

IN THE BACK OF MY MIND. Corporeity and politics in the symbolic cut of the mother tongue

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“Your mother tongue and another language are so different. I can put it simply. I know a lot of German poetry by heart. The poems are always in the back of my mind. I could achieve that in a second language. I say things in German I’d never let myself say in English” (Arendt, 1964). Thus speaks Hannah Arendt, in an interview with Günter Gaus on October 28, 1964, in response to a question regarding her life in Europe and her connection with pre-Hitler’s Germany. “I don’t long for that. I can you assure of that. What has remained? The language remains” (Arendt, 1964). After the traumatic experience of escaping from Nazism and statelessness for Arendt, there remains in that past world only the relationship with the mother tongue, perceived as something concrete, involuntary, a trace deposited in the body and returning from there, resurfaces, bringing to mind verses of poems otherwise forgotten. It is no accident that, to give it back its meaning, Arendt interrupts the conversation in German and uses an English idiomatic expression - ‘in the back of my mind’ - in an attempt to express in word, to translate material reality into a form of the untranslatable, unrepeatably and not entirely symbolizable relationship that she maintains with the German mother tongue. This bodily dimension of language, constituting the maternal as a symbolic form brought into question by the Italian feminist thought of sexual difference, is at the centre of the volume edited by Andrea Righi and Cesare Casarino, *Another Mother. Diotima and the Symbolic Order of Italian Feminism*. In it the voices of some of the most authoritative thinkers of sexual difference are intertwined, in a collection of essays wisely translated

and assembled to interrogate the transformations of the present and reveal their forms of power: “Why is it so important and urgent for politics to think and to foster a debate about the mother here and now? What is this ‘here and now’? (Righi & Casarino, 2018, p. 5). This is the question from which the two curators start in focusing on the problem that shakes the global contemporary space: the explosion of sexual and racial violence, the resurgence of misogynist cruelty that bloods the current anomic phase of neoliberal capitalism.

Just think of the practices of violence perpetrated against women in the global context of ‘new wars’: informal war scenarios in which there is a spectacularization of torture and destruction of female bodies, seized and exhibited in a showcase for a public demonstration of their submission by the masculine power that emphasizes its domination with this spectacle. It is the tragic case recalled by Righi and Casarino: nineteen girls executed by ISIS in 2016 for having disobeyed the rules of the patriarchy, kidnapped and burned, lives in the streets, in Mosul, inside a cage, for refusing to become sex slaves. But, as much as they are most affected by male violence, the problem of the current misogynist cruelty is not limited to women: the intersection of racist, sexist, homophobic and transphobic violence in the contemporary global existence is a matter of fact. This urgently raises the question at the centre of the volume: the need to think of an alternative symbolic order to the male patriarchal one. A symbolic that the philosophical community of Diotima has identified in the politicized of the mother tongue and in the female genealogy of the mother-daughter relationship obscured within the hierarchical links of the male imaginary. “Luisa Muraro’s *The symbolic order of the mother* is the text we should turn to with these questions in mind. She shares with other female authors, first of all Light Irigaray, the project of bringing the figure of the mother and daughter relationship, both imprisoned in the patriarchal imaginary, to the light of the symbolic” (Dominijanni, 2018, p. 216). Thus Ida Dominijanni clarifies the scope of the feminist shift, the revolutionary rift introduced by the feminism of difference - in practices and thought - for access to the symbolic of a sexual subjectivity. This is the critical excavation carried out by Luisa Muraro, together with Luce Irigaray and other authors, in the epistemological field of modern representation: the liberation of the mother from the darkness of the private and its highlighting as a symbolic source of a female authority rooted in the free sense of sexual difference, as an existential condition not identifiable a priori, but knowable only through a practice in which one experiences the limit, the emptiness, the dependence, with the putting into play of oneself in the relationship with the other. Freed from the patriarchal imaginary, the symbolic root of feminine

