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Mother Tongue|Body Language:
The Intimate Esthetic of Arendt's Report on Eichmann

To me *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, despite all the horrors in it, was morally exhilarating. I freely confess that it gave me joy and I too heard a paean in it – not a hate-paean to totalitarianism but a paean of transcendence, heavenly music, like that of the final chorus of *Figaro* or the *Messiah*.¹

Justice ... demands seclusion, it permits sorrow rather than anger, and it prescribes the most careful abstention from all the nice pleasures of putting oneself in the limelight.²

Close to its beginning, these words from Arendt entertain tense relations with the report she is introducing, a report that insists on demarcations, spaces and subdivisions while also subverting them; a report that shifts between sorrow and anger, between abstention and pleasure, between restraint and excess; a report that seemingly erases its elegiac subtext for the sake of extraverted provocation and irony, unpleasant “tones” that gave rise to such intense criticism; a report that, like texts written in the eye of the storm, brings out the best in its author – though not necessarily through its conceptual subtlety or speculative refinement, but rather due to its tightness and terseness, and because it reveals concerns and quests, beyond the specific issues at hand, that have long since been associated with them.

With time, after its first publication in 1963,³ critics gradually came to look more closely and lucidly at the Report, to grapple both historiographically and conceptually with what were perceived as its key challenges: Questions about the politicization of the trial, the critique of the *Judenrat*, and the notion of the banality of evil. Even those who successfully clarified her intentions and interpreted the powerful relations between the questions Arendt raised in the Report and the historical-phenomenological opus that preceded it (like *The Origins of Totalitarianism* and *The Human Condition*), took it that Arendt's language, the expressive tool for her ideas, had “slipped” or been used infelicitously, because her writing was scathing, blunt and lacking in empathy.⁴

Arendt's language, however, was not merely a tool. Throughout the Report, it shows, illustrates, and operates various possible relations between language and world, ranging from empty chatter and cliché to a renewing poetic liberation, in a way that makes it the center of interest itself, a focal issue with psychological as well as historical-political origins and far-reaching implications. Arendt presents a Report concerning language, and by extension, concerning esthetics, esthetics as ideology; a report about the ethical or esthetic possibility of a critique of ideology, of an active judging observation based on modernist assumptions which reveal a surprising association between herself and the artistic milieu of Paris between the two world wars.

Arendt offers us a narrative text. The plot that can be extracted from it if we want to follow the stages of Eichmann's career does not take the form of a sequence, being but part of a textual ensemble based on eclectic generic principles (naturalistic, impressionist, surrealist), which also includes philosophical and ideological statements.

Already in its subtitle the text articulates its difference: *A Report* – a secondary genre, apparently inferior, non-literary, non-scholarly. It is an interesting choice. It is not merely the result of the conditions in which Arendt created her essay, that is, as an envoy of the *New Yorker* to Jerusalem. For her, a report literally reports, renders account in the Socratic sense, so as to examine people's views and to extract from each expression its reasons and implications. Because she must cope with the paradoxical reality of a total evacuation of individuality, and a fortiori of thought and judgment, her report becomes a counter-report of the kind that Nazis did not, could not, publish.

Moving the discussion to the realm of esthetics and using a narratological lexicon may raise some eyebrows or even cause a certain discomfort given the *gravitas* of the subject matter and the – unjustifiably – dubious reputation of estheticization and indeed of Arendt herself, who was seen to have freely invented and speculated at will.⁵ The ethical query, however, that the literary work mediates for us – and this includes Arendt's Report as a document of this type – renders its historical anchoring more forceful, valid and insightful, along with the moral dilemmas it arouses. An esthetic response, in addition, indirectly raises the question of what counts as meaningful historiographical work, what are the criteria by which it is to be assessed, and whether these are exhausted by mere empirical exactitude.

The fact that the Report was only published in Hebrew forty years later,

against a backdrop of scholarly developments unknown and unforeseen by Arendt, further emphasizes the pertinence of this question. To the embarrassment suggested by this esthetic “inversion” I would like to add a paradoxical gesture by arguing for the relevance of Arendt’s biography to what occurs in the Report, to the workings of language in the Report, the workings of the (mother)tongue, in spite of her sparse first-person presence, because she speaks of herself so sparsely, here and in other texts, she is not easily accessible, she does not indulge in introspection, she is hesitant about showing intimacy, even in her personal correspondence. And yet, by means of the Report, with its many foci of discussion, with the whole universe which for her it holds, obviously, Arendt records the sea-change she underwent from melancholic self absorption to a breach with melancholy, to what in other writings she calls *natality*, and as a result, from melancholic writing to post-melancholic writing. The moment of change is not documented in the Report. It is the culmination of a long process that precedes the trial and grows stronger, however capricious and unpredictable its course, as she writes the Report. The latent exchange in the Report between the esthetic and the autobiographical raise, apropos of language, another valuable issue for us – both as a collective and as individuals who derive, as Arendt sees it, a disturbing, perverse pleasure from rituals of reading, again and again, in the accumulating chapters of the Hagadda: Is it possible to exit melancholy?

This essay follows – in Arendt’s footsteps – the diverse lingual range revealed by the Jerusalem trial, including the epistemologically and affectively distinctive status of the statements of the speakers, regardless of the subject position inhabited by each: the accused, the prosecutor, the defense attorneys, the judges, the witnesses. Arendt holds them all to their word. In terms of language use, this is a sequence, even if between polarities; between the shallow and the scrupulous, an absolute *differend* obtains. Her attunedness to the extremes, and not less to what happens between them, forms the core of the Report. She must find a flexible esthetic position, a polyphonic position, so as to tell deeply differing stories: Eichmann’s story, first of all; second, the story – or stories – of the Jerusalem trial, and eventually – but also simultaneously – her own story.

A Man Without A Story

“Eichmann had written a ‘book’ in the time between the adjournment of the court in August and the pronouncement of judgment in December”, reports Arendt (222). This sentence inflects, with the sharp irony of the woman who will succeed to publish his biography much before him, a hint at the impossibility of her own project, and by extension, at the radical impossibility to communicate in the strict sense, inherent in the very subject at trial here, an impossibility that, in her opinion, the court failed to address adequately: an impossibility that for legal, political, esthetic and moral reasons must be confronted. For the first time in her life Arendt must deal, rather than with a historical-sociological-phenomenological portrait of a collective, with the story of a man who lacks both speech and a story. Her pen, which until then so much enjoyed – and would again enjoy – a whole community of narrative subjects – in both senses – from Rahel Varnhagen to Lessing, Benjamin and Jaspers, and all the transference relations she spun between them, now was put into the service of writing about someone who was absent, “someone” who behaves but does not act, who lacks the necessary conditions for biography, namely: a memory and a language.

