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INTRODUCTION

Beyond the Mother Tongue?

*Multilingual Practices and the
Monolingual Paradigm*

RETHINKING MONOLINGUALISM

On September 29, 2002, the Sunday issue of the *New York Times* included a sixty-eight-page paid insert previewing a conceptual artwork called *Wordsearch: A Translinguistic Sculpture* conceived by German artist Karin Sander and sponsored by the Deutsche Bank, the world's biggest corporate art collector.¹ In response to the sponsor's request to offer a global perspective in a metropolitan location, Sander's project set out to document as many of the languages spoken in New York City as possible. It did so by finding one native speaker for each of 250 languages and asking each speaker to contribute one personally meaningful word in his or her "mother tongue" to a list. This list of unduplicated words was then translated into all the other languages. The resulting 62,500 words were arranged into columns resembling stock market tables and published as the actual "translinguistic sculpture" in another paid, eight-page insert in the business section of the *New York Times* on October 4, 2002. This commissioned artwork, *Wordsearch*, thus sought to render the novelty of globalized life at the turn of the millen-

nium through attention to the proximate coexistence of many languages in the same space.

To *Wordsearch* and many other cultural texts, the phenomenon of multilingualism appears as a remarkable new development of the globalized age.² Yet as linguists have come to agree, and as scholars in other fields increasingly document, multilingualism is and has been far more common worldwide than had been previously acknowledged.³ **Indeed, it is monolingualism, not multilingualism, that is the result of a relatively recent, albeit highly successful, development.**⁴ But a monolingual paradigm, which first emerged in late-eighteenth century Europe, has functioned to obscure from view the widespread nature of multilingualism, both in the present and in the past. While scholars across different fields have noted the “monolingual bias” or the “monolingual habitus” in particular areas, no study to date has spelled out the far-reaching implications of this insight.⁵ Recognizing the workings of the monolingual paradigm, I suggest, requires a fundamental reconceptualization of European and European-inflected thinking about language, identity, and modernity. **For monolingualism is much more than a simple quantitative term designating the presence of just one language. Instead, it constitutes a key structuring principle that organizes the entire range of modern social life, from the construction of individuals and their proper subjectivities to the formation of disciplines and institutions, as well as of imagined collectives such as cultures and nations.** According to this paradigm, individuals and social formations are imagined to possess one “true” language only, their “mother tongue,” and through this possession to be organically linked to an exclusive, clearly demarcated ethnicity, culture, and nation. Indeed, as we will see, even an apparently multilingual artwork such as *Wordsearch* still functions according to the central precepts of the monolingual paradigm.

The pressures of this monolingual paradigm have not just obscured multilingual practices across history; they have also led to **active processes of monolingualization**, which have produced more monolingual subjects, more monolingual communities, and more monolingual institutions, without, however, fully eliminat-

ing multilingualism. Schooling has been one of the primary means of such a social engineering of monolingual populations.⁶ The diverse linguistic landscape of eighteenth-century France, where large parts of the population did not speak French, for instance, was reengineered over time to produce a more monolingual population of French speakers.⁷ This last point also underscores the significance of the modern nation-state for the monolingual paradigm, or rather, of the monolingual paradigm for the modern nation-state, with which it emerged at the same time.⁸

There are signs, however, that the tide is turning against such strict monolingualization. For a supranational entity such as the European Union, for instance, the challenge has become to manage multilingualism, not to discard it.⁹ Increased migration and mobility, the advance of communication technologies, and the spread of media have also contributed to the sense that multiple languages coexist and interact in new constellations, a sense that an artwork such as *Wordsearch* reflects and contributes to. Even English-dominated domains such as the global entertainment industry see new linguistic diversity. Hollywood movies such as *Babel* and *Inglorious Basterds* or globally consumed American TV shows such as *Lost* and *Heroes* have begun to feature more languages accompanied by subtitles, while popular musical forms mixing languages have tempted audiences with “livin’ la vida loca.”¹⁰ An increasing number of language memoirs thematize life in multiple languages as a significant experience.¹¹ Literary and cultural studies scholars, meanwhile, have begun to make both older and newer forms of multilingualism visible.¹² Yet this new *visibility* of multilingualism is not simply due to its more frequent practice, since forms of multilingualism have existed all along. Rather, globalization and the ensuing renegotiation of the place of the nation-state have begun to loosen the monolingualizing pressure and have thereby enabled the contestatory visibility of these practices in the first place, albeit still in circumscribed fashion.¹³ Multilingualism, then, has not been absent in the last couple of centuries, but it has been and continues to be refracted through the monolingual para-

