, as we discussed, may be "traced to traumatic past experiences of the hearer" (Romme and Escher 2008:19). In all three cases, the emotional abuse inflicted by the participants' mothers reverberates in a voice that gives expression to the trauma of past experiences. Hayward et al. (2012: 13-14) note that "when someone has been bullied or traumatised sometimes the memory of what has been said, especially threats or abuse, can be re-experienced again and again as the voice of the bully or abuser". Attunement to those particular sounds may take shape in a form of adaptation, discomfort or dislocation but can also unfold more corporally when the voice situates itself in a particular place within the body. The ways in which the voice-hearer attempts to assert a boundary with a distressing/ dominant voice is something that interests us especially. We will shortly expand on this issue in our discussion of Patrick's vignette. First, however, let us briefly return to Peter's story.

Peter lives on his own in a home where he selectively listens to hear his mother's voice. At the time of our interview, he heard her voice on a daily basis. He acknowledges that his mother's voice serves the purpose of "taking the edge of that [grief] kind of away". Besides his own (deceased) dog barking, this is the only comforting voice that Peter hears. As soon as he is outside, in public, Peter is confronted with malevolent external male voices. In contrast to the bounded space of

his flat, the more open geography of the street compels Peter to experience voices that appear frightening. It feels to him as if they come from different external locations, which makes him feel disorientated.

It is important, as emphasised earlier, to attune to what the voices say, which includes paying attention to their race and gender. In Peter's case, the female voice that sounds like his mother enjoys a comforting quality. The voice, who cares for Peter, comes to his defence in his inner world. Some of the voice-hearers, as we will discuss later, felt that they needed to get away from their voices. Before moving to their stories, let us first learn how Patrick, another one of our interviewees, constructs his internal world, and how he mediates between internal and external spaces.

In our conversation with him, Patrick vigorously emphasised the fear that he used to associate with his voice, which he believed pursued him on his way home from a friend's house:

> On several occasions in the middle, in the dark, in the middle of these fields, the voice would come. So, then I started to run as fast as I could.

Patrick, who refers here to his surroundings, feels vulnerable in this complex emotional landscape of rural fields. Feeling pursued by the voice across the landscape, he runs as fast as he can in a bid to escape it. The situation, perhaps, might come across as eccentric, but it is also completely understandable, considering that he flees from a voice that appears real and terrifies. Patrick experienced a traumatic childhood, and he associates the voice with that of his dead alcoholic mother, who had two children taken away and a third one that died. In the

interview, he told us that he suffered from a traumatic upbringing, although he never provided the details of his "complex trauma". He said that he was so afraid of the voice that he felt unable to confront it to gain purchase on it. Patrick feels alone in this "uncanny" psychic landscape that appears unnerving and fear-invoking. Much of the more-than-representational importance of the fields stems from the feelings of dread and anxiety that the landscape inspires in him. Voice-hearers work at creating boundaries in and between their exterior and interior worlds. In the case of Patrick, however, it appears that the affective power imbued in the felt experience of the surrounding space limits his ability to negotiate the relation with his inner voices.

We noted earlier already how Blackman (2012) and Parr (1999) recognise how experiences associated with voice-hearing involve disruptive senses of borders and boundaries. When Patrick finds himself alone in the field, his emotions facilitate the constitution of a sensory relational geography shaped by the interaction of the presence of his dead mother's voice and the specifics of his spatio-temporal environment. Negotiating this outer/ inner environment is extremely challenging and emotionally tasking, especially because the external voice expresses itself in both persecutory and malevolent ways. Feeling constantly urged to flee the voice led Patrick to undertake an extensive journey, in which he "[hitchhiked] from Italy to Belgium and… halfway up France" in an effort to "try and get away from the voice". Eventually, after recognising that his attempts to escape were to no avail, Patrick now describes the voice as a "peak experience" of an "acute sort of terror". Patrick describes being "always motivated by fear", which compels him to "somehow keep it [the voice] away from him". A changing and changeable landscape does not allay such fears, as he is not able to escape the voice that he hears in moments of heightened anxiety.

In Patrick's case, we observe a sense of geographic expanse as he made a bid to flee the voice by running across the fields. This contrasts with Peter's voice-hearing experience shaped by containment and stillness. Peter engaged in a relationship with his voice within the bounds of his deceased mother's flat. His search for borders and stability is one that provides a positive sense of security, in which the voice appears as a supportive and listening confidante. Whereas in the case of Patrick, whose borderless experience results in a panicked flight, the hearer feels afraid and distressed by their voice.

Our discussion on how 'external' material environments mediate ongoing social relationships with a (deceased) mother figure draws attention to how places can come to embody the past in the present. Whereas Peter felt that he was able to invite his mother's warm voice into his space, by inhabiting her flat, Patrick remained so afraid of his mother's harsh malevolent voice that he tried to assert and maintain a boundary by running away physically. In both cases, the voices appear external to their hearers, which means that they perceive access to them as 'something' that requires negotiation and channelling.

