# In the Time of Thinking Differently

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In *L'Usage des Plaisirs*, Michel Foucault writes, "But what therefore is philosophy today — I mean philosophical activity — if not the critical work of thought on itself? And if it does not consist in undertaking to know how and to what extent it would be possible to think differently, instead of legitimating what one already knows?"[1] Like Foucault, Doris Santoro has situated the problematic of philosophy in terms of the possibility of thinking differently. For both Santoro and Foucault, thinking differently is expressed in the ongoing articulation of novel ways of perceiving the world. And, for both, thinking is the activity that counters the legitimation of existing forms of knowledge. Thinking is counterhegemonic, an interruption through which difference makes its appearance in the world.

Thinking differently produces a difference *in* the world because thinking is itself an encounter *with* difference. In the silent dialogue (*eme emauto*) where, Arendt says, "I am strictly by myself," the thinker encounters the "self" as "always changeable" and "somewhat equivocal." The self's dialogic "other," Arendt says, "is part and parcel of the political reality" in which the thinker lives. Thus, thinking, or the encounter of difference *within* the self, leads to a transformation of the world *beyond* the self. Thinking does not simply contemplate the world; it changes the world through the critical interpretation that leads to new ways of being-in-the-world. As Arendt puts, "In the sense, and to the extent that we still live with ourselves, we all change the human world constantly, for better or for worse, even if we do not act at all."[2] This radical hermeneutics is well known by activists in the tradition of Mohandas Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr.: to think differently is be the difference one wants to see in the world. But how does this transformative critical work of thought come to be? How does one learn to think differently?

If, as Santoro tells us, "teaching to save the world involves preservation and conservation *as a political act*, by teachers who must deliberately *choose* to protect natality," then this political act in the name of social justice occurs in the letting-be of the student as thinker (emphasis in original). Thinking must be learned, but it cannot be taught. Learning to think requires the teacher to sublimate her desire for confirmation of her own knowledge. Thus, Santoro's critique rewrites the terms of social justice education by displacing the pastoral with the existential. The teacher who guides the community of learners is displaced by the teacher who recognizes and lets be the singular. The critical work of thought *on itself* implies a deconstruction of a pastoral education that aims to teach the student to speak and act in predetermined ways. In its place arises a critical theory of the singular, announced by the student, in dialectical opposition to critical pedagogies of the collective movement.

Santoro, following Arendt, identifies the aim of education to be the conservation of what is new and revolutionary in each child. When we understand the Arendtian conservative education as propelling the *praxis* of critical theory, we are

led, as Santoro has shown us, to identify the unique location, the sanctuary, or what I would call the "conservatory" of thinking.[3] While it is crucial to take it up as a *topos* (place), the clearing in the gap between past and future is principally marked as a unique temporality, a *moment* where the immanent and transcendent intersect. As Arendt says, "We are not only in space, we are also in time."[4] Indeed, because of what it says about the time, as opposed to the space, of thinking, Arendt turns to one of Franz Kafka's parables, from his collection of aphorisms entitled *HE*. "For me," she writes, "this parable describes the time sensation of the thinking ego."[5] As I hope to show, an emphasis on the temporality of thinking yields important results for Santoro's critique of pastoral education.

Following Saint Augustine, Arendt writes: "Because he is a beginning man can begin, to be human and to be free are one and the same."[6] Understood as occurring in the time of radical possibility, thinking happens in the temporality of *kairos*, when the linear flow of time, *kronos*, is interrupted by an opening that allows for something wholly different to emerge.

To be free is *to be* that moment, a beginning, when something new is initiated. Thus, the political act in teaching abides in the revolutionary time of freedom when it chooses to let be the student as thinker. The shift to temporality highlights the "crisis" in education as the ever present turning point when the educator is compelled to make a critical decision about the orientation of learning. The "deliberate choice" that Santoro identifies is an existential response to the event of learning, one that affirms natality and confirms the revolutionary that each student *is*. In turn, the conservation of a student's natality should be understood through the language of temporality. The student embodies the ever present possibility of difference, and learning is that moment when something new and original comes into being.

Teaching happens in that moment when the teacher is confronted with the possibility of letting thinking happen. Santoro calls this event a "political act," and I underline this by describing it as "emancipation": the radical decision made by the educator to let be student thinking, difference, and singularity. Arendt calls the decision to affirm the natality of each student an expression of love. But Arendt's understanding of this love does not go far enough, because she is unwilling to take the necessary leap of faith in the students' capacities to think, and *to be* on their own. For, against Arendt, it is precisely *when* students "are left to their own devices," that is, emancipated *from* the projects of the teacher, that their chance of undertaking something new and unforeseen is preserved and protected. Here, I am reading Arendt against Arendt by insisting that the truly radical educator is also the most conservative: a silent guide who emancipates the student into the time and place of thinking. Here my exemplar is the stranger in Plato's famous allegory who emancipates the prisoner from the cave. The stranger says nothing, yet compels the difficult and perplexing liberation into thinking, thereby "teaching" what Foucault calls "the philosophical activity."

For Santoro, thinking differently (that is, the critical work of thought on itself) is the necessary condition of an education that enables students to take on the praxis of social justice work on their own terms. I would like to take this a step further, and

suggest that in the form of critical theory, the philosophical activity in education is itself a praxis, an activity whereby the singular thinker, the student, disrupts the normalizing process of education as the unquestioned dissemination and appropriation of the teacher's knowledge and understanding of what is "just" and "unjust" in the world. But this disruption is not simply a questioning of the teacher's knowledge, and the praxis is not simply a critique that reveals an alternative to that knowledge. Rather, the disruption of the status quo, and the subsequent reshaping of the world by thinking, reveals the philosophical activity to bear its own normative ordinance. This is why the preservation and conservation of thinking is identified by Santoro as a political act, and one, I add, whose existential imperative arises from the temporality of thinking. When thinking is emancipated from knowledge in education, the question of social justice is not delayed, postponed, or projected as a future project. It is taken up, here and now, within the time of thinking, or *kairos*: the exceptional gap between past and future. The temporality of thinking compels a new, radical form of education, one that emerges with the existential politics of the educator who is compelled to choose against her own authority, and thereby relinquish her status as disseminator of established "truths." The "crisis" in social justice education is the ever present turning point when the educator chooses to let a student's thinking be free and independent of her own projects. In making this choice, and protecting the clearing for the time and place of thinking, the educator takes a leap of faith in the student's capacity to think differently, and thereby chooses to *be* the very justice she wants to see in the world.

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1. Michel Foucault, *L'Usage des Plaisers* [The Use of Pleasure] (Paris: Gallimard, 1984), 15, quoted in Arnold I. Davidson, "Introduction," in Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, ed. Frédéric Gros, trans. Graham Burchell (Picador: New York, 2005), xxvii–xxviii.

2. Hannah Arendt, "Philosophy and Politics," *Social Research* 57, no. 1 (1990), 88.

3. I discuss the place of educational thinking as a "conservatory" in Eduardo M. Duarte, "Educational Thinking and the Conservation of the Revolutionary," *Teachers College Record*, special issue on Hannah Arendt's "Crisis in Education," ed. Chris Higgins (forthcoming). In this piece I also take up, in further detail, the temporality of thinking.

4. Hannah Arendt, "Thinking," in *Life of the Mind*, vol. 1 (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971), 201.

5. Ibid., 202.

6. Hannah Arendt, "What Is Freedom?" in *Between Past and Future* (Penguin: New York, 1993), 167.