authority is inscribed, then, in the figure of the primary relationship as a principle of individuation irreducible to the symbolic order of the law, generative of relations between being and language - thought and life, body and word - that modify the field of the sayable and decide on the opening of meaning to women's political freedom. The volume *Another Mother* takes as its starting point the radical nature of this challenge to show us how profound is the genealogical excavation carried out by the authors right into the present, here and now. The stakes, in fact, are to show how some of the key issues in the contemporary debate - the new wars, the economic financialization, the media coverage of politics, the spectacle of crimes against women, the intersectionality of racial, gender and violence class on a global scale - they can be read in their entirety only through an analytical lens capable of identifying the links and of interrogating the knowledge that defines the order of discourse in a given historical phase. Exactly the gesture made by Diotima that, to denounce the social subordination ascribed to the equal female condition in the fraternal contract, and to affirm the freedom of women, has adopted since the years of the feminist revolt a critical look capable of grasping the materiality of the symbolic in the field variable of social interactions. It is Luisa Muraro who tells us that "between symbolic and social orders there is complicity: material servitudes that become logical exigencies and, vice versa, conditions of symbolic production that translate into social impositions" (Muraro, 2018, p. 89). This analysis explains why, despite the pervasiveness of cultural and gender differences, the symbolic arsenals of race and gender continue to govern contemporary global space, with effects of subordination and violence. The answer lies in that *opaque complicity*, yet intensely operational, which Muraro traces, on the basis of Lacan, between symbolic production and the social order, between metaphorical language and the patriarchal regime. Taking into account this material connection, from which derives the recognition of a historicity of the sexes, the volume questions the historical - economic, cultural, geopolitical change - which took place after globalization, with the post-Fordist turn of capitalism and advent of neoliberal governmentality. The point in question is the relationship that the neocapitalist development model intertwines with feminist practice, in light of the profound crisis of civilization that neoliberalism has given to the forms of life in contemporary society - what Andrea Righi has effectively defined the 'psychopathology of the post-Fordism': a process of individualization and precariousness of the productive forces, based on a competitive business model in every sphere of life, according to the bio-economic project of human capital. With the post-Fordist turning point in the accumulation regime and economic financialization, social reality has lost its symbolic

function as an associative phenomenon endowed with a life of its own with respect to the lives of isolated individuals who are part of it. By encouraging the subjects to internalize an idea of entrepreneurial freedom and by mobilizing a process of destructuring of work implying forms of marginalization of the subjects who are unable to adapt to the logic of the system, the neoliberal governmentality has progressively built the foundations for increasingly fragmented living conditions, insecure, with a decisive consequence on the symbolic level: the collapse of desire in the function of enjoyment. “This is the libidinal face of post-Fordism; this is the lucrative disorder of the society of enjoyment. “The chief consequence is that of the notion of desire has now collapsed into the function of enjoyment, which is private, repetitive, and excessive as the subject of the object of pleasure precisely as a thing” (Righi, 2018, pp. 291 – 292). Thus Righi focuses on the socio-symbolic change with which to come to terms today. Now that the order of the law, based on paternal interdiction and absorbed by the juridical form of the social pact, has been seriously damaged by the advent of an anomic rationality, structured around the financial powers of the market, the forms of hardship are no longer inscribed in a social imperative that prohibits enjoyment. Rather, they are inscribed in an imperative of enjoyment: a libidinal economy that encourages compulsive, serial, unlimited forms, practices in which the subject encapsulates the object of pleasure as a thing, an inanimate reality. Psychopathology is therefore the symptom of the post-Fordist productive model, as a psychic structure immersed in a hallucinatory dimension functional to the consumerist logic of contemporary capitalism. It is at this height that finds a space the question of maternal symbolism and feminine genealogy in the urgency of re-signifying the linguistic-expressive instances on the political level. “The symbolic match of the political resignification of the maternal becomes more urgent” (Dominijanni, 2018, p. 228), observes Ida Dominijanni. If, in fact, as the author suggests, the symbolic of the mother is not monolithic, but it is a cut in the “factual and eventual whole” (Dominijanni, 2018, p. 5) order language – an excess and, together, a limit given by an experience that is not entirely symbolizable, resistant to all forms of synthesis – then, what is at stake, in the contemporary global perspective, lies in the ability to make a twist on the level of language – even that already acquired in the feminist field of emancipation – starting from the experience of practices. A ‘rotation’ that allows the translation of “the multiplicity of meanings of feminine existence” (Dominijanni, 2018, p. 5) of all women and of each one – into the historicity of the present, where other subjects who spoke about the symbolic competence to say about themselves intersect: colonized, racialized subjects, subjected to imperialist and class domination. The

point is that, in a thought of sexual difference, that is, in a thought that chooses as vocation not to synthesize, not to abstract, to put the categories in relation starting from experience, the opening to the multiple and, therefore, to the intersection with other excluded subjects, does not subtract from the task of pausing in the limit of the contradictions given by the singular historical paths of sexuation, of racialization, of colonization. It is an impervious but necessary challenge that the global present poses to feminist thought. ‘Thinking with Diotima’ today means in any case taking on the living delivery of a language which, inscribed in the materiality of experience, allows us to bring back to reality what in the male domain is continuously abstracted, naturalized, pacified in a timeless and ahistorical representation. It means taking on the metomimic cut of the mother tongue enlightened by Luisa Muraro: a language guideline that allows us to pierce the discourses from within, “cutting across” (Muraro, 2018, p. 73) them, through the singular and common experiences of practice in which corporeality of lived enlightens the generative possibility of thought.

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