digm. This persistence of a monolingual framework, I argue, is the backdrop against which we need to see today's seeming increase in multilingualism.

To capture this ongoing dominance of the monolingual as well as the incipient moves to overcome it, I introduce the term “**postmonolingual**.” This “post” has, in the first place, a temporal dimension: it signifies the period *since* the emergence of monolingualism as dominant paradigm, which first occurred in late eighteenth-century Europe. Such a historicized understanding underscores the radical difference between multilingualism before and after the monolingual paradigm, a difference that previous studies have neglected.¹⁴ This historicization is necessary, I argue, because the appearance of the monolingual paradigm substantially changes the meaning and resonance of multilingual practices.¹⁵ But since the monolingual paradigm has spread only gradually and unevenly across different contexts and not at all to others, “postmonolingual” constitutes by necessity a situated and flexible periodization, inflected by contextual differences.¹⁶ This flexibility of the term also means that it is not limited to one geographic area—in this case, Europe—but may extend to other contexts as well, whenever monolingualism becomes a dominant form.¹⁷ It is in this sense that the present book should be understood as a study of the workings of the monolingual paradigm and multilingual attempts to overcome it, rather than as a study of multilingualism *per se*. Viewed through this—flexible—temporal lens, “postmonolingual” refers to the unfolding of the effects of the monolingual and not to its successful overcoming or transcendence. But besides the temporal dimension, the prefix “post” also has a critical function, where it refers to the opposition to the term that it qualifies and to a potential break with it, as in some notions of postmodernism. In this second sense, “postmonolingual” highlights the struggle *against* the monolingual paradigm. As Marianne Hirsch notes with regard to the “post” in her own term “postmemory,” the prefix “reflects an uneasy oscillation between continuity and rupture” (“The Generation of Postmemory” 106).

Taking these dimensions together, “postmonolingual” in this study refers to a field of tension in which the monolingual paradigm continues to assert itself and multilingual practices persist or reemerge. This term therefore can bring into sharper focus the back-and-forth movement between these two tendencies that characterizes contemporary linguistic constellations. Focusing on the tension rather than on one or the other pole helps to account for many phenomena that initially appear to be contradictory. Early twentieth-century Prague, where Kafka lived, for instance, becomes graspable as both a multilingual space in which multiple languages coexisted and as a place rapidly transitioning to a monolingual structure with individuals increasingly embracing only one, ethnically predetermined language. As Emily Apter demonstrates in her book *The Translation Zone*, the complex entanglements of language(s) with culture and politics demand such a focus on tensions, struggles, and “language wars.” This definition of the postmonolingual condition indicates also that in the primarily European context on which this study focuses, the opposite of the monolingual paradigm—that is, a multilingual paradigm that would restructure perceptions and social formations along new lines *after* monolingualism—does not yet truly exist. Yet imaginative works in literature and other fields suggest the possible contours of such a multilingual paradigm and contribute variously to just such a restructuring, as I demonstrate throughout this book.