Arendt’s esthetic and moral duty – she has no doubt about this – is to allow this abyss to enter the Report, as if to puncture it from within. Never before did she stray so far into the darkness, though she does not reach its end. Two conditions, then – necessary and sufficient for biography – do not appear here, and Arendt revisits them with an obsessive persistence in the course of her writing. To begin with, let us quote from the places where she relates to the gaps in Eichmann’s memory: “His memory proved to be quite unreliable about what had actually happened. [...] Eichmann remembered the turning points in his career rather well” (53); “He never changed his Madagascar story, and probably he just could not change it. It was as though this story ran along a different tape in his memory, and it was this taped memory that showed itself to be proof against reason and argument and information and insight of any kind” (78); “Eichmann’s memory, jumping with great ease over the years [...] was certainly not controlled by chronological order, but it was not simply erratic. It was like a storehouse, filled with human-interest stories of the worst type” (81). And in the end, his report about the Wannsee conference:

The meeting lasted no more than an hour or an hour and a half, after which drinks were served and everybody had lunch – ‘a cozy little social gathering’, designed to strengthen the necessary personal contacts. It was a very important occasion for Eichmann, who had never before mingled socially with so many ‘high personages’; [...] he acted as secretary of the meeting. This was why he was permitted, after the dignitaries had left, to sit down near the fireplace with his chief Mueller and Heydrich, ‘and that was the first time I saw Heydrich smoke and drink’. They did not ‘talk shop, but enjoyed some rest after long hours of work’, being greatly satisfied and, especially Heydrich, in very high spirits (113–114).

We note a number of stylistic elements: Arendt quotes descriptions or explanations supplied by Eichmann himself. Quotation marks are an important component in her rhetoric, serving to create a variety of impressions throughout the Report. As concerns Eichmann, this is first and foremost a close study of his way of speaking – literally and concretely – that is to say, the manner in which every reality does not just lose “something” of its existence, as every act of symbolization implies, but its very existence as such. It does not exist, even if, paradoxically, its whole existence is the result of this denial. Second, on the basis of additional documents, Arendt follows evidence that Eichmann forgot (112), adds information – anecdotal at times – and perspective, even where she repeats his words. Third, Arendt often shifts from the descriptive to the reflective by means of conceptualization which allows her to shed a different light on things, to point at what has been repressed, what has been omitted, or what is not even present in the hero’s consciousness. This transition plays a crucial role in evolving the analytical-therapeutic duality that characterizes the Report and it is associated with a relationship Arendt develops elsewhere, in *The Human Condition*, and later, in *The Life of the Mind*, as well as in lectures on reflective judgment in Kant, between affect and the reflection on affect, its processing. She cannot linger too long with taste, with affect. She must judge.

Thus Arendt actively intervenes in Eichmann’s story, and she does so mostly ironically: “His life was beset with frustrations.” In Argentina he was “leading the unhappy existence of a refugee” (34). “Nothing but frustration; a hard luck story if there ever was one” (72). She breaks up his story, the logic of his story, by syntactical and rhetorical means as well as by adding information. Moreover, she takes charge of the story’s time frame: “He was put into the brand-new department concerned with Jews. This was the real beginning of the career which was to end in the Jerusalem court” (37). Not for a moment will she let him take lead of the story even if, at times, she suspends her final word to allow for a certain

effect to be heard, especially where the unbelievable, the inconceivable, indeed happened and reality is in no need of her intervention to bear out its own absurdity: “Hence, the profession that appears on all his official documents: construction engineer, had about as much connection with reality as the statement that his birthplace was Palestine and that he was fluent in Hebrew and Yiddish” (28), Arendt writes, creating the repeated impression of a total lack of connection between Eichmann and reality. Only, as we will learn later, as an “expert” on the Jewish problem, Eichmann actually did learn Yiddish and Hebrew. Her intense involvement with Eichmann’s story is the polar opposite of the restraint and dryness with which Arendt conveys difficult facts about movements of populations, enforced immigrations, expulsions, the data of annihilation. This is an altogether different register which documents the sequence of events without any rhetorical intervention, without pathos, as it were without words. Exactly because of this, in the garrulous and platitudinous context which she quotes and elucidates extensively, the huge, abstract numbers take on a flesh-and-blood presence: they themselves are what is and what perishes; they are the reality of death itself, mute and speechless.

But let us take a closer look at Eichmann’s “heroic fight with the German language, which invariably defeats him” (48). This is a fascinating formulation because it fails to fully agree with the categorical statement Arendt will express in the famous interview with Günther Gaus, a short while after the Report’s publication: “It wasn’t the German language that went crazy.”⁶ Madness – whose madness is it? There are countless quotes from Eichmann’s speech; let us, then, group some of them in terms of clearly defined characteristics which will then amount to a distinct type of expression. Arendt does not formulate a systematic philosophy or theory of language, but together the observations she makes in the course of the event form an invaluable statement concerning the knowledge of language and the use of language – which are not the same thing – about the abuse of language, on the one hand, or about the corruptibility of language – and for identical reasons, on the other hand, about the reparability of language. Arendt would not have written the Report, and she may never have written at all, were it not for this firm conviction.

(a) One category consists of the language of hyperbole. Arendt, who thinks that “[b]ragging was the vice that was Eichmann’s undoing” (46), quotes some of the expressions he uses repeatedly to describe states of “elation” (53, 62) and great falls into abysmal depths. Thus, when he was

transferred, against his will, from Linz to Salzburg in 1932 (still with the petroleum company): "I lost all joy in my work, I no longer liked to sell, to make calls" (31). When, in October 1939, he was moved to Berlin to replace Mueller as head of the Reich's Central Authority for Jewish Immigration: "There we were, sitting in a great and mighty building, amid a yawning emptiness" (67). And in response to the order he later received to exterminate Jews: "I now lost everything, all joy in my work, all initiative, all interest; I was, so to speak, blown out" (31). The expressions that serve Eichmann here are not necessarily clichés. They are part of an existentialist and mystical literary tradition that teems with expressions of vacancy and elation. What renders Eichmann's usage distinctive is not just that he revisits the same phrases over and over again, that is: the poverty of his language and its inflexibility, but rather the use of the same vocabulary for radically different situations. At the root of this linguistic performance is the absolute identification of the speaking self with the professional self, an identification that transforms everything into a force that either motivates or obstructs in relation to his work, and nothing more.

(b) An adjacent category, and possibly even more misleading, concerns the places where Eichmann seems – first of all to himself and at times to others as well – someone who observes his fellow humans, identifies with them, understands, acknowledges, is in touch with, and even interested in, their feelings. Arendt, who will eventually find that the crucial defect in Eichmann's personality is his "almost total inability ever to look at anything from the other fellow's point of view" (47–48), pauses at his emotional vocabulary. Eichmann recounts that the Jews "desired" to emigrate (48): He presents himself as someone who did not wish to "hurt their feelings". Here, in his own opinion – and hence the importance of quoting for an understanding of his self-perception – Eichmann identifies a feeling in the other, pays attention to it and responds to it. To the same extent he assumes and expects attention and empathy, indeed, even sympathy, from the other, also if it happens to be his victim's son (chief inspector Avner Less). At these moments, Eichmann's discourse, which he himself acknowledges is bureaucratic ("Officialese [...] is my only language" (48)), as it were rises, directs itself outward and opens up. It is the emotional, ostensibly personal vocabulary, as opposed to the distinct category of Nazi "rules of language" which were manipulated from the start to serve as camouflage and deception – that testifies to the absolute disconnect between language and reality, and to the eclipse of experience itself by self-deception.

