



“The ceiling may be bugged... But you should talk about this play.”

When Arthur Miller visited the Soviet Union in the 1960s, the perceived fear of wiretapping had reached such an extent the author remarked, “There is an almost universal conviction that all hotel rooms are tapped, as well as many apartments.” In Prague, the threat of government censorship over public and private communication after the Soviet takeover of Czechoslovakia stifled the artistic growth of the city that would become the basis of his setting for *The Archbishop’s Ceiling*. Miller had already witnessed—and written about—an institution asserting its power to silence communication, specifically of artists with public influence. The House Un-American Activities Committee, it was later found, had—like the Soviet Union—participated in illegal wiretapping to help its case against the perceived threat of communism in Hollywood.

The concern that someone could be spying on our conversations raises the question: how do we communicate differently when we think someone could be listening? What Miller also observed in the Soviet Union, however, was that just because they worried someone might overhear them, people didn’t stop communicating. Hosts would play loud music to allow their guests to speak safely underneath, or people would simply hold discussions with paper and pencil while they bantered away about nothing for the sake of secret microphones.

It’s interesting to consider how Miller would regard the advancements in communication technology today, when a better question than, “Could someone be listening?” may be: “Who isn’t?” Where is the line between public and private conversation if we can’t be sure anything is even private anymore? Miller utilized this juxtaposition between private and public conversation nearly forty years ago when he wrote *The Archbishop’s Ceiling*. At the time, he placed the onus on artists—specifically writers—to inspire public conversation, which in turn keeps private conversation alive, even if it means that, like Sigmund, they would be held to higher scrutiny. The same technology today which welcomes more opportunity to have our conversations overheard and potentially controlled has also empowered more people than ever before to embrace the candid conversation Miller tasked artists to employ. And as theater artists, we’ve been doing the same thing with you, our patrons, for even longer: inviting you to hold a conversation with us because of what spoke to you onstage. So, even if the theater’s ceiling may be bugged, please, don’t let that stop you from talking about this play!

*Jean Egdorf, Dramaturg*