Because the German tradition has played an important role in establishing the monolingual paradigm, *Beyond the Mother Tongue* focuses on German-language writers who are uncomfortably positioned within the paradigm and have thus had to grapple with it to a significant degree. This group includes pre- and post-Holocaust German-Jewish figures, such as Franz Kafka and Theodor W. Adorno, and contemporary writers from new immigrant communities, such as Turkish-Germans Emine Sevgi Özdamar and Feridun Zaimoğlu, as well as the unique case of bilingual Japanese-German author Yoko Tawada.¹⁸ Using a range of multilingual forms to bring German into contact with a series

of other languages, from Yiddish, French, Latin, and English, to Japanese, Afrikaans, Arabic, and Turkish, these authors provide a privileged position from which to explore the strictures of the monolingual paradigm and evaluate the means of reimagining the identitarian force of language. As this list of languages begins to indicate, even though “German” is the common denominator for all the writers considered, their multilingual connections open up paths to other languages and histories across the globe and resituate German itself in the process. To recognize the possibilities and pitfalls of multilingualism, however, requires the post-monolingual mode of reading that this book offers—a mode of reading attuned both to the existence of multilingual practices and to the continued force of the monolingual paradigm.

EMERGENCE OF A PARADIGM

Emerging only in the course of the eighteenth century at the confluence of radical political, philosophical, and cultural changes in Europe, the notion of monolingualism rapidly displaced previously unquestioned practices of living and writing in multiple languages.¹⁹ “Exclusive first language allegiance [. . .] was not the most desired of linguistic identities or imagined communities in the late medieval period,” Mary Davidson notes with regard to Chaucer and his contemporaries (*Medievalism* 137). This attitude extended to the political realm where it was of little concern to premodern rulers whether and how their subjects spoke one or more languages. They themselves did not necessarily privilege the local language either. As late as the 1780s, King Friedrich II of Prussia famously preferred to speak and write in French, while harshly dismissing German. With the gendered and affectively charged kinship concept of the unique “mother tongue” at its center, however, monolingualism established the idea that having one language was the natural norm, and that multiple languages constituted a threat to the cohesion of individuals and societies. Even as they supported the study of other languages, late eighteenth-century German thinkers such as Johann Gottfried

Herder, Wilhelm von Humboldt, and Friedrich Schleiermacher spearheaded the view that one could properly think, feel, and express oneself only in one's "mother tongue." This notion of the mother tongue has been in turn a vital element in the imagination and production of the homogenous nation-state.

Philosophically, a new conception of language prepared the way for this conjunction of language and nation. As linguistic anthropologist Susan Gal argues, it was only in the Enlightenment era and the subsequent Romantic reaction to it that language came to be considered as an object with particular attributes ("Migration" 14). In this conception, which largely persists to this day, "a language" is a clearly demarcated entity that has a name, is countable, and is the property of the group that speaks it, while also revealing that group's idiosyncrasies.²⁰ This reified conception of language enabled the distinction between mono- and multilingualism. It also relegated linguistic practices without proper names to the status of deviation, hodgepodge, or simply invisibility, rather than recognizing them as "language."²¹

With German thinkers at the forefront, the eighteenth century also witnessed the highly consequential political linkage of language and nation. Herder was one of the key figures to pave the way for this view. He celebrated the distinctness of each language, which he saw as emanating from the genius of a particular nation (*Volk*).²² On the one hand, this perspective led to a greater recognition and appreciation of the multiplicity of languages. **On the other hand, Herder insisted on the need to maintain the distinctness of these national languages lest they lose their authenticity and rootedness in their respective nations.** He thus conceived of both languages and their speakers as more separate and different from each other than had previously been the case. Herder did therefore not abandon multilingualism in so far as it meant appreciation of many languages, but rather reworked it in relation to the new vision of language, subject, and nation. The multiplication of languages is not an issue for this Herderian view as long as each language is conceived as distinct and separate and as belonging to just one equally distinct and separate people. What

this position cannot abide is the notion of blurred boundaries, crossed loyalties, and unrooted languages.²³

