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You Shouldn't Be Reading These

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You Shouldn't Be Reading These

Taylor Jacobs
Honors Research Project in Fine Arts
April 29, 2016

Artist Statement

This body of work originated in the shower, where my best and worst thoughts are conjured. My constant stream of thoughts are typically about the connections I have with the people in my life- friends, family, people no longer in my life, and those who have passed. I consistently try to organize my thoughts and feelings.

Some friendships are constant and stable, and I know that I can always rely on them. Other relationships have been constricting, not allowing self-growth . The recent loss of a friend has also made me realize that my mind isn't always capable of comprehending every given situation. Sometimes the ability to clarify becomes moot.

The gathering of hair in the shower drain for me is a metaphor for the accumulation of my thoughts in the shower. Each of my pieces are about organizing and processing these thoughts. A connection between me and people in my life, past or present, is represented differently in each piece. Individual relationships or situations call for an individual play between the hair and morphed drain. The visual literacy of my pieces being displayed on bathroom tile allows the viewer to step into a personal setting in which to read my thoughts. I just want you to know, you shouldn't be reading these.

Hello, can you hear me? Of course you can, but really it is not me that you hear talking inside your head right now, is it? The purpose of this paper is to discuss the inner voice. It will touch on how I came about researching inner voice for my Honors Project, when it came into existence for all of us, and why we continue to use it as adults. By definition this voice is an invisible language that we display mentally to ourselves. It is most often referred to as inner speech but can also be termed self talk, inner dialogue or just plain thinking to oneself.

This project took on the role of a self investigating tool; it quickly became introspective and very personal. Although there was plenty of research on inner speech through books and various sources, I believe the greatest subject that was learned about was myself. When research began for the project there was an uncertainty as to how was I was going to relay my thoughts and feelings that appeared everyday into physical forms. The inner voice in everyone typically discusses private matters. There was the knowledge that people could and would relate to these introspections, but there was still hesitation to make these everyday thoughts tangible. I began to break down how to connect these ideas to other people's lives. There needed to be an umbrella topic to all of the brooches and necklaces that were to be made. The foundation of where the ideas came from for these pieces became the research, the umbrella to cover all aspects of the pieces, inner dialogue.

Listening to my own inner dialogue had become an increasingly time consuming activity of mine over the years. It helped me problem solve and organize. Each of my

jewelry pieces held the subject of relationships. The relationships that were to be represented in these pieces included past friends, family, strangers and a specific friend that I had just recently lost in a car accident. There was a lot of reflection on the past happening and it was a realization that they were all involved in my daily inner dialogue at the time. I wanted to get across in each piece how my mind processed these relationships, or my thoughts on each person.

Inner dialogue is something that happens fluidly through the day without much notice to anyone. However, I began to focus at what inner talk was happening when there were no distractions from thinking. Quiet moments happen each day and yet it is never really quiet in one's mind. A common quiet space is the shower, a time to focus on oneself. While in the shower last summer I began thinking about the hair that was lost in each showering session. It was a consistent occurrence, loose strands would gather in the drain. Once very much a part of me, these swirled nests were viewed as something worthy of only the trash can as to not upset the next person to step into the ritualistic sanctuary. However, I was starting to see these nests as something valuable. So many moments in life just slip by us with no reminder that it happened, but my thoughts gained strength and problems were resolved as I took my shower, thinking to myself. Now, lying in my drain was tangible evidence that these thoughts took place, that moments of my life were reflected upon. It felt like there was a pause in time and a snapshot of my everyday thoughts were taken right then. These clusters of hair became significant to me. The showers they represented were moments considered to be more important than the rest of my day because I was alone and had time to think. There was time to resolve the current issues that flooded my mind each day.

When I presented my project to the advanced metalsmithing class I came unprepared. I had not realized that the way I organized my thoughts and spoke to myself differed greatly from my peers. I also did not realize that not everyone had the same inner dialogue as I did with myself. What I mean by this is that I often find myself categorizing problems, people, and situations in my inner world. I often call this organizing my thoughts. My thoughts are mostly about how to understand things in a socially acceptable manner. When I began presenting my project as “organizing my thoughts”, some people tried to give me ideas for my projects that just were not making sense to me until I realized something I had never thought on before. I think much differently in some cases than my peers. I tend to compartmentalize my thoughts while others ran on timelines. I tend to think to myself often, having great introspection and intuition. I found that some of my peers did not value this inner speech as much as I did, or at least maybe paid less attention to it. This created a wonderfully new challenge to the body of work that I was about to create. Not only was I now trying to express my inner dialogue, but I also had to help people understand how I speak to myself internally.

With the busy lives we all lead today there are many distractions, and many are fast-paced. Problem solving is a valued asset when the process happens quickly. Some would consider this efficient. I tend to take my time with things and I do not believe it is necessarily on purpose. A year before the honors project began I was told I was not making large enough leaps and bounds with my work. It was hard to digest that when I had felt like I had made some really grand breakthroughs. So I thought on this advice and came to conclude that my inner perception of what was being developed outwardly in my work was completely skewed. My honors project made me even more introspective on

how I problem solved and I tried to teach myself to make larger differences in my work outwardly. The research I did also helped me understand that I was not thinking in an unusual way, seeing an internal world versus an outward world. I came to find out that this is exactly what we all face.

