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Cecilia Sjöholm

Södertörn University

Voices in the Belly: The Ear of Critical Thought

Abstract

In present times, around the globe, we are witnessing a public sphere in crisis. Thus, one of the great challenges for critical thought today is to be able to maintain sound methods of reflection when public space, which since the Enlightenment has been called upon to maintain a legacy of critical reflection and freedom, appears undermined. What means do we have to engage in the world and develop critical thought? Living as we are again in *Dark Times*, as Hannah Arendt named the postwar era, we need to explore new grounds for critical thought. Here the “inner voice” presents itself, a thought that is socially, ethically, or politically engaged, broadly speaking. It does not look for truth in a philosophical sense, but seeks to engage in thought processes

Keywords

Arendt, Critical thought, inner voice, Kant, “enlarged thought”

The Politics of Critical Thought

In present times, around the globe, we are witnessing a public sphere in crisis, distorted through fake suggestions, lies, threats of violence, and call for constraint. This has occurred not only in states of authoritarian rule, but also in liberal societies. Thus, one of the great challenges for critical thought today is to be able to maintain sound methods of reflection when public space, which since the Enlightenment has been called upon to maintain a legacy of critical reflection and freedom, appears undermined. For Immanuel Kant, Hannah Arendt, Jürgen Habermas, and others, the public sphere was expected to sustain a measure of soundness of thought. But when the public sphere can no longer do so, and thought retreats into itself, what means do we have to engage in the world and develop a thought that is congruent with political possibilities? The concept of “critical thought” in this context is referring not to the school of critical theory, but to the kind of thought that Arendt is advocating—a thought that is socially, ethically, and politically astute. To think critically, to Arendt, one may well come close to the possibility of destruction. But it means, rather, to scrutinize opinions and beliefs and to practice a certain “Socratic midwifery” (Arendt 1992: 36). It is in this context that the inner voice is heard. The first site of truth in Western philosophical history appeared in the form of a dialogue, and Socrates may be read as an internal voice. In *Theaetetus*, Plato writes: “...the soul when thinking appears to me to be just talking—asking questions of herself and answering them, affirming and denying” (Plato 2010: 416). But how are we to conceive of the validity of thought? Is thought not merely cementing “what is,” reflecting a state of things that it is unable to change?

To Slavoj Žižek, the problem with Arendt’s philosophy is that she lacks a notion of transformation proper. In representing a position of resistance against utopian ideologies, Arendt becomes a right-wing intellectual “knave,” and is as incapable of producing challenges properly speaking: as is the utopian “fool,” according to Žižek (2009: 29).

Such a charge reflects the weight given to listening, to thought, and to the function of judgement in later Arendt. The political, to Arendt, is not altogether relegated to the world of action. Although this was the primary presumption of *The Human Condition* (1998), and by far the most well-known doctrine in her work, her later work disproved it. In her lectures on Kant, the political becomes a concept more involved with judgement.¹ The lectures provided the groundwork for a volume that was never completed, supposed to complete the third part in a trilogy on thinking,

¹ *The Human Condition*: action is the only true correspondent to plurality (Arendt 1998: 7). As Rudolph Beiner has shown in his postscript to Arendt’s lectures on Kant, Arendt’s endeavour was to politicize judgment (Beiner 1992: 106–07).

willing, and judging. The first two are constituted by *Life of the Mind* (1978a, 1978b). It is not farfetched, then, to assume that Arendt's reflections on thinking in *Life of the Mind* lays out the groundwork that was integrated into the reflections of judgement. As Arendt explains at the end of the part on "Thinking" in *Life of the Mind*, thought is the ground for judgement: judgement "realizes thinking" and makes it manifest in the world of appearances (Arendt 1978a: 193). In other words, Arendt does not equate thought with judgement, and she does not equate thought with political activity. On the other hand, she clearly points to the interlacing of thought and judgement. One could argue, then, that she gives to thought the dignity of being prepolitical.