The pseudo-emotional vocabulary, moreover, betrays a megalomaniac appropriation of reality. Reality is “in his pocket”: he initiates it, is responsible for it, channels it and experiences it exactly as he renders himself account of it – no more and no less. As far as he is concerned, he suffers from no linguistic distress. Hence the difficulty and the challenge posed by Eichmann’s pseudo-emotional language are huge – something which Arendt will indirectly point out both when quoting the transformation of affect and emotion into language from other subject positions elsewhere in the Report and when, parenthetically, she will part ask, part state: “(Was it these clichés that the psychiatrists thought so ‘normal’ and ‘desirable’?)” (48–49) Eichmann contrives to make himself fail/foul linguistically, and, interestingly, those who surround him too, including those – judges, “experts of the psyche” – who will attend him a long time after.

How is one to understand this linguistic “disorder” which is neither pathology, nor nagging “symptom”, nor necessarily cognitive defect? What, moreover, happens to a language and those who speak it when charged expressions such as “desired”, or to have “a normal human encounter” (concerning the Kommerzialrat Storfer, a representative of the Jewish community, 51), become unmoored and wholly detached from others’ material and emotional reality? What happens to a language and those who speak it when its usual expressions are ostensibly identified and give a (comforting) sense of a shared, familiar world exactly in so far as they actually escape the narrow professional bureaucratic plane to co-exist, as it were, on several levels at once? What happens to a language and its users when the absolute *differend* inheres not in the lack of adjustment between lexicons or diverse puns, but in the use of what would seem, on the face of it, the very same lexicon? For it would appear to be in a speaker’s very choice of a certain expression at a certain moment, even if it is not remotely a stroke of genius or linguistic invention, that his or her sincerity and freshness of perception is given form. Here, however, is exactly where the problem occurs. The speaker uses indiscriminately what is available.

In other words: common language which offers its speakers inventories of resources to describe the situations of relatedness between people, first and foremost for the sake of communication between them, for cross-fertilization and cross-imagining, here folds and evacuates into the scanty world of the individual. This is not common language, it is personal and non-personal, it erases personality and hence, sealed, it prattles loosely. Arendt considers:

Whether writing his memoirs in Argentina or in Jerusalem, whether speaking to the police examiner or to the court, what he said was always the same, expressed in the same words. The longer one listened to him, the more obvious it became that his inability to speak was closely connected with his inability to *think*, namely, to think from the standpoint of somebody else. No communication was possible with him, not because he lied but because he was surrounded by the most reliable of all safeguards against the words and the presence of others, and hence against reality as well (49).

Is it possible, and under what conditions, to restore to language its specific, relating and intentional gravity? And to do so without concession to a linguistic conservatism that protects us from the vicissitudes of time, avoiding to hold on to such language as remains and thus turning it into cliché, buttressing oneself in it and blaming the lack of fit between it and the events on a regrettable error that will be fixed once reality reconnects with its intended conceptual grounds. This is how Arendt interpreted the responses of the Jews of Austria and Germany to what was happening around them in the 1930s (41). By extension, and under similar constraints, the problem of those who spoke the language after the war cannot merely be reduced to that of casting out the demons of the language of deceit, for it is a question of regaining confidence in a language that functioned and to a large extent “remained itself”, common and available in a nightmare reality.

(c) The third category points at creation in language, with euphemism serving to create an unprecedented material reality. The new reality, as a result, continues to conduct itself by means of the existing lexicon, wishing thereby not to cast suspicion on itself. The habitual, available words are borrowed to describe different or opposite phenomena, and in fact to create them, to constitute conditions and consolidate them. Clearly Eichmann was merely a user of such “creations”, which rendered language absolutely powerful, without a claim to originality or to “copy right”. “The Führer’s *words*, his oral pronouncements, were the basic rule of the land” (148).

As early as November, 1937, in the secret speech addressed by Hitler to members of the German High Command [...] [he] had pointed out that he rejected all notions of conquering foreign nations, that what he demanded was an ‘empty space’ [*volkloser Raum*] in the East for the settlement of Germans. His audience [...] knew quite well that no such ‘empty space’ existed, hence they must have known that a German victory in the East would automatically result in the ‘evacuation’ of the entire population (217).

Arendt pauses at length with the Nazis' "language rules" to characterize Eichmann as a speaker who obeyed the rules. "Final solution", "legal solution", "special legislation", "the specialist", "evacuation", "special treatment", "resettlement", "labor in the East", the "human method" to kill by means of "euthanasia": "It is rare to find documents in which such bald words as 'extermination', 'liquidation', or 'killing' occur" (85).

None of the various 'language rules', carefully contrived to deceive and to camouflage, had a more decisive effect on the mentality of the killers than this first war decree of Hitler, in which the word for 'murder' was replaced by the phrase 'to grant a mercy death'. Eichmann, asked by the police examiner if the directive to avoid 'unnecessary hardships' was not a bit ironic, in view of the fact that the destination of these people was certain death anyhow, did not even understand the question, so firmly was it still anchored in his mind that the unforgivable sin was not to kill people but to cause unnecessary pain (108–109).

Only among themselves could the 'bearers of secrets' talk in uncoded language, and it is very unlikely that they did so in the ordinary pursuit of their murderous duties – certainly not in the presence of their stenographers and other office personnel. For whatever other reasons the language rules may have been devised, they proved of enormous help in the maintenance of order and sanity in the various widely diversified services whose cooperation was essential in this matter. Moreover, the very term 'language rule' (*Sprachregelung*) was itself a code name; it meant what in ordinary language would be called a lie. For when a 'bearer of secrets' was sent to meet someone from the outside world [...] he received, together with his orders, his 'language rule' [...]. The net effect of this language system was not to keep these people ignorant of what they were doing, but to prevent them from equating it with their old, 'normal' knowledge of murder and lies. Eichmann's great susceptibility to catch words and stock phrases, combined with his incapacity for ordinary speech, made him, of course, an ideal subject for 'language rules' (85–86).

And finally the following, important testimony: "He was quite capable of sending millions of people to their death, but he was not capable of talking about it in the appropriate manner without being given his 'language rule'. In Jerusalem, without any rules, he spoke freely of 'killing' and of 'murder', of 'crimes legalized by the state'; he called a spade a spade" (145).

Reality-creating language seeps into whatever constitutes the human in order then to remove its humanity: imagination, decision, action, intimacy and even the instincts, immediate responses like disgust or flinching. Hence, even when, in the end, Eichmann himself sheds the "language rules" and "rules" as it were over sin, as in the Bible, that is to say, takes control over desire and speaks it,⁷ finds the right words – even then language and experience remain hermetic vis-a-vis one another and do not pass mutual

information. The rules of language produced a reality which he may now be ready to call by its name, or, in fact, he may now be prepared to adopt the full range of legal language. "Language rules" may be shed but skin cannot be shed. And Eichmann is wholly enveloped by it.

Banality

As to the question of banality, two points in the Report stand out. One is that the word, or the concept (not the adjective) appears only once, right towards the end, towards the gallows: "He was completely himself. Nothing could have demonstrated this more convincingly than the grotesque silliness of his last words. [...] In the face of death, he had found the cliché used in funeral oratory. Under the gallows, his memory played him the last trick; he was 'elated' and he forgot that this was his own funeral" (252). And Arendt, who, in a final gesture reconnects memory and language as constituting the condition for becoming a subject, and in this case, the condition for confronting your own death, the fear of death – even from this Eichmann draws away attention – here she testifies: "It was as though in those last minutes he was summing up the lesson that this long course in human wickedness had taught us – the lesson of the fearsome, word-and-thought-defying *banality of evil*" (252).

