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TRUTH AND TRANSLATION

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"A new science of politics is needed
for a new world."

Hannah Arendt, the German philosopher, no not German, not philosopher, the historian, no not historian, the writer, no not writer, Hannah Arendt was born in Hannover in Germany and came to grow up in Königsberg, today Kaliningrad; her parents, belonging to wealthy merchant families, had emigrated to East Prussia in the 19. century fearing persecution in Zarist Russia. East Prussia was a German speaking part of the Baltics, inhabited by Polish and Lithuanian speaking minorities and Masur speakers. Hannah Arendt's mother Martha Cohn had studied French in Paris. Arendt's grandmother Fanny Spiero-Cohn spoke German with a Russian accent – and apparently she liked to dress in a Slavic fashion, as Julia Kristeva writes in her book on Hannah Arendt, herself a French philosopher born in Sliwen in Bulgaria.

At the age of fourteen Hannah Arendt became a member of a Greek reading group. Her mother used to keep a diary, which she called *Our Child*. She records that her daughter Hannah is able to speak quite fluently at the age of one and when three years old able to express whatever she wishes.

Interviewed by the German journalist Günther Gaus in September 1964 (the programme was broadcast in October) and specifically asked about continuity, continuity after her flight from Nazi Germany to France, then in 1941 from France to the United States of America, lautet ihre Antwort: "Was ist geblieben? Geblieben ist die Muttersprache." Her answer is: "What was it that continued? My mother tongue continued." Her answer, slightly revised, then becomes the title of the programme: *Was bleibt? Es bleibt die Muttersprache? Fernsehgespräch mit Günther Gaus.* An answer in German – yet Hannah Arendt has become a citizen of the United States, she writes her books and articles in English, translating them into German herself. Why does the mother tongue provide continuity? What kind of a continuity?

Is this the answer: My first language was German, therefore, as a consequence, German continues to be my most important language, the only language that is mine? Is continuity a form of consequence?

During the interview Arendt continues to answer that question: Was ist geblieben? She is able to speak and read French; after taking refuge in New York in 1941 she immediately begins to learn English. *The Burden of Our Time*, published in London in 1959 and soon afterwards published as *The Origins of Totalitarinism* in New York, was written in English, well over 500 pages. In the interview Arendt adds: "I felt a distance towards French and English. In German I know a great number of poems by heart."

May we therefore conclude that it wasn't her mother tongue that provided continuity? Was Arendt actually speaking about her poetry tongue in the television interview in 1964? Is she saying: What was able to grant continuity? Poems were able to grant continuity. If you are forced to flee, to leave one country and to

find refuge in another country, if you are coerced to go from one language to another, why do poems continue? Why are they more continuous than memories? Because poems themselves move, because they are continuous in themselves – because they are words moving?

Did poems actually ease and enlighten Hannah Arendt's move and entrance into the English language? Did poems actually whisper: Lerne Englisch? Learn English? Write in English? Think in English? Think in English and in German? Why should poems make such suggestions?

Ich muß verstehen. I have to understand. In the 1964 interview and on various other occasions, Arendt expresses her great desire to understand. This desire was constantly linked to her interest in poetry. Understanding was always supported by poetry – poems which she read in books or which she knew by heart or wrote herself. In which way is understanding supported by poetry? Poems rather seem to be objects that withhold understanding. Is there an essence that can be understood in a poem? Or do poetry readers understand that poems withhold all results, try to escape from results? Are poems movements – and is understanding, in Arendt's sense, a form of movement? Is understanding a process that produces no results, avoids results? Is understanding a continuous form – an understanding with no end?