We would like to focus our attention now on cases in which voice-hearers experience their own body as host to the voice(s). This, we hope, will offer insights into how interior, embodied spaces can mediate voice-hearers' emotional engagement with their voices. It will also provide us with an opportunity to determine the ways in which voice-hearers invoke boundaries when locating their voice(s) within the interiority of their own bodies.

Interior Voices

Earlier, we noted how Leudar and Thomas (2000) recognise how voice-hearers sometimes locate voices in particular areas of the brain or other parts of their body. In our interviews, eight out of the thirty voice-hearers perceive their voice as inhabiting a space within their body. Of interest to us is the geographical and affective relationship that voices hearers have with their voice(s). This also includes attuning to the ways in which the interior spaces of the body can form the setting in which voice-hearing plays out. A voice produces a space that listening orchestrates and makes meaningful through a process of boundary making. Space, in the experience of a voice-hearer, however, can refer to both an exterior and embodied interior; hence, it is important to consider the ways in which voice-hearers may take an active role in managing their feelings of agency in the spaces of their own body.

Mary, for instance, who is a retired staff nurse in her late fifties, identifies the way in which she "shuts down" her emotions. She describes this process as a "framing" of the brain. She explains that she transforms her brain into an actor in a drama play that unfolds entirely independent from her. She ironically refers to it as that "wonderful brain" explaining that it tells her: "hang on, you can't shut down these emotions any more. Can't do it". Mary describes her brain more-than-metaphorically as giving her instructions, for instance, by taking control.

Many would hesitate to accept the idea that the brain has an own agency of its own. A study of Jones et al. (2016), however, maps the agentive ways in which voice-hearers invoke "embodied control" in the framing of their voices. Mary refers to a personality disorder type, and tells us that "the schizotypal part of me" has decided to release what she sarcastically describes as "these wonderful voices". It appears as if she locates the source of her voices in the inside of her brain. Mary views a part of

her brain as acting on its own volition when it release the voices. Perhaps her ability to separate the rest of herself from her voices, creating a distance of sorts, by locating their source inside her brain instead of to her "self", enables her to cope better with voice-hearing experiences.

For some of the voice-hearers the boundary between the self and the voice(s) appears even more blurred. Simon, for example, struggles to assert a boundary between his self and the voice that he locates in his leg. He explains:

> My sense was that my emotions were in my right leg. They were extreme emotions that I couldn't handle, and in a bland way I thought I could cut my leg off... I had a black man in my right leg, saying "you haven't seen anything yet". I thought I had a curse.

According to Simon, the voice(s) cannot be ignored, because he believes that there is "a black man" inhabiting the interior space of his leg. When the man's voice issues threats, Simon does not feel that he can stand up to him or have a two-way conversation. Whereas Mary could identify her brain as an external other that she holds responsible for generating the voices, Simon's leg is a site where the distressing (and racialised) voice is 'unbounded', in the sense that its borders with the embodied self are regularly brought into question. Simon does not consider himself to hold sufficient power in his relationship with the voice. His desire to amputate his own leg is shaped by his understanding that he is not able to manage his "extreme emotions". These emotions originate from the same location from which the threatening voice of the "black man" speaks. Simon himself is white, and fears this black male voice, who he associates with the threat of potential violence. Through a racialised stereotyping of a black man Simon comes to experience the

voice as powerful and controlling. A lack of boundaries can lead voice-hearers to feel overwhelmed and powerless in their relationship with the voice(s).

After having discussed interior and exterior voices, we would like to broaden the focus on the spatiality of voice-hearing a bit by looking at a few examples in which the boundaries between a voice-hearer's inner and external worlds appear ambiguous. Of interest to us is the question how interior environments can appear as exterior. In this last section, we illustrate the different ways in which voice-hearers are reworking boundaries between interior and exterior worlds, sometimes even dissolving them.

The voice and the external environment

Linda, a women in her late twenties, works as a secretary. While describing a conversation with her ex-partner, she explains how "[your] soul and your mind […] are not bound by your body":

> Now, I'm hearing my partner's voice. It really had me tripped up… I was on my laptop. I was typing to him in a Word document and hearing these voices, and I would type the words up and I've had responses and I actually fully believed that he was sitting on his laptop in London doing the same thing.

