

The inner voice

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- Considerable part of our lives is devoted to talking to ourselves.
 - This inner discourse incarnates a voice, our inner voice.
 - This discourse is both **said** and **heard** – it implicates our vocal apparatus, the motility of the larynx and of vocal chords, even though it is often sub-vocal (or outwardly silent) – and also the hearing apparatus
 - Bizarre absence of inner voice in contemporary scientific agenda

 - Goal of this talk: to show that inner voice is a major phenomenon of our inner lives, a basic institution of our humanity, and an important (maybe decisive) vector of our psychic and social lives

Brief history of inner voice

- The phenomenon of inner voice has been recognized in the Antiquity:
- for the Greeks it was the *daimôn* (δαίμων) – the voice of a divinity that *speaks in us* and tells us what to do (Socrates, Plato, Xenophon)
- In *Theaetetus* Socrates (Plato) explains what he means by thinking (*dianoesthai*): “I call it a discourse that the mind carries on with itself about any subject it is considering. [...] It looks to me as though this is nothing else but talking something through [*dialegesthai*], only that the mind asks itself questions and answers them, saying yes or no to itself. [...] Making up one’s mind and forming an opinion I thus call discourse, and the opinion itself I call a spoken statement, pronounced not to someone else and aloud *but silently to oneself*”
- In the Stoic tradition – philosophical work (self perfection) is carried by inner speech

- In early scholastics (neo-platonism up to Augustinus) distinction between:
- *logos prophoricos* (externalized discourse) and *logos endiathetos* (internal discourse) which ended up by becoming ontological
- *logos endiathetos* → *oratio mentalis* (Ockham), *mentalese* (Fodor) language of thought ≠ ordinary language
- The Heritage of the scholastic tradition:
 - thinking is a form of language distinct from the ordinary language (translation needed → converting thought into speech)
 - *logos endiathetos* is no longer a voice (as a sound and as a speaker)

Six pillars of Epilegein*

- (1) Real voice (both from the physical and symbolic point of view)
 - (2) Arises spontaneously (see inner speech, imaginary companion)
 - (3) Discourse to self (self talk) no matter whether vocalized or subvocalized
 - (4) Diversity of forms
 - (5) Alice's workshop (medium, mnemotechnics, field of integration)
 - (6) Voice of the reader (writer)
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- These are six facts, in the sense that either they are based on empirical data, or on observational facts one can easily check it by oneself

* *Epilegein* – literally in Greek: *to say more*, in the Stoic tradition: *to comment internally on what happens*

(i) Real voice

- Physically:
 - the involvement of the vocal apparatus in sub-vocalizations can easily be shown empirically; the voice resonates in our skull (the involvement of the auditory apparatus can also be demonstrated), in our thorax, and even in the belly
- It is a real voice, also in the sense of the nuances of human voices (sharp, vulgar, charming, suave, annoyed), the timber, and the prosody
- See also a melody in your head (or a song)
- Full parallelism in speech modes between inner voice and outward voice
- This voice sounds the same whether spoken internally or externally – it is a part our body schema (see the surprising sound of our recorded voice)
- There is a gestural/kinesthetic equivalent of inner voice in deaf people
- NB. The voice is the first contact we have with the human world (starting *in utero*)

Webster

- expression in spoken or written words, or by other means: *to give voice to one's disapproval by a letter.*
- the right to present and receive consideration of one's desires or opinions: *We were given no voice in the election.*
- an expressed **opinion** or choice: *a voice for compromise.*
- an expressed **will** or **desire**: *the voice of the people.*
- expressed **wish** or **injunction**: *obedient to the voice of God.*
- the person or other agency through which something is expressed or revealed: *a warning that proved to be the voice of prophecy, the voice of the law, conservatism has many voices, the wee small voice of conscience, the voice of experience, the voice of reason*
- a singer (metonymy): *one of our best voices.*
- a voice part: *a score for piano and voice.*
- with one voice, in accord; unanimously: *They arose and with one voice acclaimed the new president*

and also:

- *advice, warning, call, plea, claim*

Brief semantics of **voice**

- *Nie dopuścić/dopuścić do głosu*
- Plea/search of expression: *Prosić o głos (mieć głos)*
- Consent: *Dać głos, udzielić głosu*
- Right/consideration: *Dojść do głosu*
- Expression/personal spokesperson: *Zabierać głos*
- Lost of right/consideration: *Odebrać głos (stracić głos)*
- Personal choice/opinion: *Oddać głos, głosować*
- Consideration: *Liczyć się z czyimś głosem*
- Claim/will/opinion: *Odezwały się głosy ...*
- Voice as collective entity/agency/spokesperson: *Głos ludu, Głos Wybrzeża, Voice of America, Kol Israel, the proud voice of middle-class conservatism...*
- Expression of power/warning: *Podnieść na kogoś głos*
- General agreement: *Jednogłośnie* coś zatwierdzić (*Einstimmung* in German)
- also:
- *To find one's own voice, the voice of reason, the voice of dissent...*
- Conscience: *the wee small voice of conscience*

- Voice as a **subject**, as a **person**, as **individuality**, as **spokesperson** (even in writing)
 - whether inner or outer, the voice carries the dimensions of **will, wish, desire, claim, opinion, right, expression** of yourself
 - on a rather impersonal level voice also carries the dimensions of **advice, warning, appeal**
 - voice **impersonates a character**, a person, a subject, an instance (entity)
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- Phrase *inner voice* – in American journals (since circa 2000)
 - Phrase *voix intérieure* (French) – recently used in literary translations

(ii) Inner voice arises spontaneously

- **Egocentric speech** in children (Watson, Piaget, Stern, Vygotsky) → precursor of **inner speech**
- **Imaginary companion** (a pet, a character, an imaginary sibling) – from 4 to 8 years – arises spontaneously (with no pre-given model nor solicitation)
- Not only the child is no longer alone, but can also externalize internal dialogue (without the feeling of incongruity)
- With imaginary companion the child becomes **two-in-one**
- Phenomenon of imaginary companion more general and variable than usually reported

- „Szalejąca tuż po wojnie domowej epidemia cholery zabrała mi mamę. [...] Mimo upływu sześciu lat nieobecność mamy była dla mnie wciąż jakimś omamem, krzykiem ciszy, której nie potrafiłem jeszcze zagłuszyć słowami. [...] *Jeszcze jako mały dzieciak nauczyłem się zasypiać, opowiadając mamie w półmroku pokoju, co takiego zdarzyło się w ciągu dnia, co spotkało mnie w szkole, czego nowego się nauczyłem. Nie mogłem usłyszeć jej głosu ani poczuć jej dotyku, ale jej aura i ciepło obecne były w każdym zakątku mieszkania, a ja, dzieląc wiarę tych, którzy mogą jeszcze zliczyć swój wiek na palcach obu rąk, wiedziałem, że wystarczy zamknąć oczy i zacząć mówić do mamy, a ona, gdziekolwiek by się znajdowała, na pewno mnie usłyszy.*”

Carlos Ruiz Zafón, *Cień wiatru*



(iii) Self talk

- The primary characteristic is that of discourse addressed to self, no matter whether subvocally or outwardly – the fact that most often it is subvocal pertains to social habitus and does not appear to be a necessary characteristic of inner voice
- Speaking out loud to oneself is nevertheless very frequent (swearing, injunctions: now, go...)
- Long solitude, isolation – people start to talk to themselves aloud (see Robinson Crusoe alias the Scottish sailor Alexander Selkirk)

(iv) Diversity of forms

- No special form of speech
- In spite of the longstanding tradition of viewing inner speech as a condensed, abbreviated form of speech which is “almost entirely predicative because the situation, the subject of thought, is always known to the thinker” (Vygotsky, 1934, p. 182) there are practically as many forms of inner speech as of outward speech
- Some of these varieties are simple internalized forms of external speech, when for instance we are preparing a talk or devising smart replies to anticipated questions or statements – here the discourse is generally well-formed
- But in other cases various dimensions of the voice(s) come into play (subject, wish, claim, right, plea, warning, ...), as for instance in an internal debate, in ruminations, personifications, ...
- Use of *I* and *You*, and sometimes even *s/he*

(v) Alice's workshop

- “I wonder how many miles I've fallen by this time?” she said aloud. “I must be getting somewhere near the centre of the earth. Let me see: that would be four thousand miles down, I think—” (for, you see, Alice had learnt several things of this sort in her lessons in the schoolroom, and though this was not a very good opportunity for showing off her knowledge, as there was no one to listen to her, still *it was good practice to say it over*) “—yes, that's about the right distance—but then I wonder what Latitude or Longitude I've got to?” (Alice had no idea what Latitude was, or Longitude either, but *thought they were nice grand words to say.*)”...