In *Denktagebuch*, Hannah Arendt's philosophical diary, which she kept from 1950 to 1973, we find an entry on "die verschiedenen Arten des sogenannten zeitgenössischen Denkens", written in March 1952 on the Atlantic Ocean, somewhere halfway between the United States and France, on board the *Ile de France*, one of the steamers of the *French Lines* – in a moment when she was no longer where the journey had started and not yet where she was

bound. “The different forms of so-called contemporary thinking.” In *Denktagebuch*, published long after her death and probably not intended for publication, she not only made notes of thoughts but also wrote poems. Precisely on the *Ile de France* she wrote a poem, right after her thoughts on contemporary ways of thinking and concluding: “1. Das Rechnen und Berechnen, wobei alles im vorhinein darauf angelegt ist, dass die Rechnung aufgeht zum Vorteil des Rechnenden. – 2. Das Argumentieren, das im vorhinein so angelegt ist, dass man immer recht behält. Ob das Argument recht behält, hängt von seiner inneren Konsequenz (‚consistency’) ab, d. h. von der rücksichtslosen Ausschaltung aller anderen Argumente, die aus einer anderen Erfahrung stammen, von einer anderen Prämisse ausgehen. – 3. Das Erklären, das im vorhinein so angelegt ist, dass vom Erklärten nichts übrig ist, wenn das Erklären mit ihm fertig ist. – 1. Reckoning, whereby everything is arranged such in advance that the reckoning produces a result beneficial to him who reckons. – 2. Arguing, which in advance is arranged such that what is to be proved is proved. Whether the argument is valid depends solely upon its consistency, i.e. upon the merciless elimination of all other arguments coming from a different experience, resting on a different premise. – 3. Explaining, which in advance is arranged such that nothing remains of what is explained, once the explanation has come to a conclusion.”

Is there a suggestion that Hannah Arendt, on board the *Ile de France*, while writing about forms of reckoning, arguing, and explaining, is thinking about poetry? She is being transported by a moving object, a vessel, through a liquid substance, water, the ocean. Are poems liquid objects, movement in a flow medium? Are poems alternatives to contemporary thinking, are they alternative forms of reckoning – forms that have not been arranged in advance

to benefit him who reckons, not arranged to prove what is to be proved, to eliminate other arguments and to dispose of what is to be explained?

While thinking about thinking, is Hannah Arendt also thinking about poetry? In other words, is thinking a form of poetry? Can poetry reckon in ways that yield no benefit or profit? Can poetry argue in such a way that other arguments are not eliminated or treated mercilessly? Can poetry explain in such a way that what is to be explained remains to be explained and continues to exist? Is poetry a form of continuity – a product with no end and no ends, producing no results – merely sults and saltos and somersaults? Is poetry, instead of being or delivering a result, merely a beginning – therefore able to whisper to whoever is forced to flee to a new country and a new language: Begin; begin to study that new language? Begin to begin? Give up achieving results? Add something to your mother tongue? Even begin to read and write poems in that new country? Did Hannah Arendt ever write poems in English?

She fled, probably by the very last steamer from Marseille to New York, holding an invitation visa, issued by the United States Secretary for Home Affairs, in 1941. Apparently Hannah Arendt begins to keep a notebook. Among the very first entries of the published version is a reflection on "Person – Ich – Charakter" accompanied by an English poem. "'Persona': Maske, ursprünglich die Rolle, die das Ich für das Spiel unter und mit den Menschen wählt, die Maske, die es sich vorhält, um identifizierbar zu sein. – Person: Kann aber auch die Rolle oder die Maske sein, mit der wir geboren werden, die uns von der Natur in Gestalt des Leibes und der Geistesgaben, von der Gesellschaft in der Form unserer Stellung in ihr verliehen worden sind. – Person im ersten Sinne ist eigentlich Charakter, sofern hier Person ein Produkt des Ich ist. –

In beiden Fällen entsteht die Frage der Identität. Im Falle des Charakters so, dass das Ich souveräner Herr des Charakters, seines Produkts, bleibt, beziehungsweise durch den Charakter immer wieder durchbricht. Im zweiten Falle so, dass die Person ein Anderes, scheinbar Tieferes, verdeckt [...]. – Dagegen: 'Persona' als 'per-sonare' – durchtönen."

"Person – I – Character – 'Persona': mask, originally the role which the I could select for its game among and with others, the mask worn so as to be identifiable. – Person: Can furthermore be the role or the mask with which we are born, which was given to us by nature, in the shape of our body and intellectual capacities, by society in the form of our position in society. – Person in the first sense is actually character, insofar as person here is a product of the I. – In both cases the question of identity arises. In the case of character the question is whether the I remains the sovereign master over character, its product, i.e. repeatedly breaks through character. In the second case the question is, whether the person is hiding something that is different and deeper [...] – On the other hand: 'Persona' understood as 'per-sonare' – to sound through."