Linda describes how she traverses a virtual space to reach a desired point of familiarity with her ex-partner's voice. The geographer Deborah Thien (2016: 193) notes how "intimacy allows for a bonding of the self and the (desired) other". Intimacy in such a framework is a spatial affair that involves a permeability of boundaries between private spaces. Earlier, we discussed how voice-hearers may experience a disruptive sense of borders and boundaries. Linda believes and,

equally importantly, feels that her ex-partner is replying to her typed words. By (re)turning to a time when they were together, expressions of physical and emotional distances are overturned and transformed into affective closeness and proximity. Linda's instinctive response is to feel both excited and anxious. However, of course, this imagined cyber relationship is a poor substitute for a committed, loving relationship.

In contrast to the porous boundaries of Linda's voice-hearing experience, we discuss the case of Helen. Helen, who is an eighteen-year-old student, strives to locate a sense of boundedness in her own bedroom. The geographers Davidson and Parr (2014: 130) suggest that "(un)conscious engagements with material spaces may be an important part of a 'therapeutic' and psychological search for a sense of boundedness". Voice hearers, in an effort to situate the self, build boundaries physically or metaphorically by identifying or locating them within the body or outside of it. Helen explains:

> When I'm home in my bedroom when nobody's looking at me, that's when I talk to them [i.e. the voices] because my room is like my safety, like whatever you call it. But I feel a lot better when I'm in my room because I feel safer and I know that nobody's going to be looking at me thinking: who's she talking to? And I just feel really safe there.

Michael Gallagher (2011: 52) deploys the term a "surveillance of sound" to refer to an authority figure, such as a teacher, that listens to and scrutinises what people say. Helen says that she feels liberated when there is nobody that listens or "looks" at her. In these circumstances and in this space, Helen feels able to talk to her voices. Her room makes her feel "safer", as it provides a sense of 'sound privacy'

that allows her to interact with the two young girls who speak to her. According to Helen, her voices can sometimes "get very emotional and… start crying". Helen's own fears trigger an intense emotional reaction from the girls, which causes additional stress: "it makes me upset because I don't want to upset [the voices]… because I just feel like they're a part of me now". Inhabiting the space of her bedroom, facilitating a safe space for conversation, helps her to renegotiate the relationship with her exteriorly experienced voices. The room allows her to accept these voices as "parts" of her "self", which, in turn, reduces her emotional distress and anxiety. The improved relationship with Helen's voices demonstrates that voice-hearers can organise a particular space to mediate a different relationship with their voices. This newly created space acts as a place of safety in which the self can be extended historically and emotionally.

Conclusion

Our analysis of voice-hearing identifies and addresses an apparent gap in existing literatures on sound geographies by (re)turning attention and thought to the issue of the voice. We move beyond the idea of voice as meaning and truth, embracing a more progressive branch of post-structural theorising that seeks to approach the voice as excessive, incomplete and not making "easy sense" (Mazzei and Jackson 2009). We challenge notions of its singularity, location and even aurality, but we never doubt that voices speak, meaningfully. In our research, voices take on specific relational geographies that produce, negotiate and assert affective boundaries. Voices bond humans and non-humans alike in an endless creation of worlds that surpass the possibilities offered by voice as mere language. A voice's open-endedness, plurality and relationality entice hearers to immerse and expand their

bodies, blurring the porous divisions of embodied insides and outsides. Voices, however, do not only travel between body and world. They also echo and reverberate within the interiorities of the manifold self.

We show how the experience of collapsing inside/ outside dichotomies propels voice-hearers to attune to their voices in different ways. As we listened-in, we heard that the majority of our interview participants felt distressed by their voice(s), resulting in a sense of disempowerment and feelings of being overwhelmed. Hearers feared them because they appeared unable to regulate spatial and emotional relationships with them. A geography that distances could help hearers to establish greater control, and, in some circumstances, may even result in a positive change in the emotional and affective relationship between a hearer and their voice(s).

In this article, we develop an understanding of the ways in which voice-hearers try to assert and negotiate boundaries with their voice(s). Voices have an ability to exercise affective power over their hearers, resulting in feelings of dread, shame and guilt, but many hearers have shown an ability to mediate those relations of power spatially. Voice-hearers, we argue, are boundary-makers. However, where voice-hearers build boundaries, and how they blur them, is variable and contingent. Notions of where a sense of self starts and where it ends are reworked and renegotiated constantly. As emotions from yesterday travel into the places of tomorrow, such boundaries transgress time and space, inside and outside. A warm, accepting environment, such as Peter's deceased mother's flat, affords voice-hearers the ability to 'turn towards' voices which previously had been sources of distress. As our interviews confirms, "particular kinds of environments have the capacity to transform people's (emotional) lives" (Gesler in Bondi et al, 2016: 8).