Two-in-One in the Theater

Arendt's agent of thought in *Life of the Mind* is what she calls a two-in-one (Arendt 1978a: 179–97). It is an individual who reflects, and listens to his inner voice whilst reflecting. Such individuals are reflected not only in the history of philosophy but also in literature and art. The thinking individual who is in dialogue with him/herself is an aspect of plurality and replaces the transcendental subject as agent of experience (Arendt 1978a: 179–97). In *Life of the Mind*, Arendt famously argues that thought processes take on a figure, as a "two-in-one" incorporates reflections on Shakespeare's *Richard III*. This is no coincidence. What is interesting with plays of internal monologue such as *Richard III* and *Hamlet*—and this is perhaps why they have drawn so much interest in the last few years—is that they point to the fragility of that last resort of democracy: thought itself. When opinions cannot be advocated in the open, thought can still withdraw and lay the ground for political judgement.

This has also been staged at the theater. Shakespeare's plays that use internal voices have been used for an immanent critique of authoritarian rule. Dmitri Shostakovich's 1934 opera, *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*, for instance, uses a novel by Nikolai Leskov in order to conjure up a Shakespearian motif in order to stage a possible critique of Stalin. Bertolt Brecht's *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* (1941), in turn, is an allegory on National Socialism based on *Richard III* and was written in exile in Finland after a stay in Stockholm. These critical theatrical adaptations, among others, formed a background against which a significant amount of philosophical reflection dedicated itself to Shakespeare during and after the war. These reflections focused on the capacity of the individual to reason, reflect, and judge. These capacities are also in focus in two of the most talked-about plays in Germany in recent years: Thomas Ostermeier's stagings of *Hamlet* and *Richard III* at the Schaubühne in Berlin. Engaging with contemporary right-wing populism through two of Shakespeare's most canonical plays, Ostermeier refers to a long tradition of critique of

authoritarian rule. Ostermeier's target is the neoliberal destruction of democracy, the commodification of power, and rule through fear.

The television series *House of Cards*, starring Kevin Spacey and Robin Wright, has also integrated the Shakespearean form of monologue from *Richard III*, directly delivered to the audience as a theatrical means of staging the inner voice of a Machiavellian player. Both Ostermeier and *House of Cards* evoke the inner voice of nihilism in order to pinpoint the eradication of the symbolic value of the presidency. The presidency, as can still be seen in series such as *Designated Survivor* with Kiefer Sutherland, is supposed to be upheld in popular culture by someone with high standards, integrity, and moral dignity. As we peek into the inner voice of the king in *Richard III*, authoritarianism is underscored and symbolic authority undermined. To Arendt, the play stages the undoing of conscience, also an aspect of the thought processes that precedes the capacity to make political judgements.

To many postwar European intellectuals such as Arendt, Adorno, and Brecht, one of the most problematic features of their time was that conscience had become bankrupt. Theodor Adorno discussed this in the 1996 radio program "Education after Auschwitz": There is, says Adorno, no conscience in our time (2005: 194). What was formerly internalized in some kind of fundamental law held by each individual has travelled out into a patchwork of destructive rules upheld by external authorities. Brecht, exiled in the United States and trying his best with the film industry there at around the same time, writes in his journal: "Shakespeare's grand motif, the fallability of instinct (indistinctness of the inner voice) cannot be renewed" (Brecht, September 20, 1945, quoted in Lyon 1980: 80). The little people, as Brecht put it, were defenseless against a moral codex that had gone berserk. The corruption of conscience on a universal scale was not the result of the criminal potential prevalent in Shakespeare's grand tragic figures. It was the result, rather, of a deafening of the inner voice that would have symbolized the possibility of conscience; there was nothing to hold onto as morality was transformed into persecutory and racist ideals.