The second point, which appears in the Epilogue, where Arendt deals with the debate that erupted on publication of the Report, a point which re-appears both in her correspondence and in the Introduction to *The Life of the Mind*, is her insistence that this is not a thesis or a doctrine: "When I speak of the banality of evil, I do so only on the strictly factual level, pointing to a phenomenon which stared one in the face at the trial. [...] He [Eichmann], to put the matter colloquially, *never realized what he was doing*" (287).

Throughout, Arendt actually tries to show banality, its sallow and defiantly camouflaged face, tries to show the shapes it takes rather than explain it, let alone offer a wholesale theory of it. Indeed, she chooses a flexible everyday notion, simple, whose use does not attract attention, a concept, hence, that totally merges with what it comes to describe and that itself features the very same disproportionate tension between its availability and its cheapness on one hand, and the monstrosity which it denotes on the other. She comes to this in the end, as to a pseudo-apotheosis because

there is no apotheosis, because there is a non-apotheosis: banality. Just like that. And she does this only after first having put on display, one after the other, the manifestations of banality, and predominantly, its manifestations in language.

In the face of this quantitative accumulation of rules of “clean language”, of euphemisms, clichés, and platitudes – which eventually is revealed as a wholly different and unprecedented quality of speech – Arendt points at what she regards as the inherent link between the banality of language and the banality of evil. In doing so she introduces a broad and rich field for thought which has not yet been mined, not by Arendt herself either. For linguistic banality does not directly lead to evil. It may stay within the bounds of cliché – and by extension within the bounds of uniformization, regularization, and monotony, whose damage to the ability to judge are not to be ignored – but without lapsing into totalitarian evil.

Though Sartre’s *Nausea*,⁸ for instance, in contrast with his more conclusive story “Childhood of a Leader“, is situated in the dangerous zone of bad faith of the anti-Dreyfusard bourgeoisie, it does not cross the lines into the banality of evil. It would seem that it is Arendt’s distinct modernism, the humanist modernism that forms the basis of the Report, which categorically confirms that the birth of the subject is in language, in speech, in verbalization; that deems it worthy to labor on behalf of language/the imagination, and that is aware of how easy it is to give up, stop paying heed, to neglect and reduce, indeed, wholly abolish them in the face of the given. At some point, its emergence cannot be foretold, and as a result of a combination of structural and historical circumstances which she elucidated and described at length in her *Origins of Totalitarianism*, the monstrosity becomes possible. Arendt, regrettably, never attempted to forge a synthesis between the Report’s perception of language and the socio-historical and phenomenological perspective she presented in this earlier work.

Arendt thus weaves her threads and avoids theorization. Repeatedly language and memory come up as the constitutive factors of subjecthood: a relational subject who exists among others, as part of a multitude whom she or he takes into account, as opposed to a coiled self who, even in public, sees itself only. The performances of banal language are directly associated with an absolute self-absorption:

Hence the problem was how to overcome not so much their conscience as the animal pity by which all normal men are affected in the presence of physical suffering. The trick used

by Himmler [...] was very simple and probably very effective; it consisted in turning these instincts around, as it were, in directing them towards the self. So that instead of saying: what horrible things I did to people!, the murderers would be able to say: What horrible things I had to watch in the pursuance of my duties, how heavily the task weighed upon my shoulders! (106)

False language, or what Arendt more than once calls bad faith (giving it explicitly Sartrean characteristics), depends on putting the private self, which is subject to the collective self and materializes as part of it, at the center. Arendt finds, here, a total inversion of the spaces of existence and of the world, a radical injury of the human condition, that is to say: a transposition of the order of necessity which obtains in the private space to the political space, as well as a total conformism regarding the “demands” of the political as the self undergoes paradoxical erasure. An object-less self, one reproduced and reflected in the collective without entertaining any reciprocal relations with it, is a self that registers global, historical-political events as part of organic, natural – and hence also destructive – processes. Such a self becomes immediately enthralled, it does not intervene.

Eichmann needed only to recall the past in order to feel assured that he was not lying and that he was not deceiving himself, for he and the world he lived in had once been in perfect harmony. And the German society of eighty million people had been shielded against reality and factuality by exactly the same means, the same self-deception, lies, and stupidity that had now become ingrained in Eichmann's mentality. [...] [T]he practice of self-deception had become so common, almost a prerequisite for survival (52).

And so the one trait of banality suggested by the observation of Eichmann's language is a total confusion, a true inversion, of the spaces of existence. If the Nazis in their sophistication willfully created a language of deceit, then Eichmann was, as it were, “born into it”, completely saturated by it and living everything that happened around him, in every sphere and on every plain, as though it was “his job”. For him there is no world or public space with which he can make contact. He is therefore not in the position to recognize the meaning and consequences of the “job” he is doing. In the terms of *The Human Condition* what we have here is an *animal laborans* which, while it *produces* corpses and changes the order of the *world*, never, even for an instant, loses the narrow horizon of its vision. Hence Arendt does not stop emphasizing the narrowness of Eichmann's perspective. She writes, in one of the most incisive sentences of the Report: “What for Hit-

ler, the sole, lonely plotter of the Final Solution [...] was among the war's main objectives, with its implementation given top priority, regardless of economic and military considerations, and what for Eichmann was a job, with its daily routine, its ups and downs, was for the Jews quite literally the end of the world" (153).

At times, describing this aspect of Eichmann's banality, Arendt uses the weapon of de-banalization, that is: the refusal of authority, or rather: contempt of authority. As she writes in *On Violence*, authority assumes recognition. Whoever wishes to obey or respect it must not ask questions, and authority, from its side, needs not impose itself forcefully to convince her or him. The enemy of authority, therefore, is ridicule and the sure way to question it is by laughter. Many times, this technique appears in the Report as the spectacle of banality is set off by resistance, the writer's de-banalization. Arendt's laughter, or her "tone", became an issue, explicit as well as inflected, in the post-publication debate. Its crucial role – both in the presentation and the questioning of banality – must be understood in terms of the importance she attaches (always through the modernist-humanist prism) to the counter-factual, to the possibility of natality, to the fact that it could have been otherwise, that it may, in the future, be otherwise.

This is for instance how Arendt describes Eichmann's involvement in the fantastic negotiations about "blood for goods", the bargaining, during the horse-trading with Kästner, around saving Jewish lives. "There was a considerable haggling over prices, and at one point, it seems, Eichmann also got involved in some of the preliminary discussions. Characteristically, his price was the lowest, a mere two hundred dollars per Jew – not, of course, because he wished to save more Jews but simply because he was not used to thinking big" (143). Sometimes the laughter, Arendt's laughter, is just a matter of an added particle: "He even read one more book" (50).