This changing attitude towards language(s) finds a clear articulation in the field of translation.²⁴ While previously a “universalist” conception of languages prevailed, now a “relativist” perspective began to take hold.²⁵ The universalist conception, dominant until the eighteenth century, deemed languages to be essentially equivalent and their specific forms only an irrelevant surface feature compared to the more important aspect of the content of any text. The relativist perspective, on the other hand, saw languages as radically different from each other in their specificities and their makeup. **In this new vision, translation no longer merely transported content from one form into an equivalent form without damage, but rather necessarily transformed the content in the process.** Wilhelm von Humboldt’s suggestion that languages were not a neutral media but rather inflected the thoughts they expressed was influential in this regard.²⁶ With this greater attention to form came also a greater sense of the difference of languages and their distance from each other. At the extreme end of this relativist view, languages were essentially seen as untranslatable and closed off from each other.

This new perspective not only drew attention to each language’s specificity, but also to the individual’s relationship to his or her—presumably singular—primary language. That relationship was now seen as more internal and innate, and also more circumscribed by inheritance and nationality. In his influential 1813 lecture on translation, Schleiermacher provides the image for this new model, while contrasting it to an older one:

For whoever acknowledges the creative power of language, as it is one with the character of the nation [*Eigenthümlichkeit des Volkes*], must also concede that [. . .] no one adheres to his language only mechanically, as if it were something externally attached to him like a strap and as if one could as easily harness another language for one’s thought as one would exchange a team of horses [*Gespann*]; **rather, every writer can produce original work only in his mother**

tongue [*Muttersprache*], and therefore the question cannot even be raised how he would have written his works in another language.) (“Über die verschiedenen Methoden des Übersetzens” 85; “From On the Different Methods of Translating” 50, trans. modified)

Schleiermacher introduces the image of interchangeable straps and harnessed horses to reject the view of languages as external, indiscriminate means for transporting individuals from one place to another. In a metaphoric move that is characteristic for the period and indicates changing philosophical paradigms, he replaces this mechanistic image of speakers’ relation to language with an organic one.²⁷ The counterimage to the mechanistic view is encapsulated in the reference to the “mother tongue.” Schleiermacher does not elaborate on this image in the same manner in which he provides an extended metaphor for the rejected view. The “mother tongue” functions as a shorthand that barely needs explication. In this shorthand, the weight of the argument falls on the element of “mother” in *Muttersprache*. It stands for a unique, irreplaceable, unchangeable biological origin that situates the individual automatically in a kinship network and by extension in the nation.²⁸ In contrast to the mobility implied by the harnessed horses, the “mother”—a markedly gendered kinship concept—stresses a static mode of belonging to the national collective. Schleiermacher does not need to elaborate that one cannot willfully change one’s mother like one can a team of horses; this point appears self-evident and underscores the effectiveness of the chosen metaphor.

The uniqueness and organic nature of language imagined as “mother tongue” lends its authority to an aesthetics of originality and authenticity. In this view, a writer can become the origin of creative works only with an origin in a mother tongue, itself imagined to originate in a mother. The result is a disavowal of the possibility of writing in nonnative languages or in multiple languages at the same time.²⁹ By the mid-nineteenth century, this position has become a truism, as borne out by composer Richard Wagner’s assertion that “to make poetry in a foreign tongue has

hitherto been impossible, even to geniuses of highest rank” (*Das Judentum in der Musik* 150; tr. *Judaism in Music* 85).³⁰ Such a “retrospective monolingualization of the West European literary system, based on the Romantic stress on the mother tongue as the primary material for literary creation,” as decried by translation scholar André Lefevere (“Translated Literature” 76), effects a historical amnesia about all earlier multilingual configurations while it seeks to deter future turns to any language other than the solely sanctioned “mother tongue.”