Before, during, and after the war, the reflections on Shakespeare became a point of reference for negotiations of self-reflexivity, engaging in questions of compromised forms of contemporary subjectivity for many others, including Adorno. Although all of these thinkers took different positions in their modes of analysis and critique, they pointed above all to the deluded forms of reason that Shakespeare's figures exemplified. Plays such as *MacBeth* and *Hamlet* dealt with issues of power, delusion, and madness whilst problematizing the possibilities of action (Stribny 2000; Heller 2002, Fik 1996).

Arendt, also, referred to the inner monologues of *Richard III* as the undoing of judgement in authoritarian times. *Richard III*, as is well known, murders his adversaries and ascends to power, ridden with an inner voice

of doubt that pushes through in instances like the monologue quoted by Arendt:

What do I fear? Myself? There's none else by:
Richard loves Richard: that is, I am I.
Is there a murder here? No. Yeas, I am:
Then fly: what! From myself? Great reason why
Lest I revenge. What! Myself upon myself?
Alack! I love myself. Wherefore? For any good
That I myself have done unto myself?
O! no: alas! I rather hate myself
For hateful deeds committed by myself.
I am a villain. Yet I lie, I am not.
Fool, of thyself speak well: fool, do not flatter
(Quoted in Arendt 1978a: 189).

Here, the inner voice appears as the two-in-one literally speaking: Richard the murderer speaks to himself and thinks to himself. The monologue communicates through an inner voice. The two-in-one of the thought-process is, to Arendt, dramatically different from being in the word of appearances, where “the outside world intrudes upon the thinker and cuts short the thinking process” (Arendt 1978a: 185). In private, Richard sees the ghosts. In public, he rejects them. The ghosts are relegated to the cellar of non-consciousness. But the inner discord, nevertheless, interferes with the capacity of judgement.

Thought proper, to Arendt, strives after a certain congruence with itself, it strives to accommodate the other in such a way that discord is replaced with differentiation: I become the two-in-one, I accommodate the internal friend “at home” (Arendt 1978a: 190–91) Richard forecloses this process. The inner voice becomes a commander who talks to a “knave,” submissive to any kind of demands. It gives witness to an invisible master rather than a reflective subject. Arendt points to an aspect of plurality that manifest itself in Richard III to begin with, but then is cut off.

Thus, the inner voice need not be a sign of conscience proper. This is brought up with regard to Adolf Eichmann, who surprisingly is said to be not devoid of but rather obsessed with conscience. He did not need to “close his ears to the voice of conscience,” (Arendt 1964: 61) because his conscience did not, unlike Richard III's, speak with the voices of his victims. It spoke, instead, with a “respectable voice,” with the voice of what Eichmann regarded as the respectable society around him (Arendt 1964: 61). Eichmann's evil was not a pathological feature. It was the result of a perversion of the call of conscience. Eichmann did not deny the call of conscience—he was in fact obsessed with it. But it was never rooted in the fundamental prohibition against killing the other—a prohibition that cannot be compromised (Arendt 1964: 83–112).

In *Richard III*, thought comes across in the form of voices, bringing us beyond the idea of a self that is self-contained and self-reflective. The inner voice is a trace inscribed in consciousness that appears to give witness to another consciousness. But that consciousness is never fully represented, it appears as a trace of something or somebody. The monologue evokes a voice that resounds of “the standpoint of somebody else,” an internal voice which may guide our sense of the real, an internalized presence of alterity that “assures us of the reality of the world and of ourselves...” (Arendt 1998: 50). It is this sense of the real that has been cast off in the testimony of Eichmann, offering us instead a dead language of bureaucracy.

The Ear of Critical Thought

The Human Condition (1998) conceived of freedom as being in conjunction with a model of public space that is no longer applicable.² As of late, Arendt’s analysis of the totalitarian tendency to suppress public space through lies, distortion, and suppression has drawn a lot of attention. There are a number of ways in which public space has also been perforated in democratic societies, for instance through political lies,³ the commodification of politics, the threat of violence. In times when short-sighted economism and individualism plague contemporary democracy, finding new models for collectivity and solidarity is one of the greatest challenges for critical thought. How are we to find ways to act, think, or feel “in concert” (Arendt 1969: 44) and yet maintain a legacy of critical reflection and freedom?