The other mark of banality is related to the fact that it is likely to be "deep rooted", as it tends to thicken over time. The quantity of banalities as such sediments into quality, to "banality" with a capital B. And indeed, only at the end of the Report can Arendt say that everything we have seen so far – quantity that evolved into quality which in turn went on to accumulate, and vice versa, and once again, uninterruptedly – this is the "banality" of evil literally, and insist that this remains on the descriptive level, unconceptualized, without theory. Banality grew into a quality that constantly increased quantitatively, incessantly, and not a person got in its way; for this is what it would have taken, according to Arendt: a person

– man, woman – people to stop it. The monstrosity we are trying to understand is situated in this unprevented drift between the swelling number of ongoing manifestations of the “banal” and the new “quality” of the banal. As a rule, it should be noted that the words “radical” and “radicalness”, for which Arendt’s detractors searched in a panic and knowingly, are far from absent from the Report, in fact they are far more common than the rarely used words “banal” or “banality”. Banality, in Arendt’s view, does not lack seriousness or gravity, even fanaticism. It by no means excludes these characteristics where no one questions or ridicules the rules of the game. Again and again, Arendt describes so-called “negotiations”, meetings, decisions and discussions which were all marked by a rigorous, irrefutable logic. For her, Eichmann is definitely a “radical” Nazi. His banality is radical, utterly extreme. It is not moderate: so deep-rooted is his banality that he cannot control it. When he states that he is prepared to be judged by an Israeli court, in these words: “I wish to be at peace with myself at last” (241), Eichmann – along with Arendt who is quoting him – momentarily creates the impression that he has learned to speak, that he has learned to think: for according to the Socratic approach that Arendt confirms in *Life of the Mind*, isn’t the life of thought realized in the possibility of the harmonious co-existence of a reflective self, of “two-in-one”? And when he hears about the guilt experienced by the younger generation of Germans, he responds: “I wanted to do my part in lifting the burden of guilt from German youth, for these young people are, after all, innocent of the events, and of the acts of their fathers, during the last war” (242). Arendt, however, adds immediately and conclusively: “Of course, all this was empty talk. What prevented him from returning to Germany of his own free will to give himself up?” (243) Language vanquishes man who defeats language. The latter leads him astray and he leads astray himself and the others. “[T]his kind of talk gave him feelings of elation, and indeed it kept him in something approaching good spirits throughout his stay in the Israeli prison. [...] There was some truth behind the empty talk” (243). The vicious or crazy cycle between language and mankind – can it still bear Arendt’s demarcation between the sanity of the former and the madness of the latter? Only if we sympathize with the humanist anthropology which from start to end underlies her project.

The Trial, the Witnesses, and De-Banalization

A woman sits in the courthouse. Why a woman? Every human. Every human sits in the courthouse, at least once in their lives, as spectators, at least. His gaze passes over the audience, the judge, the accused, the prosecutors, the room, the lighting. His ears are intent but his attention swerves, extremely focused and very scattered, sensitive, sharp and selective, something draws his attention, he gets stuck, redirects his focus a little to himself, the procedure anyway has a pace of its own, he'll pick it up in a little while, and an internal discourse sets in, discussion, negotiation, a coming to terms, a lapse into feeling, leaps and bounds and runnings this way and that, and out again, followed by a gathering inward. A woman and a man. In the courthouse, cinema, theatre, therapy, ceremony, work, conference. Even at the Eichmann trial.

“*Beth Hamishpath*” – the House of Justice: these words shouted by the court usher at the top of his voice make us jump to our feet as they announce the arrival of the three judges, who, bareheaded, in black robes, walk into the courtroom from a side entrance to take their seats on the highest tier of the raised platform” (3). It should be noted that Arendt might have chosen different verbs. She chose “to shout” and “make one jump”, bringing in the weapon of ridiculing authority, very remote from the graveness of the occasion it would seem. Because this ridicule is grave and not casual or capricious; it pulls the gaze sideways and suggests, without further ado or beating around the bush, another frame from which to experience anew, to read anew the Jerusalem trial. Not from the heart, in both senses. From where, then? For we must, in all seriousness, ask whether this “not from the heart” is then immediately heartless or hard-hearted. Faint-hearted, in any case, it is not.

Shouting is the tone – this time not of Arendt the reporter, but of what she hears, first of all, among the other voices. And what she hears is not simply very loudly spoken words. She hears shouting. The first pages of the Report are full of parentheses which weave between opening words and fine words and lofty quotes, and create a powerful tension between various levels of discourse, between pathos and the storm of her emotions which is no less full of pathos but of another kind. In parenthesis the storm breaks out at the most celebratory moments, the most manipulated and channeled and directed moments, we all know this. It may deceive us, pull us along into daydreaming, recollection, some persistent fixation, take

us to the side entrance. It becomes insufferably predominant. We can try with a certain degree of success to tease it out, or alternatively, we may, as we come to report on what happened, completely repress it from the events, as if it never was, as if it was of no importance, so much less so than what is at issue here. Arendt, however, took the work of reporting, of rendering account, in utter seriousness and she renders it almost as in psychoanalysis, taken to pieces, in all directions, into the margins, into the corridor-conversations, the associative parentheses, opening and closing restlessly, a Report that reports to the letter.

In the opening paragraph, immediately, the question of language arises: “The German-speaking accused party, like almost everyone else in the audience, follows the Hebrew proceedings through the simultaneous radio transmission, which is excellent in French, bearable in English, and sheer comedy, frequently incomprehensible, in German” (3). For Arendt, it must be stressed, the “comedy” takes place in German, her mother tongue. This mother tongue is under attack from all sides. It has been crushed by the Nazis in general and by Eichmann specifically. Here, in the courtroom, it is not being “crushed”: this would be a bad exaggeration. Only a certain neglect, insensitivity perhaps, a superficial approach. Banal? Arendt expresses with special openness, not less so than the interview with Günther Gauss will show in the future, her forlorn attitude to her mother tongue. And this outrageous contact with language, which kicks it, coarsens and impoverishes it, will accompany the Report throughout, her intense involvement with the events as well as her alienation from them. For at each and every turn she encounters lack of respect for the language. On the part of the court usher, too. There is no need for shouting. It seems to me that these are not merely trite remarks dropped on the way to the issues that really count.

Among the descriptive sentences in the first pages which relate to the spectators and listeners, the following statement catches the eye:

[T]his audience [...] was filled with ‘survivors’, with middle-aged and elderly people, immigrants from Europe, like myself, who knew by heart all there is to know, and who were in no mood to learn any lessons and certainly did not need this trial to draw their own conclusions. As witness followed witness and horror was piled upon horror, they sat there and listened in public to stories they would hardly have been able to endure in private, when they would have to face the storyteller (8).

As said, Arendt does not often write in the first person, nor does she tend to include herself so directly in this type of “we”. What this means is that here, at least, at the start, she regards herself as part of the public and does not keep a distance. She nevertheless chooses to refine the picture in two ways, though her additions, for the time being, are not yet clear, and in fact require reading the entire Report from the point of view of someone observing the witnesses. Arendt presents the word “survivors” in quotation marks, in contrast with the word “immigrants”. Later she will remove the quotation marks: “(Ninety of them were survivors in the strict sense of the word, they had survived the war in one form or another of Nazi captivity)” (223). It seems therefore that when the word appears in quotation marks, she is suggesting a more general sense in which she can be included, while in the strict sense Arendt, certainly, is not a survivor. At the end, another switch occurs. Again, the word “survivors” appears within quotation marks: “The procession started [...] with eight witnesses from Germany [...] but they were not ‘survivors’; they had been high-ranking Jewish officials in Germany and were now prominent in Israeli public life, and they left Germany prior to the outbreak of war” (224). If the criterion is the time of leaving Germany, then Arendt herself is not a survivor, neither in quotation marks nor outside them. What is happening here? What is happening with her? Why does the gap open so decisively, so resolutely? Even if, and precisely because, this concerns nothing but a slip of the quill. For unquestionably this makes for a heavy cloud over the Report and any reading of it.

