Sam McAuliffe

Inner Voice

2017

https://doi.org/10.25969/mediarep/1984

Veröffentlichungsversion / published version
Sammelbandbeitrag / collection article

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:
McAuliffe, Sam: Inner Voice. In: Mercedes Bunz, Birgit Mara Kaiser, Kathrin Thiele (Hg.): *Symptoms of the planetary condition. A critical vocabulary.* Lüneburg: meson press 2017, S. 73–77. DOI: https://doi.org/10.25969/mediarep/1984.

Inner Voice

Sam McAuliffe

In a short text written in exile in 1941, Theodor W. Adorno identifies the emergence of a "new type of human being," and as a functional corollary of the administered world, it falls to critique to reconstruct the configuration of indices through which this incipient *Menschentypus* has been cast. Pursued to these ends, the resulting analysis repeatedly lays bare the following tendency: when modeled after this type, nothing of the interior world of the resultant individual is exempt from heteronomous determination; its inner space is permeated by the governing structures of external reality all the way down to its "innermost constitution" (Adorno 2009, 463). This process extends well beyond one of outside influence ("'*Beeinflussung' von außen*") acting upon an otherwise self-subsistent entity. As Adorno later writes in *Minima Moralia*, his expanded study of the typology in question, "there is no substratum beneath such 'deformations,' no ontic interior on which social mechanisms merely act externally" (Adorno 2000, 229). The seclusion of the subject's interior world has always already been breached. The social mechanism is at work and in force on both sides of the threshold that separates the inner world from outer (it engages the individual, whether the latter is aware of it or not, on either side of this division). Inwardness persists for this new human type as, at most, a semblance, shorn of whatever necessity it once had.

This is certainly the case when it comes to the position allocated to the heteronomous subject within its discursive field, the schema for which is drawn up by Adorno in much the same way in this text. Insofar as the administered world is composed of "a synthetic, essentially advertising-determined language," the terms of which circulate all the more readily the more opaque they are, the new type of human being is struck with a form of aphonia, "the wasting away of language [*die Verkümmerung des Sprachschatzes*] and the capacity for expression through language" (Adorno 2009, 464). So too, then, within this linguistic sphere is the subject expropriated of even the pretense of autonomy and intentionality. It is as if the synthesis that produces meaning, that guides the passage of what is said by determining the form of relation between words and things, and between words themselves, has always already been locked in place. The speech of this subject is *prefabricated*, reduced without remainder to the circulation of formula.

It is this that leads Adorno to identify the faltering of speech – the culminating point of which would be its falling away altogether – as one of the primary characteristics of the new type of human being, a privation encompassing all of its actions and passions, and one it would have no available means to counter; again, in *Minima Moralia*, he writes: "the *rigor mortis* of society is spreading at last to the cell of intimacy that thought itself secure. No harm comes to man from outside alone: dumbness [*das Verstummen*; falling silent, becoming mute] is the objective spirit" (Adorno 2000, 138). But what is surprising here, as this line of thought approaches its conclusion, is the specific instance of discourse invoked as evidence of this tendency, as well as the dimension of experience within which this privation is said to come into effect.

> The change in the body of language concerns the interior monologue most of all. So far, there has not been any investigation of the influence of this nascent speechlessness on the overall condition of the people who are made speechless. (Adorno 2009, 464)

The tendency towards speechlessness that accompanies the expansion of the administered world would first and foremost make itself known *within* the integral structure of the subject. No doubt this privation will have further consequences for the possibility of communication in general, but not before it has impinged upon the subject, in and of itself. What lapses into silence, ceasing not only to speak but to hear itself speak, is the monologue of the inner voice, the voice that addresses itself, that alone receives what it emits, and this disrupts, if it doesn't withdraw it altogether, the very condition of reflexive experience, the possibility of staging a relation between the self and itself in any given form. It would mean that the subject could no longer take up a position in relation to itself, not even one of estrangement, because the primary term of this relation has been dissipated: "there is no longer an 'ego' in the traditional sense," it no longer holds together as a point of reference (462).