One aspect that may contribute to this problematic is widening the scope of the conception of public space. We need to understand not only the role of free speech and action, but also that of listening. We need to contribute to a theory of listening, and develop an ear of critical thought. For this purpose, Hannah Arendt has a lot to offer. In *Life of the Mind*, she develops a distinct theory of thought that can be linked to the capacity of listening and subsequently to her notion of judgement that, as has been argued above, plays a distinct political role.

Immanuel Kant established the public sphere as a preeminent site for the development of emancipation (2010). In postwar Europe, the public sphere was also considered a preeminent site of emancipation, for instance by Habermas, for whom the discursive model of public space, or “public opinion,” has served the legitimization of law (1989). To Arendt,

² This is made clear by Arendt herself who notes the exclusion of slaves, etc., if one sticks with an ancient model of free political life (1998: 12).

³ As noted by Arendt herself in “Lying in Politics” in *Crisis of the Republic* (1972: 1–49).

the public sphere represents plurality, for example through the interaction within institutions such as the academy, the judiciary, and a free and independent press (Arendt 1961). Although they appeal to different modes of discourse and action, both Habermas's and Arendt's notion of the public sphere can be looked at as normative models of how an open society was supposed to function in the wake of the totalitarian state.

Many have questioned the relevance of a postwar notion of public space today, for instance Chantal Mouffe (2008) and Bruno Latour (2008). According to Latour, political issues are no longer motored by public debates but by concerns invested in by multiple individuals (2008). These concerns may find an outlet in sites that construe a network that binds together a hidden geography, for instance through works of art, sites on the Internet, and clusters of groups. Latour's notion of hidden geographies identifies political concerns that are being negotiated on sites that are often not public in and of themselves, but merely semi-public. Real political issues are no longer fueled by ideas and ideologies. They have to do with particular issues that give rise to feelings: it could be melting ice, writers in prison, the depletion of cultural institutions. We are no longer gathering around ideas that that found "realpolitik" at the cost of the concern of living beings. We gather around objects that are immediately linked to the big questions of our time. Here, we find an alternative public space protrude that is no longer a space of free speech but of engagement. We find a politics based not on freedom but on bonding. It is here that a hidden geography comes to the fore, on virtual spaces and cultural spaces (Latour 2008: 309–24) The concept of what is public must then be widened: it must refer to all possible places for engagement that can even be considered—the question is no longer what the physical conditions are for publicness. It applies rather to the networks behind the engagement. In an exhibition called "Making Things Public," performed in Karlsruhe, Germany in 2005, Latour created a simulation of the invisible flows and movements that create public spaces today (Latour 2005: 14–31).

In many ways, however, Latour's idea of new forms of publicness only emphasizes the kind of complexities that already existed during the Enlightenment as Kant noted, not only opinions and action but also affectivity of engagement belongs to public cultures (2007: § 29). And to Arendt, not only actions and opinions, but also thought must be considered crucial for democratic practices. As Arendt has shown, thought is not abstract, it is embedded in a variety of practices, and it has several functions: art, for instance. Just as speech is, it is embedded in a context. Thought is not autonomous.

What marks the crisis of the public sphere is the experience of the senses. The affect of "enthusiasm" is replaced with the overruling imaginary structures of ideology. Thought and experience become disconnected. Rather than negotiate reality as a ground for the feasibility of action, the agent of the public sphere becomes someone who has a lot of opin-

ions. When opinions rule over experience, reality becomes distorted. Experience is no longer a measure that may point to the coming together of a sense of the real, a *sensus communis*. The undoing of experience produces not only fake news but also fantasies. The responsibility that accompanies thought is replaced with the attachment to fantasies that may be more or less persecutory. Instead of perceiving oneself in a society where differences are accepted, persecutory fantasies about the others come to reign.