Person, either understood as character chosen or understood as something given, by nature or society, is contrasted by quite a different concept – by an identity conceived through sounds, echoes, songs. According to this concept a person exists through sounds, or more precisely: in sounds. A person is like a poem.

This reflection on person – I – character and on the significance of sounds is immediately followed by a poem:

> My life closed twice before its close;
> It yet remains to see

If Immortality unveil
A third event to me,

So huge, so hopeless to conceive
As these that twice befell.
Parting is all we know of heaven
And all we need of hell.

This is the first poem in Hannah Arendt's published diary. However, the published version differs from the original diary manuscript. The original diary begins far earlier, in 1942, only a few months after Arendt's arrival in New York. The editors of the published version are convinced that only what begins in June 1950 can be deemed the actual philosophical diary, with no links to what was written before that date. They very briefly describe the first pages of the diary as containing "short stories, many empty pages as well as some poems". We must therefore keep in mind that Arendt's first poem in her published diary is definitely not her first poem. It is the first poem that her editors have chosen to be her first poem.

It is probably significant that this poem was written in English. As can be concluded from what Arendt said about her mother tongue, the poetry tongue and the language of poetry is what continues after the escape from one country and language and the arrival in a new country and language. Poetry continues – "My life closed twice before its close" – yet the poem was not written in Arendt's mother tongue. In fact it was not even written by herself. Someone else wrote the poem, a different Arendt, whose name was Emily Dickinson. The poem speaks about two closings that do not close, two endings that do not end – actually two beginnings. The poem seems to be whispering: Begin to write in English. Begin to write poems in English.

Is Hannah Arendt's thinking and writing a form of poetry? Is her political theory a form of poetry? Can we hear tiny poems in her answers when she is interviewed? In conversation with Günter Gaus in 1964, she talks about the behaviour of intellectuals, of intellectual friends during the first years of Nazi reign in Germany. The Nazis are obviously her enemies, yet her disgust is directed against her intellectual friends, against the unexpected suddenness of their agreeing with or arranging themselves with the Nazi ideology. Their intellectual capacity provided them with sufficient inspiration and imagination to agree with the ideology in power. In Hannah Arendt's words, they had ideas, inspirations, thoughts about the new ideology. Their intellectual capacity and elasticity allowed them to adjust to actually everything and anything. They had thoughts – but that was also the stuff that Arendt was made of. She was of such stuff as thoughts are made on. But of course she did not answer Günter Gaus' question in English. It was an interview for German television and her answer was: Zu den Nazis hatten sie viele Einfälle. This word *Einfall* is the problem. It is very similar to inspiration, idea, thought, yet slightly different. The intellectual friends were able to have ideas and inspirations about the new ideology. Sie gingen ihren Einfällen in die Falle. This is what Arendt literally has to say about intellectuals. Sie gingen ihren Einfällen in die Falle. It sounds like a short poem, and therefore differs from ideas and inspirations, imaginations and whim. She complains about ideas – why isn't her complaint in itself a kind of idea?

"Sie gingen ihren Einfällen in die Falle." If we translate these words into: They were trapped by their own ideas – then the sentence lacks a certain literal and poetical quality, it lacks the similarity or acoustic identity of *Einfall* and *Falle*. The coexistence of *trap* and *idea* in the English phrase is non-literal, therefore probably non-

poetical. It is in itself an idea, an imagination – a cliché. In the German phrase there is no cliché – what we see in German is an invention, a production, a creation, a beginning. We can hear the thought being produced, being sounded, we can hear the thought being thought. We can hear thinking. Sie gingen ihren Einfällen in die Falle. This is not actually a thought, a result resulting from a thought, rather it is a thought in thought, a thought in progress, in actu, it is a beginning. Nicht ein Gedanke, sondern ein Denken. Arendt's diary is not a Gedankentagebuch, a diary containing thoughts and ideas, but a Denktagebuch, a diary containing thinking. And therefore poems too.