By scientific definition, according to Romeo Vitelli, Ph.D., there are two ways that our inner speech is acknowledged by ourselves. One way we speak to ourselves called condensed. This is the fluid, constant thought that we have throughout the day. They are imagined in a clearer cut translation of what we think about. And then there is expanded inner speech which is when we use our full expansive literary language in our minds. The first scientist to really begin looking at the function behind this talk was Lev Vygotsky in the 1920s. He rationalized that we began using this process around the age of three, when we begin to solve problems for ourselves, independent from our caregivers. Observed, children will often speak out loud to themselves during cognitive learning. They develop an understanding of the tasks they are trying to accomplish by talking themselves through the problem. As we grow older we learn to internalize this voice in which we had once used to solve all problems.¹ As a person ages, their vocabulary grows as well as their capability to talk to themselves inwardly.

Evidence of this is seen as children learn to read inside of their minds as they grow older, sometimes running across words that they must say aloud to accomplish an understanding of the word. As adults we are able to grasp the meaning of an article much quicker than a child, not only because we have mastered all of the words. We have an easier time reading quickly and comprehending meaning because of our accomplished

¹ Romeo Vitelli, Ph.D., "Listening to Your Inner Voice." *Psychology Today*, August 31, 2015, Accessed April 24, 2016. doi:April 24, 2016, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/media-spotlight/201508/listening-your-inner-voice>.

inner voice. Our minds pick up key words and phrases in articles and our inner voice makes sense of them. It is the base of processing logical thoughts.² Our inner self talk helps us do things we are not even aware of. There is a constant dialogue that happens whether we want it to or not and helps us as adults even if we believe we have a firm grip on things we learned as children. Really though, it just makes our learned skills stronger.

Although consciousness had been researched by others such as Pavlov and the Wurzburg School, Vygotsky wanted to resist researching consciousness through the introspective mentalistic psychology or reflexology position that the previous scientists had taken. He believed our inner speech was more than a conscious gesture. He looked to philosopher Spinoza's explanation, "Thinking, like walking, is a proper function of its relevant organ... a description, however approximate, of the function that the organ performs, as a description of the real thing that it does".³ Thus Vygotsky imagined that thinking was not an action taking place because of the brain, but because of the interactions humans had with other people and their cultures. This made a lot of sense to me personally because most of my thoughts that were involved with the jewelry for the honors project were about people and situations. When I lost a good friend, I thought on it a lot, and it was because it was an event that took place in my lifetime that was unusual, to lose someone so young, so close to my own age. There was an action that I had reacted to, thus bringing about a lot of inner dialogue about the situation. There were outward ceremonies of grieving but also day to day thoughts on what and why it happened.

While Vygotsky was occupied with the whys of inner speech, today we know

² A. Sokolov, *Inner Speech and Thought* (New York: Plenum Press, 1972), <https://books.google.com/books?id=z7goBgAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover#v=onepage&q&f=false>

³ James P. Lantolf and Gabriela Appel, *Vygotskian Approaches to Second Language Research*, Norwood: Ablex Publishing Corporation, 1994. doi:April 24, 2016.

where inner speech occurs in the brain. During a simple experiment scientists gave subjects single words to form into simple structure sentences while undergoing positron emission tomography (more commonly known as PET). During the task, subjects silently spoke the sentences to themselves and also imagined someone else speaking to them. These two ways of thinking highlighted different areas of the brain. When inner speech was used, the left inferior frontal gyrus showed activity. This area is located on the left frontal, lower area of the brain. When auditory verbal imagery (subjects imagined the voice coming from someone else) was used, activity was discovered in the same region, but also in the left premotor cortex, supplementary motor area and the left temporal cortex. This experiment allowed us to see that inner speech excites areas that deal with speech generation and imagining speech coming from someone else uses the same regions as outward speech perception. ⁴

Inner speech is a major means of problem solving and is also the way we plan for the future and retain working memory. By talking to ourselves we can imagine future situations, contemplate the past and repeat thoughts to commit them temporarily to memory. However, repeating things to ourselves can also have damaging affects. Rumination is the thought process in which one repeatedly thinks on negative situations or dwells on emotional harm. It can occur when someone tends to be very introspective and habitually looks inward for the answers to their problems. This over-analysis of events can be harmful if they no longer exist outside of one's mind. Although we should look internally to find the root of our problems, it sometimes takes actions in the outer

⁴ P.K. McGuire, D.A. Silbersweig, R.M. Murray, A.S. David, R.S.J. Frackowiak, and C.D. Frith. "Functional Anatomy of Inner Speech and Auditory Verbal Imagery." *Psychological Medicine*, Cambridge University Press, January 1996, 29-38.

world to resolve an issue.