The result of this is that the inner voice, the tonality of alterity, is lost, and replaced with the voice demanding submission of the “knave,” the subject that thinks but which is merely affirming “what is” in the language of Slavoj Žižek (1997: 182–83). The voicing of ready-made opinions, often construed in and through virtual collectives, replaces thought. In contrast, can the internal voice of thought, or what Kant appeals to as “speech in the belly” (2006: 86), serve as a site of emancipation in times when public space in the postwar sense has been compromised?

What is the Inner Voice?

Philosophy, as Aristotle has already indicated, has historically been conceived through a concept of *theoria*, an idea of overview or spectatorship. Logo-centric hierarchies maintain vision as active and masculine, whereas listening is framed as passive and feminine. Poetry has been conceived in periods of history as related to the sense of “listening.” In the eighteenth century, as the arts were categorized, Johann Gottfried Herder, Jean-Jaques Rousseau, and Georg Hegel identified the signifying means of poetry as “tone,” and not as “text” (Hegel 1995; Herder and Rousseau, 1966). However, the art of “listening” can be considered common to both philosophy and literature.

There is an awareness of this in the critique of Western logo- and visual-centrism, as we can find in such thinkers as Jacques Derrida, Jean-Luc Nancy, among others (Derrida 1988; Nancy 2002). The first site of truth in Western political history appeared in the form of an internal voice. Socratic consciousness appeared through a fictional character without body, character, or face. This has continued in the tradition of philosophy, where the voice comes forth as a tonality that appears in metaphysics, ethics, politics, and physics. Here, the voice has a daemonic function, it is a shadow that has continued to haunt philosophy. This shadow may be an invisible voice of consciousness perhaps, but it also serves the injunction of laws and moral concepts in a more formalized manner. From a Socratic point of view, Mladen Dolar argues, the philosopher is submitted to the daemon of the voice, rather than being its agent (Dolar 2006: 85).

In times of authoritarianism, may the inner voice escape the ruination of perception? Arendt reflects on the tonalities of the inner voice

from two points of view. The primary question is how actions “in concert,” collective actions that carry their own specific mood, are made possible. The second is how thought carries its own tonalities.

From the first point of view, collective action is best formulated through a notion of attunement. It is something that happens, something that we simply become engulfed without noticing how or why. The verb *hö-ren* (to listen) also carries the connotation of: *gehörchen*, *hörlich*, *gehören*, words that, in English, are translated as *to obey*, *to be in bondage*, *to belong*. In *gehören* (to belong), the “listening” implies not just a sense but also a relationship of power. The one who listens is exposed; sound is more penetrating than visual sights are. Through sight, we can orient ourselves in space and conceive of our position. Sound, however, is not always easy to follow toward its source. It may surround us and pierce through our shields more easily. Sound may be experienced as lacking shape. This may make it difficult to objectify and to locate.

The subject of vision is always given as an angle, a point of view. The hearing, however, is penetrated and called onto itself unclear at the same time (Nancy 2002: 44). Sounds are not something we act upon. They are something that break our shields, that run deep into us. Whereas vision is framed, listening exposes us to a lack of limit. From such a perspective, the inner voice of thought can be described as a kind of sensorial encroachment. The voice through which we think, the moods that accompany thoughts, impinge upon us, as being both on the outside and on the inside, transcending the division between private and public, intimate and collective.

Arendt’s notion of mood, which accompanies her conception of actions in concert, can be compared to the Heideggerian term of *Stimmungen*. *Stimmungen* relates to a form of unraveling of Being that is non-discursive and non-conceptual. It is also not perceptible or sensible; it is a mood that sticks to phenomena of experience without being properties of them. To Heidegger, moods such as fear and the sense of the uncanny unravel predicaments of Being. At the same time, it comes across in music, literature, and art in general. In this sense, *Stimmungen* belongs to those aspects that cut across the limit between literature and philosophy (Heidegger 1978: 230–35). At the same time, there is, as was understood by Hannah Arendt, an aspect of mood that overruns the distinction between collective and individual, between public action and the tonality of individual thought.