In other words: *Sie gingen ihren Einfällen in die Falle* does no translate into: They were trapped by their inspirations. The German phrase can only be translated by a proper thought, by a thinking, which is being thought, by a thought in progress. Are translations new thoughts? Are proper translations no imitations, are they never deduced, are they no clichés and no stereotypes? Are, therefore, translations like poems? New beginnings, and no clichés? How do we begin anew? Hannah Arendt's vast study on *The Origins of Totalitarianism* concludes thus: "Beginning [...] is the supreme capacity of man; politically, it is identical with man's freedom. *Initium ut esset homo creatus est* – 'that a beginning be made man was created' said Augustine." Is the end of *The Origins of Totalitarianism* actually a poem? Do we need poems to keep on beginning? The third entry in Hannah Arendt's diary, written on the *Ile de France* while crossing the Atlantic Ocean, is a poem. "My life closed twice before its close; / It yet remains to see / If Immortality unveil / A third event to me."

Thought apparently cannot be divided from the material of which it is made, the medium of thought. They were trapped by their own ideas – in a sentence of this kind the content can be separated

from the medium and it can be reproduced as a cliché – they were misled by their ideas, for instance. If we separate the message from the medium, we lose something. We isolate and gain the message, but we lose the process, which made it come alive. We isolate and achieve the result. Was Hannah Arendt's thinking not interested in results? Not interested in results, therefore interested in poetry? Because they whisper actively: Begin? Are poems the opposite of abstract logic and consequence? Arendt: "The radical evil: – Where does it come from? Where is its origin? What is its ground and soil? – It has nothing to do with psychology – Macbeth – and nothing with characterology – Richard III., who decided to become a villain. – Essential is the super-sense and its absolute logic and consequence."

May we conclude (although nothing is said here about poems): Poems are not absolute logic, they do not progress by consequence, they speak not through super-sense, but by sense, by something that can be sensed and experienced, something palpable, they speak in the medium, in movement, in progress? Sie gingen ihren Einfällen in die Falle. Sie tappten into their traps? They tapped into their traps? Understanding then is the acknowledgement of the material character of language. Was Hannah Arendt an unacknowledged poet?

In December 1950 Hannah Arendt noted a poem of her own in the diary (the editors of *Denktagebuch* assume it was not written by Arendt, yet cannot ascertain the true author; however, unlike all other poems which Arendt quotes in her diary this poem is not written in inverted commas – it could very well have been written by herself):

> Up life's hill with my little bundle,
> If I prove it steep,

If a discouragement withhold me,
If my newest step
Older feel than the hope that prompted,
Spotless be from blame
Heart that proposed as heart that accepted,
Homelessness for home.

Is it important to know who wrote the poem? Reading the poem it seems important that it was prompted – that *homelessness* could become home, that *blame* and *home* are rhyming words, that *steep* was made to sound like *step*. The process of thinking in this poem produces no results, only movement and transformation. The poem is a prompter, not a resultant. *Homelessness* is almost able to transform into *spotlessness*. "Heart that proposed as heart that accepted": This line is pure movement from one to the other (though without *Einfälle*, without whims and inspirations). Hannah Arendt's thinking is a form of prompting and suddenness. A prompt: the act of prompting; instigation; something said or suggested to incite to action, or to help the memory.

Arendt in December 1950, in entry no. 22: "[...] the specific ambiguity of language – in which alone we can have and say the truth, by which alone we can actively remove the truth from the face of world, and which, due to its inevitable outwornness, is always in the way, when we seek the truth [...]"

Homelessness for home: This phrase contains no absolute logic and it is not a consequence based on a premise. It is not a form of consistency. It can be seen as a rupture – therefore an experience. A physical, sensual impression. No result. Philosophy and political theory as conceived by Hannah Arendt deal not with ideas – they are ways of movement – a moving and transforming of words, therefore poetry.