Let us return to the first quote. The witness box allows for conversation among the “survivors”, that is, among the survivors in the broad sense. Such conversation is a privilege they did not and do not enjoy on the individual level. Arendt was familiar with the survivors’ community. Here she is saying something very intimate, very painful, about how much they, including maybe herself too, are able to bear. This is not about a conflict with the younger generation or with the Israeli *sabras* who are not willing to hear. This is about the community of survivors, their inability to recount a story and to listen to it facing each other, and it is about the supreme opportunity which is given them here; supreme because, in Arendt’s opinion, this is about values that structure the public sphere, the political sphere. At the start of the trial at least, that is, she seems to wholly surrender to this “politicization”, which for her is different from that of the prosecutor or the Prime Minister who “speaks from his throat”. She gives herself to

the witnesses' accounts and it may even be that she is full of expectation. Not to learn any lessons and to know more. What for, then? How does she expect or think the horror should be spoken of? Is she disappointed? By what exactly? What is the nature of her reparative language project? Can it be understood? Can it be accepted?

Even as banality refers to or describes verbal paucity and the inability to tell, the escape from banality is connected to the ability to tell. To language and the manner in which it transposes the speaker from the order of tormented and absolutely private experience to the order of public appearance and communication with others, Arendt attributes esthetic, political, historical and moral significance. But first and foremost putting things into words has existential and therapeutic significance, which is suggested by the quote from Isak Dinesen with which Arendt heads the chapter on "Action" in her book *The Human Condition*. Like an extremely demanding, perhaps impatient and certainly unrealistic psychoanalyst, Arendt expects experience to be processed without surplus. Demanding and unrealistic in terms of her own Report which derives its vitality, its validity, its humaneness, and its wisdom from the relationship between text and its parenthetical statements, from what constitutes the "body" of the text, and what at times goes out of control.

"At no time is there anything theatrical in the conduct of the judges. Their walk is unstudied, their sober and intense attention, visibly stiffening under the impact of grief as they listen to the tales of suffering, is natural" (4). The opening pages. But on and on, now through the frequent use of expressions in quotation marks or by means of truncated quotations, that is, serving Arendt the observer almost throughout as a distancing technique:

The prosecution [...] had been under considerable pressure from Israeli survivors, who constitute about twenty per cent of the present population of the country. They had flocked spontaneously to the trial authorities and to Yad Vashem, which had been officially commissioned to prepare some of the documentary evidence, to offer themselves as witnesses. The worst cases of 'strong imagination', people who had 'seen Eichmann at various places where he had never been', were weeded out, but fifty-six 'suffering-of-the-Jewish-people witnesses', as the trial authorities called them, were finally put on the stand (207).

Mr. Hausner had gathered together a 'tragic multitude' of sufferers, each of them eager not to miss this unique opportunity, each of them convinced of his right to his day in court. The judges might, and did, quarrel with the prosecutor about the wisdom and even the appropriateness of using the occasion for 'painting general pictures', but once a witness had taken the stand, it was difficult indeed to interrupt him, to cut short such testimony,

‘because of the honor of the witness and because of the matters about which he speaks’, as Judge Landau put it. Who were they, humanly speaking, to deny any of these people their day in court? And who would have dared, humanly speaking, to question their veracity as to detail when they ‘poured out their hearts as they stood in the witness box’, even though what they had to tell could only ‘be regarded as by-products of the trial’? (209)

Even the word “suffering” is transformed between the first sentence and the later paragraphs. Though Arendt interprets her protest in terms of the judicial relevance of the testimonies, it seems that this is not where the main issue lies. For those who followed the trial, who saw the images, or watched screenings of parts of it, then or later, K-Zetnik’s appearance left an indelible impression. Nevertheless, Arendt cannot bear what she witnesses and allows herself to intervene. Let us present the quote nearly in its entirety: “How much wiser it would have been to resist these pressures altogether” – enacted by the witnesses of the prosecution – “and to seek out those who had not volunteered! As though to prove the point, the prosecution called upon a writer, well known on both sides of the Atlantic under the name of K-Zetnik – a slang word for a concentration-camp inmate – as the author of several books on Auschwitz that dealt with brothels, homosexuals, and other ‘human interest stories’. He started off, as he had done at many of his public appearances, with an explanation of his adopted name. It was not a ‘pen-name’, he said. ‘I must carry this name as long as the world will not awaken after the crucifying of the nation ... as humanity has risen after the crucifixion of one man’. He continued with a little excursion into astrology: the star ‘influencing our fate in the same way as the star of ashes at Auschwitz is there facing our planet, radiating toward our planet’. And when he arrived at ‘the unnatural power above Nature’ which had sustained him thus far, and now, for the first time, paused to catch his breath, even Mr. Hausner felt that something had to be done about this ‘testimony’, and, very timidly, very politely, interrupted: ‘Could I perhaps put a few questions to you if you will consent?’ Whereupon the presiding judge saw his chance as well: ‘Mr. Dinoor, *please, please*, listen to Mr. Hausner and to me.’ In response, the disappointed witness, probably deeply wounded, fainted and answered no more questions” (223–224).

Arendt believes that K-Zetnik is practiced in public speech, in “performance” and is rehearsing his moves which are therefore wholly unrelated to the courtroom with its particular interest. Had she heard him before? Had she read his books? We do not know, but he is not mentioned in the rich bibliography of *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. And so what? Does a

gesture, when repeated, lose its validity, its impression, its credibility? Of all the witnesses, in a way that his excursus to the empyrean only emphasized, K-Zetnik was most aware of the semiotic, psychosomatic tonality of his experience. The justices' intervention, apparently inevitable given the symbolic sphere which the courthouse represents, and in spite of the wide margins which in the course of the trial were made for the witness accounts, cause him to collapse to the ground. More than reiteration, though she is bound to consider it a symptom of the inability to recount a narrative,⁹ Arendt rejects assimilation that lacks reflexive doubling, lacks observation – any assimilation, in fact, whether it is political, cultural or emotional. This rejection resurges in the various contexts of her life and work, starting with her criticism of the assimilation of the Jewish *parvenue*, through the merging with the other, and concluding with the becoming of self in a story which distinguishes the latter from and among the others. Assimilation brings along collapse, system breakdown, as if at one blow. So that Arendt does not tell the full story when, immediately following, she writes: “This, to be sure, was an exception, but if it was an exception that proved the rule of normality, it did not prove the rule of simplicity or of ability to tell a story, let alone of the rare capability for distinguishing between things that happened to the storyteller more than sixteen, and sometimes twenty, years ago, and what he had read and heard and imagined in the meantime” (224). For “the disappointed witness [...] fainted” must be put side by side to Zindel Grynszpan, the witness who was “holding himself quite erect” (227). It is she who cannot, who refuses to stand it. And her, admittedly peculiar, way of apologizing can be found at the end of the chapter “Evidence and Witnesses”. Where she talks – by means of comments of Abba Kovner – about the exemplary figure of Anton Schmidt and about the possibility of light at the heart of darkness, she herself uses an astrological metaphor; it is hard to believe that she would have failed to note the resonance with K-Zetnik: “Humanly speaking, no more is required, and no more can reasonably be asked, for this planet to remain a place fit for human habitation” (233).