Relating *Stimmungen* to politics, however, is not unproblematic. In Žižek’s film *The Pervert’s Guide to Ideology* (2012), one scene depicts Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony as a suggestive device; not only is it used as a signature of the European Union, it was a symbol in Nazi Germany, in China of the cultural revolution, in Stalinist USSR, and so on, an empty shell into which all ideologies can be spilled. In the negotiation of a theory of listening that can be related to political action, therefore, we need to

separate the notion of the collective and the kind of ideology that is produced in a collective, from the kind of attunement that Arendt relates to political action, properly speaking.

Here, the notion of plurality is crucial; attunement is a figure that begins with plurality. From that point of view, we need to consider plurality as something that is more than the collective. Here I think that Arendt's notion of thinking, and the kind of inherent plurality that it may represent, is helpful. It is a plurality that is illuminated by way of the notion of the inner voice, representing to two-in-one, the plurality present in thought itself.

From this perspective, the inner voice may orient us toward a horizon that supports a common grasp of the world. Thought may offer a site of truth that resist assaults on our sense of the real in other, compromised forms of discourse. The "ear of critical thought" engages both a demand for autonomy, and for a notion of collectivity based on such autonomy.

How Do I Listen?

Thought, to Kant, is accompanied by an I of apperception that is tangible through an inner tonality. To think, therefore, is to listen to oneself. This is a conception of thought that in Kant is not contrary to a metaphysical notion of reason. Is the inner voice private, or does it engage and direct us to a community? Is the inner voice related to corporeal desires and intimate relations, or can humanity's venture to think for itself, that is, to use reason? Here, another element is added, which is a form of extension: thought, among other criteria for a thought that has matured into reason, should be reflective and consistent. But it must also apply a certain universalist command. To Kant, this is not simply abstract. His formula for the command is what intrigues Arendt, is the following: to use reason is "to think for oneself (in communication with human beings) into the place of every other person" (Kant 2006: 124).

Critical thought, Arendt argues, is in principle "antiauthoritarian" (1992: 38). Ever since Socrates, it has been a silent dialogue of a thinker with him/herself. Arendt, however, wishes to extend the notion of inner dialogue beyond a subjective experience, and show how it may offer an instrument of a better understanding of a collective experience, and a community.

Kant in his *Anthropology*, writes that thought is not devoid of communicable language, it is not simply silent or abstract. It is communicable language directed to oneself. Thinking, he comments famously, is *speaking* with oneself. Figuratively it would correspond a "voice in the belly." Although, directed toward the public, it is conducted in solitude. In her lectures on Kant, Arendt negotiates the question of how individual thought can be assessed, following Kant's presentation of reason. For the first, the

subject must be capable of thinking by itself and not in accordance with inherited and imposed views or ideas. Second, it must negotiate the capacity of putting oneself in the place of the other (Arendt 1992: 42).

Thought does not have an object. It is not congruent with judgement, which has an object, but traces, rather, a relation to the world. Judging deals with particulars, Arendt argues, thinking deals with “absents”; absent friends, the negative, a world that is not present (Arendt 1992: 79–89).

Thought is not the universal reflection of reason, although it can be that. Most of the time, however, it is embedded in a mood that carries as much meaning as do the connotations of the words that flow in a conscious trail of thought. The mood of the thinking ego, Arendt writes, is serenity, melancholy even, and intensely involved with recollection (Arendt n.d.).

As a reader of Kant, Arendt picks up the idea that to think is to speak for oneself, and to hear oneself “innerlich” [intensely] (Kant 2006: 86). This “inner” motion of thought is not only inner with regards to being incorporated. It is “innerlich,” that is, in-tense, with regards to tonality, when the voice from the belly, the inner voice from within the writings of Kant, suggest a doubleness of agency that is reflected on in *Life of the Mind*. The doubleness of the thinking individual is added to her notion of plurality.