The short entry no. 38, of February 1954: "Opinion = what opens up to me." What do we see and hear? First of all we see that *Denktagebuch* is not a German book. It requires more than one language – it requires more than a mother tongue. In other words: A mother tongue requires or leads to more than a single language. A mother tongue needs more than itself – in order to produce non-consistency, ambivalence, plurality, contradiction. Arendt couldn't have written the sentence in German – it does not exist in German. Maybe the idea exists in the German language, but not the physical sentence, the sensual data. Meinung: was sich mir öffnet, was sich zu mir öffnet. Which in English would be something like: Conviction: what opens up to me. Hannah Arendt's English phrase is different, it is informed by a kind of rhyme or symmetry, by an assonance – *opinion* and *open*s. There is a moment of *personare* in the sentence, a sounding through.

Hannah Arendt's English entry no. 38 is characterized by a physical quality. There is also something absurd about this entry, because *open* is not an equivalent of *opinion*, if we consider the meaning and the history of both words. The two words are not linked or interrelated on the level of signification. However, there exists an equation – a physical, literal attraction: *opin* – *open*. Should we deem it a non-consistent equation? A passage?

It is interesting to closely examine the word *open*. The history of the word is in no way linked to *opinion*. A possible partner for *open* would be Latin *apertus*. The *Oxford English Dictionary* offers the following explanation: "apparently from the root of *up*. In all the languages, the word has the form of a strong participle, as if meaning 'set up', 'put up' – 'put up the door', 'set up the door' (German *macht die thür auf*), 'the door is up, put it to'. – Of a door, gate, or the like: Not 'put to' the place which it fits, not

closed or shut; ‘up’, set up, standing up, so as to allow free passage through.” It seems that *open* is an equivalent of *up*.

The sign of equation – between *opinion* and *what opens* – is not really a sign of equation. We can think of it as an opening and it actually looks like a tiny passage, a little conduct, a small causeway. You have to look at it – closely, openly? – to see what it is. It is not a word. It consists of two lines. It looks like something that hasn’t been closed. An opinion, therefore, is something that has not been closed and finished. Hannah Arendt’s phrase not merely expresses this idea, but actually produces and enacts what it is saying. It bodies forth. The phrase itself is a passage. Isn’t it therefore much like poetry? Hannah Arendt’s mother tongue poetry seems to be active here. However, it is not active in German, but in English. The mother tongue is a passage to new languages, to non-consistency. Poetry is a beginning that leads to new beginnings.

Entry no. 38: “Opinion = what opens up to me.” Entry no. 39, a longer entry, again in English: “We are born into this world of plurality where father and mother stand ready for us, ready to receive us and welcome and guide us and prove that we are not strangers. We grow up to become like everybody else, but the more we grow, the more we become equal in the way of absolute, unbearable uniqueness. Then we love, and the world between us, the world of plurality and homeliness, goes up in flames, until we ourselves are ready to receive the new arrivals, newcomers to whom we prove what we no longer quite believe, that they are not strangers. We die in absolute singularity, strangers after all, who say farewell to a foreign place after a short stay. What goes on is the world of plurality.”

Equal in the way of uniqueness: The word *equal* is not consistent with *uniqueness*; *equal* cannot be deduced from *unique*. Hannah Arendt's phrase does not actually suggest that the two words are identical. There is no sign of equation between the two words. Equal *in the way of* uniqueness. In Arendt's expression *in the way of* we can see a passage, an open door, an opening, an opinion, a metamorphosis. Hannah Arendt's world of plurality is a poetical world – it deduces nowhere and seems to open up everywhere. Love, the attempt to equate, leads to a collapse of the world.

Plurality is a web of hostile and conflicting and inconsistent intentions. Arendt: Whoever acts "has the choice, either to give up his intentions, to let himself be stripped, or to become violent and to destroy other intentions." Proper equations actually seem to be forms of violence – they are aimed towards an end – armed towards an end – instead of opening up towards no end. Passageways between differences have no aim and no end; they let differences be. Are we now able, with the support of Hannah Arendt, to distinguish between non-violent and violent forms of translation? The first leads to non-equations, the second to equations, imitations and correctness?