At issue here is nothing less than a constitutive change in what Adorno elsewhere refers to as "the facticity of inwardness" (Adorno 1991, 32), that which, within the subject, takes the form of spontaneous, ever-present immediacy. Once the inner voice has ceased to speak, once the living support it appears to grant to experience is withdrawn, not only the formal cohesion but the material composition of the interior world finds itself fundamentally affected. This is one of the primary tasks that falls to a critique of "the new type of human being": to analyze the historical conditions for this lapse into speechlessness and to gauge the full range of its consequences, from the effect this silence has on the distribution of the individual's other faculties and the various spheres of psychic life, to its wider implications for the social categories in which the individual is embedded, the division between the public and private self, for example (consequences which are, no doubt, still unfolding today).

Such analysis may even show that the tendency in question is not entirely detrimental. It could well harbor a potential of sorts. Something of this is already apparent in the fact that the critical

model developed by Adorno here at no point speaks in the name of the supposed integrity of subjective inwardness, as though the inner voice was a property that should be restored to the individual, even if this was indeed somehow possible. On the contrary, Adorno subscribes to a doctrine of the individual for which interiority is a condition that must be worked through and ultimately overcome: "the subject does not come to itself through the narcissistically self-related cultivation of its being-for-itself but rather through externalization, by devotedly abandoning itself to what is not itself" (Adorno 1998, 164). There is always a danger, after all, that the inner voice impedes the process of externalization on which the subject's realization is said to depend here, that it leaves the subject estranged from itself by confining it within itself, locking it into its accidental particularity. Interior monologue is a resource that can always lead the subject to mistake inwardness as a value in and of itself, thus suspending the process of self-reflection by which "the ego becomes transparent to itself as a piece of the world" (Adorno 1973, 73). Conversely, then, a model of language from which the structural possibility of interior monologue had been withdrawn, a language given over entirely to externalization, at all points transparent in its mediations: would not such a language necessarily draw the subject out of its self-seclusion, so that, in speaking, the latter would be left "transparent to itself as a piece of the world"? And would this not offer the prospect of a new form of sociality, a revised social relation between its speakers? In his essay on the totally administered society of Huxley's *Brave New World*, Adorno does in fact entertain such a possibility, when he writes: "Through total social mediation, from the outside, as it were, a new immediacy, a new humanity, would arise" (Adorno 1967, 106).

In any case, an intimation of where this question would take us is given intermittently in Adorno's subsequent critical writing. From the radio's phantasmatic mediation of the living voice to the popular cult of biography; from the talking cure in psychoanalysis to the psychotechnical procedures underwriting administered

life (the aptitude test, the questionnaire, and so on): once viewed from within the scope of this question, it would be possible to treat these widely disparate yet historically convergent phenomena as so many prostheses for the absent voice, so many attempts to make speak what has fallen silent, the subject's interior monologue.

References

Adorno, Theodor W. 1967. "Aldous Huxley and Utopia." In *Prisms*, translated by Samuel and Shierry Weber, 97–118. London: Spearman Press.

Adorno, Theodor W. 1973. *The Jargon of Authenticity*. Translated by Knut Tarnowski and Frederic Will. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.

Adorno, Theodor W. 1991. "The Position of the Narrator in the Contemporary Novel." In *Notes to Literature*, Vol. 1, translated by Shierry Weber Nicholsen, 30–36. New York: Columbia University Press.

Adorno, Theodor W. 1998. "Gloss on Personality." In *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*, translated by Henry W. Pickford, 161–165. New York: Columbia University Press.

Adorno, Theodor W. 2000. *Minima Moralia: Reflections on Damaged Life*. Translated by E. F. N. Jephcott. London: Verso.

Adorno, Theodor W. 2009. "The Problem of a New Type of Human Being." In *Current of Music: Elements of a Radio Theory*, edited and translated by Robert Hullot-Kentor, 461–468. Cambridge: Polity Press.