Lewis Carroll: Alice's Adventures in Wonderland – I. Down the Rabbit-Hole
(my underlying)

- No reason to show off her knowledge but she does it anyway
- She uses her 'internal forum' as a field of exercise, a medium which makes up a playground (to say and to play) and provides mnemotechnics (to repeat, to “taste” nice, grand words)

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- Novelists experiment by way of fiction (thought) possible livings
 - Alice makes use of the possibilities that inner voice gives her: repeating, rehearsing, playing, experimenting, giving form, inventing (fiction)
 - In doing so, not only she improves her hold on language, she also consolidates her hold on normative, prescriptive, imaginary repertory of her culture
 - It is indeed good practice to repeat, use words, formulas she has learnt, as it is impressing (charming) to pronounce words the meaning of which she didn't really know

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- **Virtuous loop** between public expression and self talk in language development (both in terms of acquisition and of the language itself)
 - The physical character of inner voice brings **motor schema** to memory fixation
 - Inner voice **emancipates attention** from dependence on current perception and action – we become able to determine our agenda, not to depend solely to what happens to us
 - Inner voice as **workshop** of reality, fiction, and lie (especially self lie)

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- “I love words insofar as they correspond to the world, insofar as they give it to me in a heightened form. The more words I have, the more distinct, precise my perceptions become – and such lucidity is a form of joy. Sometimes, when I find a new expression, I roll it on the tongue, as if shaping it in my mouth gave birth to a new shape in the world. Nothing fully exists until it is articulated. ‘She grimaced ironically’, someone says, and an ironic grimace is now delineated in my mind with a sharpness it never had before. I’ve grasped a new piece of experience; it is mine.” (pp. 28-9).

Eva Hoffman, *Lost in Translation* (1989)

(vi) Voice of the reader

- Inner voice and reading – our voice often does the reading for us (our timber of voice, style of pronunciation, accent)
- Phenomenon of **voice of the author** (giving the text the tone and the authority of the author) – the voice may be familiar or imaginary
- Voice and sacred texts – lending one's voice to the sacred text

First summary

- Inner voice as an institution of human life, a vehicle and regulating device of psychic and social life
- The very idea of interiority, of “inner life” comes from our having the inner voice
- Frees attention from dependence on here and now (perception, action, social world) – possible detachment from purely immersive and participatory form of life: possibility of distancing, reflexivity
- As the vector of **agency**, our **spokesman**, and responding instance, it confers upon us the status of **subjects** responsible of our acts
- Is an essential vector of **semiotization** of our being – inner voice is what semiotizes human life from part to part

Becoming a moral instance

- Since **I am two-in-one**, I have to live up to the constraints of this coexistence, to become accountable to myself: “if I disagree with other people, I can walk away; but I cannot walk away from myself; if I do wrong I am condemned to live together with a wrongdoer” (H.Arendt)
- If I try to evade my own company (to avoid the other me, or the one to whom I cannot hide anything) I do it at the risk of dissolving the institution that makes me a subject and confers on me the responsibility of my acts
- I can try to forget, to cheat (i.e. to convert the offense into a justifiable act), to deny, or to lie to myself – all this to preserve the appearance of a responsible subject (obviously these solutions come at a cost – but it is a delayed cost)

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- Why is it so that we are more dependent on the other me than on anybody else?
 - As soon as we talk to ourselves, we are two-in-one, we cohabite with another instance of ourselves
 - What counts here is this need of inner harmony and respectability: we cannot stand coexistence with an instance for which we are a despicable being

Institution of psychic life

- Not only inner voice uses shared language it also transposes social relations: so that even alone we behave in a social fashion, we respect the norms of social life (e.g. uneasiness when we violate these norms, even when alone – we may blush alone)
- Inner voice as both *social agent* (shared language, norms of social life) and as *foundation/vector of individuality* (autonomy of attention, status of subject, intimate spokesperson)
- Inner voice as a medium of verbal expression provides the means of structuring, segmenting, differentiating, focalizing, and at the same time carries permanently the heritage of the symbolic world
- **Rhetorics** as exercise of the character (Yes/no but ...)
- Narratives (witnessing an event)