A non-violent translation prompts no result? "... Handeln, eigentlich gesprochen, ziellos und endlos ... Dies hat bereits Aristoteles als a p e i r o n gefürchtet. Activity, actually aimless and endless ... This is what Aristoteles already feared as a p e i r o n." Apeiron, infinite, endless. Did Hannah Arendt have the Greek word *apeiron* in the back of her mind when she was writing about Latin *opinion* and English *open*? Is there such a thing as a non-intentional translation – from *opinion* to *open*?

> Ich lieb die Erde
> so wie auf der Reise

den fremden Ort
und anders nicht.
So spinnt das Leben mich
an seinem Faden leise
ins nie gekannte Muster fort.
Bis plötzlich,
wie der Abschied auf der Reise,
die grosse Stille in den Rahmen bricht.

A poem written in January 1954. I suggest the follwing translation:

Loving nothing
on my way
but foreignness,
not otherwise.
Woven by the silent
thread of life into a pattern
of unknown size.
Till suddenly,
like a farewell say,
great stillness invades, divides.

Maybe it was in February 1954, while working on *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, that Hannah Arendt was confronted with the sensuality of the word *sense* and with the sensuality of language altogether. There is something in language that is merely sensual, not meaningful, sensual very much like the world, like soil, stones, doors and door knobs, apples, cherries, far more sensual than sensible, unsensibly sensual. Thinking about sense and sensuality she may have felt that her mother tongue was obstructing her and was in the way of the truth. *Sense* is quite different from German *Sinn*. The German word *Sinn* cannot be separated from the notion of direction and aiming. There is no etymological connection

between the Latin word *sensus* and German *Sinn*. *Sinn* is derived from a root, which signifies to travel, to strive, to go. *Sinn* is linked to Italian *sentiero,* a path, a track. It belongs to the verb *to send*. There is nothing sensorial in *Sinn*. *Sense*, on the contrary, is pure feeling with no implication of direction or intention.

Entry no. 37: "Als der 'common sense' in die Hände der Philosophen fiel, haben sie ihn seines Sinnes-Charakters beraubt und absurd gemacht. Das grösste Beispiel ist Hobbes. Erst hier wird der ‚common-sense' unabhängig vom Sinnlich-erfahrbar-Gegebenen und verwandelt sich in eine Logik, ein Rechnen mit Konsequenzen, das alles Reale zerstört." In order to express that a difference exists between *Sinn* and *Sinn*, Arendt makes use of the English language. She requires the English term *common-sense* to express that it differs or can differ from the German concept of *Sinn*. She needs English words to find out that a sensual quality comes with *Sinn*, a sensual quality and a feeling and not merely direction. To discover this difference she needs a different language.

My English translation of entry no. 37: "When common-sense fell into the hands of the philosophers, they deprived it of its sensual aspect and rendered it absurd. Hobbes represents the greatest example. Here for the first time common-sense becomes independent of the sensually-palpable-given and is transformed into logic, a reckoning with consequences which destroy all that is real."

The difference between reason and common-sense may have been far clearer in English than in German, simply because *sense* is sensual, whereas the German *Sinn* is neither sensual nor palpable. It is not based on what we perceive through our senses. Der Sinn eines Gedichts is more the essence than the sense of a poem.

A further German-English reflection can be found in entry no. 34: "'Common-sense' und gesunder Menschenverstand: Hobbes führt ihn in die Philosophie ein, indem er alle vergangene Philosophie für absurd erklärt. [...] Damit hört der 'common-sense' auf, ein *Sinn* zu sein, und wird zur 'Vernunft' erhoben. Als solcher erst ist er der 'gemeine Verstand'. Bei Hobbes funktioniert er in doppelter Weise: 1. Als logisches Folgern, das jeder richtig machen kann und bei dem alle zu gleichen Resultaten kommen müssen. Das 'Sein' wird sofort folgerichtig ausgeschlossen beziehungsweise seiner sinnlichen Gegebenheit beraubt und zu einem 'sign' für Konsequenz degradiert. 2. Als psychologische Selbsterfahrung, wobei vorausgesetzt ist, dass ich mich selbst so kennen kann wie alles Andere. Das 'Kenne-dich-selbst' soll nun meinen: Nimm dich selbst zum Beobachtungsgegenstand und du kennst alle, denn alle sind gleich in sich selbst [...]. Die erste Weise des gesunden Menschenverstands ist typisch modern und subjektivistisch; die zweite aber typisch 'philosophisch' – das, was aus dem 'common-sense' in den Händen des Philosophen wird. Nun gibt es wieder keine Pluralität, keine d o x a i und keine Verwirrung. Alle Menschen sind eigentlich nur *ein* Mensch [...]. Hegel verstand den 'common-sense', wie Hobbes ihn verstand, als den gemeinen Verstand, der nichts kann als Konsequenzen berechnen und die Dunkelheit des Herzens gemein machen."