Only once in the entire Report does Arendt quote a story almost in full, hardly interfering, and adding only a few paraphrases. The ten minutes of Zindel Grynszpan's story are written down in a way that brings the time of telling and the time of reading as closely together as possible. This is her explicit statement about the story, which is, hence, not described or abstracted to the level of principle. De-banalization, like banality, needs

no theory. It is what it is, what it tells, what it enacts. “Now he had come to tell his story, carefully answering questions put to him by the prosecutor; he spoke clearly and firmly, without embroidery, using a minimum of words” (228). Communicability; words that breach a way to the other, to others.

This story took no more than perhaps ten minutes to tell, and when it was over – the senseless, needless destruction of twenty-seven years in less than twenty-four hours – one thought foolishly: Everyone, everyone should have his day in court. Only to find out, in the endless sessions that followed, how difficult it was to tell the story, that – at least outside the transforming realm of poetry – it needed a purity of soul, an unmirrored, unreflected innocence of heart and mind that only the righteous possess. No one either before or after was equal to the shining honesty of Zindel Grynspan (229–230).

Yet there is another story, it is like a thin layer, hardly material, added to the other stories. On the face of it, it is wholly impersonal and we might couple it with the “dry” facts about the fate of the Jews of Europe which, as is known, Arendt conveys as an antithesis to Eichmann’s pathetic rhetoric. Arendt, however, does something additional here, suggesting a kind of outline of a psycho-geographical journey through Europe, impressionistic in character, to succinctly examine the response of governments and civil societies to the predicament of the Jews. This, strangely enough, is “Arendt’s story”; not in the first person, not intimate apparently, it is concealed: Her memory – not her memoir – that documents part of the complex spectrum of her emotions concerning the continent on which she was born. How lucid and exact are the following sentences on the first expulsions of Jews from Stettin in February 1940, from Baden and Saarpfultz in the fall of the same year (Jews who, like Arendt, reached the French internment camp in Gurs, and who were transported to Auschwitz when the “final solution” became operative):

The objective seems to have been a test of general political conditions – whether Jews could be made to walk to their doom on their own feet, carrying their own little valises, in the middle of the night, without any previous notification; what the reaction of their neighbors would be when they discovered the empty apartments in the morning; and, last but not least, in the case of the Jews from Baden, how a foreign government would react to being suddenly presented with thousands of Jewish ‘refugees’ (156).

Quiet, restrained prose that moves between the anecdotal and the fundamental, between illustration and exemplum, and in so far as it marks,

always through concrete cases, “a sudden burst of light” (231) where banality comes to a halt, where de-Nazification is situated, it infuses the reader with emotion – and moreover: it inspires confidence and faith.¹⁰

“[U]nder conditions of terror most people will comply but *some people will not*, [...] ‘it could happen’ in most places but *it did not happen everywhere*” (233).

Mother Tongue

And we have not said everything yet. This time it is not a matter of an added narrative layer, not of a “meta-narrative”, and definitely not of autobiography in its usual, confessional sense. This concerns something more subversive and subverted than these well-defined genres: it is as if it were their negative, their abject. Hard-to-define, this dimension, which actually constitutes the whole or the impression left by the whole, turns Arendt's Report on language into a work of mourning *sui generis* for a mother tongue, of a kind that Arendt had not suggested before and would not suggest again, nor did she ever call it by this name.

The dominant gesture, there is no mistaking it throughout Arendt's writing or more precisely starting from *The Human Condition*, and always entertaining a complex relationship with her historical-political studies, grasps becoming a subject as a process of natality in language. This is second birth (and third and so on), at a fundamental distance from the origin, in more than one sense for Arendt herself, who is reborn in a new, acquired language, a “professional” or somewhat “technical” one. True natality, in any case, takes place only in the symbolic order, in the plural and among the many – among at least three – who recognize and respond.

Arendt leaves no doubt about the categorical temporality of the notion of natality – future time – its absolute divergence, therefore, from the language of the body, mother tongue, from the archaic depths, their pains and grief. In each tongue one is actually born, as if for the first time, into speech. It would seem that for her, literally and as a figure of speech, each shift of abjection, private and communal, from the hidden metabolism out into the multitudes by way of rituals, carnivals, processions and bonfires is bound to cross boundaries that must not be crossed, limits of speech and communication – it is bound to subvert and paralyze. The process of individuation is, hence, completed in paradoxical manner: extremely

personal and extremely abstract at one and the same time. A body-less, sickness-free natality that is wholly protected from extinction. But things are not this simple, in fact, and the refusal of regression, assimilation, and symbiosis which may indeed have come at the price of an “all too” thick skin, to put it this way, impervious to injury, to penetration and infiltration, is revealed, nevertheless, as an unending process of boundary formation, inside and out (physical, moral, linguistic, interpersonal), and yes, also of abjection.

Mary McCarthy gave subtle testimony concerning Arendt’s treading between languages, in her inspiring “Epilogue” to *The Life of the Mind*, which she edited after Arendt’s death. McCarthy dwells on the German ambit of Arendt’s English writing (or indeed speech), both syntactically and in terms of her vocabulary, something that sheds further light on her anger, during the trial, regarding the issue of simultaneous translation. Translating all the time, in order to live, to broaden her mind, to write, Arendt experienced translation both as ultimate task and as impossibility. The Jerusalem trial was the occasion of a multi-dimensional encounter with the mother tongue and its humiliating banalization which hit her with unbearable intensity, touching of necessity, and unexpectedly, on matricide and mother-tongue-murder, which were erased, traceless – or at least without readable trace – when she crossed a continent to another country and another language. For these, among other things, are the meaning, the implications, the consequences of the act of uprooting. Even if, at first, language may seem the one mobile property that one can take along.

The Eichmann trial largely remains a classic example of how indispensable the symbolic order, the legal defense, are to the management of the difficult, painful and inevitable processes of abjection. The justices’ emphatic insistence on the limits of the discourse and their emotional restraint outlined with precision, first and foremost to the members of the community, what was possible and what not permitted. Sharply, Arendt picked up the *differend* between the objectual judicial discourse of the justices and the discourse of the prosecution which moved simultaneously between two totally different registers – the objectual and the abjectual (and hence moralistic), and she repeatedly cites moments when these registers clash, always followed by acknowledgement of the law, of the judging self facing its object, in the final instance. What she called the “bad history” presented by the prosecutor was, for her, history that constitutes a type of sublimation of purification rituals, a sublimation which conceptualizes

the history of the Jewish people in terms of continuous confrontation with monstrous enemy figures. For many reasons, presented in her essays, especially those of the 1940s, she was unable to identify with this position. Even Eichmann, in so far as he was made of flesh and blood, she did not flood in hatred. In the Report he maintains his status as a clearly outlined object for observation and judgment, much like the accused in the judicial discourse.