Some of the interviewed voice-hearers with negative voices were successful in creating boundaries with their voices. Mary, for example, conceptualises her critical, persecutory voices as if released by a part of her brain. The boundary helps to create a distance between the voices in her brain and her sense of self. Mary's experience contrasts sharply with that of Simon's. His voice-hearing, located inside his leg, appears far less successful in asserting a boundary. Whereas Mary experiences her voices as if generated by her brain, which acts as having an agency of its own, Simon's experience is defined by a distressing voice that is 'unbounded', which prevents him from compartmentalising the emotions of the voice. The capacity to make and negotiate boundaries corresponds to relations of control and power. Boundary-making, as we show, is an important component for transiting from a situation of feeling powerless to regaining control and feelings of empowerment.

More research is necessary to explore in detail if and how embodied agentive processes evolve over time, and whether boundaries with voices are static or changing. As voices often echo personal experiences, intimately linked to specific socio-political hierarchies, such research will require taking in consideration the ways in which societal asymmetries of power, including race, class and gender, and their intersectionalities, affect relationships between voice-hearers and their voices differently (see also Haarmans et al. 2016). Structural inequalities within societies work across different scales. These scales are interconnected and do not stop at the borders of a corporal body. Inequalities are absorbed and internalised, and find reflection in the interior world of voices-hearing experiences. Therefore, their affect and power need taking into account when analysing the specificities of its boundary-making geographies.

This paper has shown how voice-hearers listen to and respond to their voices, so as to explore ways in which they negotiate an emotional relationship with critical, sometimes even malevolent voices, or kind voices in real or imaginary spaces. Most importantly, perhaps, is that we started to explore the ways in which spaces affect how voice-hearers relate to their voices. As such, we hope to have opened-up a debate on geographies of voice-hearing, which not only speak to embodied interiors, but helps to illuminate ways to think of voice-hearing working across a number of different scales.

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[i] Among the exceptions are the writings of Parr (1999), Davidson and Parr (2014) and Blackman (2012).

[ii] The term 'voice hearer', originally coined by Romme and Escher (1987), and the voice hearer Patsy Hage (1987), is also the name of the *Hearing Voices Movement* that was launched at the same time (see also Woods 2013).

[iii] Leudar and Thomas' *Voices of Reason, Voices of Insanity* (2000) addresses the problem with the classification 'inner' and 'outer'. We build on their idea that these boundaries are porous and fluid.

[iv] In a discussion of the gendered nature of voice hearing, McCarthy-Jones et al. (2015: 2) discuss how the famous 19th century neurologist, and precursor of Freud, Jean-Marie Charcot treated experiences from female voice hearers as "vocalisation not communication".

[v] AVH is commonly identified with "a range of psychotic and mood disorders including schizophrenia, schizophreniform disorder, schizoaffective disorder, brief psychotic disorder, bipolar disorder (in both manic and depressive episodes) and major depressive disorder" (McCarthy-Jones 2013: 101).

[vi] The Movement, which is internationally active, operates within the tradition of collective, participatory and activist science. It is based on a collaborative mode of knowledge production in which "subjective" experiences of hearers are valued as much as medical scientific "objectivity". Blencowe et al. (2015: 212) explain that "[w]ithin the movement, objective knowledge is produced through self-experimentation and knowledge sharing. The transformed experiences of individuals constitute the evidence that the knowledge produced through groups 'works' in developing deeper and clearer relationships with voices."

[vii] Current interventions often limit themselves to pharmacological and psychosocial solutions. Corstens et al. (2014: 290) write that "there are no outcome measures of voice experiences that have been informed by consultation with voice hearers themselves".

[viii] In one of the first interview-based comparative studies of the phenomenology of voice hearing in different cultures, Luhrmann et al. (2015: 43) confirm existing anthropological and psychiatric evidence that shows that "voice hearing experience outside the West may be less harsh" and, in some cases, even welcoming. These contextual differences have a tangible impact on the "quality of relationship with the speaker of the voice" (ibid.: 42). Cultural contexts in which voice hearing does not suffer from negative connotations may help empower hearers to enjoy less estranged relationships with their inner other(s).

[ix] Research has shown that voices often express themselves in gendered, racialized and even intersectional emotions (Legg and Gilbert 2006, Blackman 2000, Haarmans et al. 2016, McCarthy-Jones et al. 2015). In their interviews with female voice hearers, McCarthy-Jones et al. (2015), for instance, describe how "the voice hearer's relationship with their voices reflected their relationships with other people in their social world… Undermining, abusive talk by voices sometimes echoed the very same words women had previously heard from others". Any intervention in negative or harmful relationships between the hearer and their voice(s), as we argue also in the conclusion, should consider the socio-political context from and in which a voice(s) speaks.

[x] The study design, methods and research practice received ethical approval from Durham University's Geography Department, whose procedures are compliant with the guidelines of RCUK and government legislation. Given that the project was concerned with the experiences of voice-hearing reported in community settings, rather than clinical ones, we did not require additional ethical approval from the NHS.