Before I attempt to translate this passage, let me point out that at the centre of this reflection you can hear – you may have heard – a conflict that is activated only if two languages are involved, a conflict
and a coincidence. You may have noticed the German word *Sein*, soon followed by the English *sign*. On the semantic level there is no similarity between the two words. *Sein* is *Being* and a *sign* is a *signal*, a mark, a badge. Using two languages, Arendt links, equates

the two words in order to clarify a difference. The German concept of *Sein* includes the sensual, the palpable – *sign* on the contrary is abstract and meaningful, it belongs to the realm of meaning and signification. *Sein* is non-semantic activity, it sends no *signals*. Arendt seems to grasp the great difference between the two concepts precisely because the two words are so similar acoustically. When spoken there is hardly a difference between them. She grasps the difference, because she feels, sees, hears, perceives the sensuality, i.e. the sense of both words. To understand their meaning, their sense has to be felt. Her thinking rests and relies on sensuality, on poetry, on poetic energy.

Common-sense covers both aspects: sensual *Sein* and abstract *signification*. According to Arendt, it was the English 17. century philosopher Thomas Hobbes who introduced the concept of common-sense to philosophy, thereby transforming it into logical reasoning and reckoning, stripping it of all sensual qualities. Common-sense turns into a form of reasoning, of drawing correct conclusions, of consistency. Arendt however finds a trace of resistance against reasoning in the English term – sense is closer to sensuality than to sensibility and reasoning. She finds the sensorial potential because she pays attention to the sensual aspects of language, because she is able to listen to language. Listening and understanding are interrelated.

Now the translation: "Common-sense and 'gesunder Menschenverstand' (sound reasoning): Hobbes introduces it to philosophy, while declaring all previous philosophy absurd [...]. This leads to common-sense losing its quality as a sense, raising it to 'reason'. Only as such is it common-sense. With Hobbes it functions in two ways: 1. In the form of logical reasoning, which everyone can execute correctly and which leads everyone to arrive at identical results. 'Sein'/'Being' is immediately and consistently

excluded, in other words deprived of its sensual existence and reduced to a *sign* for consequence. 2. In the form of psychological self-experience, based on the assumption that I am able to know myself in the same way as I know everything else. This 'know-yourself' is meant to mean: Observe yourself like an object and you will know all others, because all are equal in themselves [...]. The first type of common-sense is specifically modern and subjectivistic; the second, however, specifically 'philosophical' – what happens to common-sense in the hands of philosophers. Again there is no plurality, no d o x a i, and no confusion. All men are actually one man [...]. Hegel understood common-sense in the same way as Hobbes, as a general reasoning able only to calculate consequences and to generalize the heart's darkness."

It seems that common-sense, truthfully and actually, is a sense that is able to sense plurality, contradiction, and confusion. Since Hobbes it has been transformed into something quite different, into the capacity to deduce properly and reasonably and sensibly and to think by consequences and ideas. Since Hobbes, in philosophy there exists a reasonable link between *Sein* and *sign* – they are not confused as Hannah Arendt confuses them. She is able to again confuse them because she listens to the sensorial qualities of words. Arendt is not a philosopher, but a confusionist and a fusionist or, as she states herself, a political theorist.