- “The worst comes at night. As I lie down in a strange bed in a strange house [...] I wait for a spontaneous flow of inner language which used to be my nighttime talk with myself, my way of informing the ego where the id had been. Nothing comes, Polish, in a short time, has atrophied, shriveled from sheer uselessness. Its words don’t apply to my new experiences; they don’t coeval with any of the objects, or faces, or the very air I breathe in the daytime. In English, words have not penetrated to those layers of my psyche from which a private conversation could proceed. This interval before sleep used to be the time when my mind became both receptive and alert, when images and words rose up to consciousness, reiterating what had happened during the day, adding the day’s experiences to those already stored there, spinning out the thread of my personal story.
- Now, this picture-and-word show is gone; the thread has been snapped. I have no interior language, and without it, interior images – those images through which we assimilate the external world, through which we take it in, love it, make it our own – become blurred too.
- [...] What has happened to me in this new world? I don’t know. I don’t see what I have seen, don’t comprehend what’s in front of me. I’m not filled with language anymore, and I have only a memory of fullness to anguish me with the knowledge that, in this dark and empty state, I don’t really exist.” (pp. 107-8).

Eva Hoffman, *Lost in Translation* (1989)

Self and impersonality

- As we talk to ourselves we can take roles, impersonate others and respond to them
- it is in virtue of this possibility of taking roles and impersonating others that we come to the possession of our *selves* (Mead, 1964)
- and symmetrically, as we acquire our selves we discover the dimension of *impersonality* (or the *generalized other*, in Mead's terminology) which, in turn, opens up the possibility of abstract thinking, of generalization, of invoking collective instances
- NB. Third person (account) \neq impersonal

Inner voice and individuality

- Inner voice as both *social agent* (shared language, norms of social life) and as *foundation and vector of individuality* (autonomy of attention, status of subject, intimate spokesperson)
- Conceptual, theoretical difficulty of viewing humans both as socially structured beings and being potentially endowed with individuality, so that I may occasionally think, act, and feel by myself

Externalization of internal debate

- Example of the biblical figure of Job (a blessed man who lives righteously) – catastrophe after catastrophe, but Job doesn't curse God; book of Job: mostly dialogue of Job with three friends – externalization of inner dialogue as a dialogue with friends
- Greek tragedy (vaguely based on myths or epos, with an *alter ego* for the main hero) – here, more systematically, the inner dialogue is externalized as dialogue with the alter ego (friend, sister as in the case of Antigone, aide)

Rational and mythical worlds

- Inner voice may also be the voice of **absent or invisible instances**: father, ancestors, gods
- In instituting psychic or inner life, inner voice uses the cultural repertory at hand – a mix of rational and mythical worlds.
- Mythical thought is primarily a **compact (or dense) medium of thought which is characteristically expressive**
- Compact medium = mythical thought reunites in a reduced format of a foundational narrative (strongly imbued with meaning and referring to general values) a collection of ontogenic (existence, precedence), deontic (norms, obligations) and ethical questions which apply to the interpretation of an **infinity of practical situations**.

- As it is strongly **expressive**, this compact and highly meaningful form is easily **memorizable** and **transferrable** so as to provide the guidelines for the interpretation of a variety of practical situations and human conducts.
- Moreover, much as inner voice is an essential vector of continuity of the self, myths as symbolic forms are an important vector of continuity of the society
- Myths, symbolic fragments, dense formulas
 - *Don't be more papal than the Pope*
 - *He's still unable to kick off his Oedipus (attachment ,jealousy, immaturity...)*
 - *He's a lone wolf (mythical wolf, personification, retains both human character and animal physiognomy)*
 - *She outfoxed her rival (mythical fox – cunning physiognomy both human-like and foxlike)*
 - *The habit makes the monk (cunning transformation of the proverb which imputes to us the belief which it denies, but in a way legitimates the idea that a function – a habit – can actually change the person); see also: time is waste of money*
 - *Loose lips sink ships*
 - *Wyszedł jak Zabłocki na mydle*

Inner voice and becoming human

- Inner voice is a major phenomenon of our mental life
- It is a major vector of a child's development as a human being and a persistent vector of participation in human life
- It is an important vector of language acquisition (repetition, rehearsal, experimentation, imaginary roles/companions)
- Frees attention from dependence on here and now (from total immersion in perception/action)
- Keeps us within the purview of the social world, even alone (Robin Crusoe spoke to himself), and entertains our cultural inheritance
- Provides us with the means **to acquire and stabilize** these same social, cultural and linguistic repertoires of norms and instituted forms, by way of **repeating, reiterating, rehearsing, transforming,** and ***fictionalizing*** (of which it is, as earlier highlighted, an essential vector and medium) – we are the first public of our own fictions
- As the main vector of individuality and of mastery of our own agenda, inner voice offers us a small but nevertheless real chance of **thinking by ourselves**



Thank you!