Arendt's judicial "purism", then, is also associated with the fact that she had not been in the vortex experienced – at least among themselves – by most of those surrounding her, perhaps including the justices: the intolerable encounter, so protected and so exposed, with the concrete enemy, as negotiated through historical and mythological documents, through communicated recollections, through opinion and arbitrariness. Yet the text she wrote is far from "purist" and Arendt is far from not being flooded. She is flooded from all sides. The shock or the frustration the readers of the Report experienced is related to the fact that its abject, its outcast, is not Eichmann. This has strayed elsewhere, to another "object". Something else has turned into the monster, and it is present in the human situation which the court house stages in the living present, day after day, in the form of voices, gestures, sounds, a mish-mash of accents: language, tongue. Something else, her province only, Arendt's, and which among its other implications also includes an objectual-objective attitude to Eichmann. So that her sense of being a stranger only increases, along with the blow she both deals and receives anyway, since it seems that each side, *each side*, scorns and ridicules what the other side takes in utter seriousness, what the other side *is*.

Arendt is forced, for the first time, to process her repressed mourning for her mother tongue, a sensitivity which was dulled as it were, a yearning that now assaults her in Jerusalem of all places. She writes some sentences, in the opening pages of the Report, which we quoted at the outset. Now that we have come this far, they require re-quoting: "Justice [...] demands seclusion, it permits sorrow rather than anger, and it prescribes the most careful abstention from all the nice pleasures of putting oneself in the limelight" (6). Arendt makes an "erroneous" observation here, in her own terms, first of all, with regard to her own principles of public speech. Nevertheless, for her, the trial has become domesticized, economical, intimate, secluded, and the rage or the anger which are the emotions that link us to the world and which render it powerful for us, all these as it were

capitulate, unable to withstand the overpowering passivity of sorrow. All boundaries are flooded by this deluge: her (private) correspondence with Gershom Scholem becomes public and not by coincidence; it is no coincidence either that Mary McCarthy's essay in defense of the Report reads like a letter. Loves and hatreds, crossing the lines between the intimacy of rooms into the public space in order to say what cannot be said there, and to be pulled once again, in the middle of the courtroom, into seclusion. Her other letters, especially those to her husband Heinrich Blücher, which mention spasms, physical distress, a frequent need to vomit, which at the time were read to express her arrogant excoriation of the East, express, I believe, her regression to the mother tongue within her. There is its whole range: starting with the young Eichmann's *Schlaraffia* – with Arendt adding in parenthesis “(the name derives from *Schlaraffenland*, the gluttons' Cloud-Cuckoo Land of German fairy tales)” (32) right up to the words of the Jewish observer in Berlin when he saw the Jews' expulsion in 1943: “*Immerzu fahren hier die Leute zu ihrem eigenen Begräbnis* (Day in day out the people here leave for their own funeral)” (115).

It was, hence, Mary McCarthy who tried even then, albeit impressionistically and without either explanation or analysis, to draw readers' attention to something else that is at work in the Report, between the lines, the composition, the rhythm, the extra-linguistic, the stamp of creation, its precise touching of the reader's nerves: she and only she, of the different, and still unabating waves of criticism concerning Arendt, tried to literally “domesticate” her beloved, and perhaps also, this time at least, to restore the lost childish dimension to her “natality”. In other words, to hint that alongside the Report's content, controversial though it may be, there is a linguistic, musical esthetics, trickling through and unsettling, very intimate, which must breach the predictable limits of reception. “Just one word about the Mozart business”, Arendt writes her on June 23, 1964: “[...] the comparison even of effects is too high. But I always loved the sentence because you were the only reader to understand what otherwise I have never admitted – namely that I wrote this book in a curious state of euphoria. And that ever since I did it, I feel – after twenty years – light-hearted about the whole matter. Don't tell anybody, is it not proof positive that I have no ‘soul’?”

Notes

- 1 Mary McCARTHY, "The Hue and Cry", *Partisan Review*, Jan.-Feb., 1964.
- 2 Hannah ARENDT, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report of the Banality of Evil* (New York: Penguin Books, 1994), 6.
- 3 The Report's first version appeared in the form of five separate essays in consecutive issues of *The New Yorker* between February 16 and March 16, 1963, it came out as a book in May that year.
- 4 Steven E. ASCHEIM, *In Times of Crisis*, Wisconsin 2001; Seyla BENHABIB, *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt*, California 1996; Dana VILLA, *Arendt and Heidegger: The Fate of the Political*, Princeton 1996; Martine LEIBOVICI, *Hannah Arendt, une juive*, Paris 1998; Pierre BOURETZ, "Introduction à Eichmann à Jérusalem" in Hannah ARENDT, *Les origines du totalitarisme; Eichmann à Jérusalem*, Paris 2002.
- 5 Arendt reported on her work – both when she was preparing it and later, in defending it – in historical terms and without any speculative dimension. She wrote to Mary McCarthy in a letter dated 20 May 1962: "[I] somehow enjoy the handling of facts and concrete things." The book, she stressed, did not contain ideas, only facts and conclusions. Even the notion of Eichmann's ordinariness she did not regard as an idea but as a faithful description of a phenomenon-issue with which we would later deal from the perspective of language. On 20 September 1963, again in a letter to Mary McCarthy, she wrote: "The hostility against me is a hostility against someone who tells the truth on a factual level, and not against someone who has ideas which are in conflict with those commonly held." The most unambiguous expression of what she regarded as the Report's epistemological status appears in the essay "Truth and Politics". Arendt argues that the differences between facts, opinions and interpretation must not be blurred. A factual truth includes a compelling, closed and uncompromising component which is beyond debate and agreement. It cannot be removed otherwise than by lies which subvert its status and turn it into opinion. This is how, as she felt it, they treated the Report. Facts became controversial theory. In *Between Friends: The Correspondence of Hannah Arendt and Mary McCarthy, 1949–1975*, ed. Carol BRIGHTMAN, New York 1995; Hannah ARENDT, "Truth and Politics", *Between Past and Present*, New York and London: A Harvest Book, 1968.
- 6 "What Remains? The Language Remains", in *The Portable Hannah Arendt*, ed. Peter BAEHR, New York and London, 2000, 13. In his *Monolingualism of the Other*, Derrida consecrates a fascinating long footnote to the question of the languages of the Jews in relation to that of their hosts in both sides of the mediterranean. Among Celan, Rosenzweig, Levinas, Scholem and Kafka, Arendt appears through the words she used in the interview in order to describe her unique relation to her mother tongue. Derrida wonders however both about this alleged uniqueness and about the assertion that only people become mad independent of their language. Doesn't madness inhere in language itself?
- 7 In Hebrew the Biblical root "mashal", which appears in Genesis 4 [addressed to Cain by God], refers both to ruling and verbalizing.

- 8 Jean-Paul SARTRE, *La nausée*, Paris 1938. Cf Roquentin's visit in the municipal museum of Beauville, which is full of sounds announcing Vichy.
- 9 In *The Life of the Mind* Arendt talks about repetition which, in extreme cases, may lead to a fixed state of mind that indicates psychological disturbance: the euphoria of the maniac or the depression of the melancholic.
- 10 See also 174–175.