It is thought that inner speech has correlations with anxiety and depression levels in young adults due to rumination. Those who are prone to ruminate will carry on negative thoughts for too long; will spread them on amongst days. These thoughts repeatedly go over the causes and consequences of a negative emotional event. This constant bombardment of negative thoughts does a lot of harm to one's body. To continue thinking in a negative way makes it harder to live positively, it begins to affect other areas in life. It also culminates and inspires anxiety because the thoughts are not based on reality. A person typically ends up feeling anxious over nothing since these thoughts are negative and agitating them daily.

People who experience depression are specifically prone to rumination, while those who do not live with depression have an easier time of shaking these negative thoughts. Depending on what event took place, rumination can also have lasting affects. Having negative thoughts about someone for a long time can lead to harboring negative feelings towards them as well, stopping any type of forgiveness. If one continues to keep these feelings inside, it can ruin relationships, being non-beneficial for both parties.⁵

This is why it is so important for children to hear and learn encouraging phrases. When a person thinks on everything negatively it is truly difficult to lead themselves out of that mindset and they begin to perceive the outside world as worthless. This leads to an unfulfilling lifestyle. Even as adults it is advised in therapy sessions to use an uplifting mantra to begin your day. We internalize these thoughts as reality, boosting our individual morale and making life simpler.

⁵ Simon McCarthy-Jones, Charles Fernyhough, "The varieties of inner speech: Links between quality of inner speech and psychopathological variables in a sample of young adults," *Consciousness and Cognition* 14 January 2011, <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1053810011001954#b0120>.

When we listen to the inner speech that occurs daily and constantly, we begin to notice that there is really a dialogue happening; that there are seemingly two voices. One of these voices typically tries to drown out negativity from the other voice. For myself I would view this voice as something separate from myself, why would I be so negative about situations in the first place, why do I bring up memories of painful relationships of the past? I had dedicated my metal work to these memories I was dredging up constantly without understanding why I did it. I began reading a book that discussed the reasoning behind why we continue to have these inner thoughts since we are obviously beyond the stage of cognitive comprehension as adults.

“Your consciousness is actually experiencing your mental model of reality, not reality itself.”⁶ Reality is too harsh for our being. There is too much violence, too many painful memories. Humans begin to buffer themselves with inner thoughts and dialogue, it is also used to become familiar with objects in the world. Once we notice something around us we mentally take note of it. Now it is no longer a strange subject to us but one that we have acknowledged and committed to memory. I believe that as adults we use these voices solely to comfort ourselves. Of course, there is that negative voice that is still ours but we counteract that with comforting thoughts. It is when we begin to learn that the negative thoughts are also our own voice, is when we begin to heal our wounds. Once it is understood that these problems exist within oneself, rather than outside, the process of healing can begin.

With my metalsmithing project I believed projecting my inner thoughts to the outer world in physical form would help me understand my thoughts and feelings. The

⁶ Michael A. Singer *The Untethered Soul: The Journey Beyond Yourself* (Oakland: New Harbinger Publications, Inc., 2007), 7-22.

project successfully helped me understand the way other people and I think. There was also the opportunity to be able to connect my thoughts with other people. In turn people came to me to discuss similar happenings, events, thoughts and relationships that were relevant to my exhibition. Through speaking to people outside of oneself there begins a connection with the outside world, it does not feel like these are singular feelings anymore. There is a network on different levels of people sharing the same situations and feelings everywhere. It is important to find the root of problems inwardly but is equally important to express these feelings to other people. This outer world is too large to feel alone in. Making these thoughts connect with others helps to find new ways to handle our emotions. Inner dialogue helps fix these problems by processing what happens in the outside world and making them bite-sized problems for our individual selves.

Making work like this was very fulfilling and I want to make more work that stems from this research project in the future. The connections I made with people during my exhibition opening were invaluable. Someone had approached me a month after and told me that my show had resonated with them very deeply. They too had lost a friend in a car accident, it was her best friend and she had memories of herself in the shower contemplating why it all happened. It was such a simple act for me to portray in my work, but knowing that it struck a chord in someone else made me feel that I wanted to make more that connected to other people. It is very important as human beings that we do not feel alone. We need hope in ourselves and others or the daily risk of trying will become futile to many. Art in a big way connects all of our inner thoughts. If someone is in a museum and looking at art, unless they are with someone else to discuss it with, it is their inner dialogue that they turn to to decipher what the work means. They are forced to

put personal meaning to it with their own thoughts and they may possibly apply meaning on a larger scale to the piece.

My work was on such a personal, small scale, level of understanding that my hopes for the pieces were that other people would apply their own life scenarios to the work. Everyone deals with losses and gains in their life and that was what my work was conveying from my standpoint. As an artist I always struggle with the delicate balance of giving enough information for a viewer to understand the work, but not so much information that the answer is so apparent that people can not lend their own experiences to it. My work invited the viewer to see my inner thoughts on display and to connect their own lives through their own interpretation of the work.

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