The subject that thinks does so from a position in which its reflections are intertwined with the tonality of its inner voice. What is “inner” to Arendt comes to the fore as a mood. Through this mood, language is not only pointing to phenomena, but also to itself. Language, therefore, does not communicate emotions to the exterior world as much as it transposes thought through moods (Arendt 2002: 690). In this way, thought becomes embedded in moods and tonalities of language. Thinking is close to action, which is also encompassed by “moods”—the happiness of the revolution for instance. The concept of mood transcends the differentiation between individual and collectivity; it encompasses the thinking individual in larger movements of action.⁴

The capacity to think involves an “enlarged mentality” (Kant 2007: § 41; Arendt 1992: 73). This means that inner thought is not a detached egoless universalist abstraction, it is attached to a form of representation, although it may be a vague one. As one can argue by reading Arendt, the inner voice can be imbued with tasks that points in a direction where the ear of critical thought, that is, the capacity of hearing, acquires a tonality that pushes the limits of the “I” of apperception. Thought points to the primacy of alterity through the use of imagination. Through our imagination, we “go visiting” (Arendt 1992: 43). That means, when we abstract

⁴ It is, in this sense, as Artemy Magun has put it, a form of “rhythmic” and “reasoned” coordination. Such coordination may take place with other beings, but it may also help appease the internal conflicts within oneself (Magun 2013: 41).

from the particular we are not merely set in a colorless and airy room of the mind. We imagine places and people that we are not familiar with. The inner voice may push us in directions that we are not familiar with.

Sometimes we may hear ourselves thinking. We may hear our own voice, as in an echo. Sometimes, thoughts appear, as voices in a cave. They strike us, as from the outside. We hear them, from an invisible point that we cannot see, and yet they are structuring our perception and our apprehension of space (Chion 1999: 21). When we hear our own thoughts, we experience ourselves not as estranged from ourselves, but somehow as naturally double, as reflecting beings capable of reflecting in the world, internally and silently, in our own minds. When the voices appear as foreign, as the voices of angels or devils, or simply as belonging to other people, this would be a sign of psychosis (Lacan 2016 [1975–76]: 62–74). When we hear our own thoughts internally, however, as aspects of ourselves, we experience ourselves as integrated in the world, as capable of reflecting, and although we may be alone, as capable of engaging in vivid internal reasoning with ourselves, and with the world.

To Arendt, we can only be free in a sphere in which others are encroaching on us. Only in a world of plurality can we be truly free. To Arendt, the only interesting freedom that exists is the one that manifests itself, either on the horizon of our perception or within, is in the engagement with internal voices. It is certain that thinking, and action, are two separate activities that can never be regarded as interchangeable. But thinking, although it is conducted in solitude, manifests itself precisely through the encroachment of others not only on our horizon but also in our minds.

Thought, Arendt suggests, may appear to put us close to the neutral manifestation of a non-self: “It is because the thinking ego is ageless and nowhere that past and future can become manifest to it as such, emptied, as it were, of their concrete content and liberated from all spatial categories” (Arendt 1961: 10–11). But this neutrality is only an illusion. Thinking, in fact, takes place in a “time-space,” in which the thinker is reflected and deflected. Time can come into being “only with/the thinkers/, self-inserting appearance” (Arendt 1961: 10–11). Neither philosophy, nor literature, may exist outside of the “time-space” in which the activity of thinking, writing, or listening takes place; producing the deflection of those who think, tell, or listen. This is precisely what philosophy may learn, when it listens to literature. There is no place outside of time that can be emptied of this deflection.

It is this challenge that the ear of critical thought needs to work with; gathering voices in order to listen, rather than return to the unreflected commands of the everyday, and thus straying errantly, further and further away from the web of voices. It is this challenge, also, that we need to face as we look for new models of collectivity and solidarity for critical thought, and I believe that this is what Hannah Arendt allows us to do.

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