Listening to the sensual qualities of language – paying less attention to meaning and significance – Arendt finds "false friends" and turns them into true friends. In October 1950, a short while after beginning the *Denktagebuch*, she places two words side by side, one is German, one is English, they are quite different, yet they are almost literally identical: "Treue: 'true'". A correct and reasonable translation, a translation that does not take note of the character and the characters of words and is only interested in pure

meaning, would of course and consistently transform *Treue* into faithfulness, fidelity. Arendt's translation *'true'* is an unfaithful translation – it is faithful to other forms of expression, to meaningless forms of meaning. The translation of *Treue* into *truth* is not consistent with fact and reason. It takes the word as it is, the characters as they are – and transform them into themselves. A new meaning and a new sense is created – yet not by implication or inspiration or ideas. Thinking is a sensorial process, more sensual than spiritual. It proceeds not by conclusions and deductions. It proceeds by poetical means. It is more interested in means than in meaning.

The linking of faithfulness and truth would hardly be possible or probable in either of the two languages. Both languages distinguish between faithfulness and truth, much as they distinguish between day and night. Arendt speaks both languages. Sooner or later she cannot avoid discovering the similarity of different words. She discovers that the sensorial reality of words is actually greater and more powerful than their intellectual reality. She discovers that thinking proceeds by sounds.

"Treue: 'true'": wahr *und* true. Als wäre das, dem man die Treue nicht halten kann, auch nie wahr gewesen. Daher das grosse Verbrechen der Untreue, wenn sie nicht gleichsam unschuldige Untreue ist; man mordet das Wahr-gewesene, schafft das, was man selbst mit in die Welt gebracht hat, wieder ab, wirkliche Vernichtung, weil wir in der Treue und nur in ihr Herr unserer Vergangenheit sind: Ihr Bestand hängt von uns ab. So wie es von uns abhängt, ob Wahrheit in der Welt ist oder nicht. True: ‚Treue': faithful *and* true. As if that, to which we were not able to remain faithful, had never been true. Therefore the great crime of unfaithfulness, unless it is a sort of innocent unfaithfulness; the once-true is murdered, what was added to the world by ourselves is

eliminated again, a proper destruction, because through faithfulness and only through faithfulness are we masters of our past: Its continuity depends on us. Just as it depends on us whether truth exists in the world or not."

Thinking, I think, and as you might agree, is triggered and fuelled not by ideas and intellectual traps, but by sensual matter. The similarity of truth and faithfulness is not logically concluded from philosophical premises and reasonably proved – the similarity of the two is discovered with the support of a sense for plurality and translatability. It seems that truth is discovered through translation.

Before concluding, before happily arriving at no conclusions, I would like to quote a few lines taken from the long poem "Dark City" which the American poet Charles Bernstein wrote:

> A transom stands bound to a flagpole. Hard
> by we go hardly which way is which
> lingering somewhere unsettled where evidence
> comes harder by sockets, stems,
> etched in flexed omissions like osmotic
> molarities flickering edge and orange at flow
> rates unrepresentative of ticking or torpor
> any child or person requires for, well
> against, that remorse remonstration
> brings.

What happens after line one, is it pure thinking? Undisturbed by traps? But how can we be sure that lines two to nine are thoughtful and sensual, whereas the first line about the transom and the flagpole is almost conclusive and basically reasonable? What evidence do we have for thoughtfulness in lines two to nine?

Hannah Arendt would probably agree that repetition is an indicator for a thought process. Repetition is a highly inconclusive process, it produces no results and it seems to support similarities and symmetries. If we closely and openly look and listen to lines two to nine we could discover that they are full of clear and discrete repetitions: hard – hardly – harder; which – way – is – which; transom – somewhere – comes – sockets; omission – osmotic – molarities; somewhere – where; etched – edge; flexed – flickering; like – flickering; edge – orange; or – torpor – remorse – remonstration.

The very first line and phrase in which, more or less sensibly, a transom is bound to a pole and this object or device stand motionless – conclusively motionless so to speak – this first line and phrase is dismantled in lines two to nine and recombined inconclusively, yet audibly and sensually. Lines two to nine are reattached to physical experience. Whereas line one appears to merely talk about the physical world, itself being hardly material.

Lines two to nine can be seen as a translation of line one – a translation into spontaneous thinking, into poetry, into common-sense. Into more sense than makes sense.