THE MOTHER TONGUE: A LINGUISTIC FAMILY ROMANCE

The “mother tongue” is the affective knot at the center of the monolingual paradigm and therefore a knot worth unraveling. This knot relies heavily on the invocation of the maternal, without however necessarily referencing actual mothers.³¹ As the discussion of Schleiermacher begins to illustrate, the “mother” in “mother tongue” stands in for the allegedly organic nature of this structure by supplying it with notions of maternal origin, affective and corporeal intimacy, and natural kinship. Yet the emotional and ideological connotations of “mother tongue” on which Schleiermacher draws and with which we are still familiar today are themselves historical artifacts and not transhistorical constants. Originally a Latin term, *lingua materna* was used in the Middle Ages and the Early Modern period to refer to lay people’s vernaculars in contrast to learned Latin.³² *Muttersprache* first began to be an emotionalized term in the late eighteenth century, when it was newly linked to a notion of linguistic socialization—that is, at the same time as the monolingual paradigm took shape. This change itself occurred in the context of larger social and political transformations that produced new and interrelated conceptions of family, kinship, motherhood, nation, and state. The family, for instance, only then began to be thought of as consisting solely of biological kin and excluding other members of the household such as servants. This rethinking corre-

sponded to the reorganization of labor and the household that resulted in a stricter separation of the private and public realms. The new context defined (bourgeois) motherhood increasingly as the site of affective care rather than simply physical care.³³ It was this image of the bourgeois mother that entered into the modern “mother tongue” discourse.

That the ensuing constellation of “mother” and “language” continues to be a complicated one is demonstrated by the diverse perspectives on it among contemporary feminists. Some feminist critics celebrate the “mother tongue” as bearing residues or traces of the maternal body. Feminists who view the mother tongue in this manner valorize it as the expression of the repressed and dominated maternal and set it against male authority.³⁴ Yet, other feminists, working within a psychoanalytic framework, stress the divergence between the maternal and the linguistic. For instance, some readings align the maternal with the pre-Oedipal and preverbal. Developed in particular by Julia Kristeva, this vision sees the maternal as preceding language. Kristeva’s proposed structure thus locates language and the law of the father as separate from the mother, who is “pure bodily closeness” (Johnson, *Mother Tongues* 66). A third strand, which guides my approach here, rejects both of these utopian figurations of the mother. As feminist philosopher Rosi Braidotti puts it, “Lacanian psychoanalysis shows us that there is no such [. . .] thing as a mother tongue, that all tongues carry the name of the father and are stamped by its register” (*Nomadic Subjects* 11). For Braidotti, “mother” does not stand for something outside the law of the father but rather resides squarely within it. Nevertheless, the mother’s body and all that it suggests about affection, proximity, and presence continues to function implicitly in the still-active concept of the mother tongue.

The complex imbrication of the mother’s body with language and male authority is underscored by media theorist Friedrich Kittler’s historical account of the turn to phonetics in literacy education.³⁵ Around 1800, the bourgeois mother began to be incorporated into the role of teaching her children to read. Kit-

tlar demonstrates in great detail how the mother's mouth became the central conduit in the production of proper sounds in the mother tongue.³⁶ The child was supposed to see and hear the mother's mouth produce sound at the same time that she pointed to the corresponding written letter. Thereby, a connection would emerge between the mother's mouth, the sound, and the letter. The mother, however, was first instructed in textbooks by male experts in how to produce the sounds properly. Her body was meant to function as a medium for those male experts in their attempt to control the proper (re)production of language. As this scenario strikingly demonstrates, the "mother tongue" coming out of a women's mouth was not just any language that a mother spoke, but rather the result of male ventriloquism. While this technique supported the ongoing standardization of the language, it also relied on the child's associating the written letter with the proximity and intimacy of the maternal body.

As this historical account illustrates, the manufactured proximity between "mother" and "language" stages the fantasy behind the modern notion of the mother tongue—namely, that the mother tongue emanates from the mother's body. This notion indicates that, within the monolingual paradigm, "mother tongue" is more than a metaphor. Instead, it constitutes a condensed *narrative* about origin and identity. Freud describes origin fantasies that take the shape of narratives in order to give rise to new subjects as "family romances." In these family romances, children reimagine parents in a grandiose manner in order to deflect their growing sense of the parents' ordinariness.³⁷ Using this basic structure, I propose to read the modern notion of "mother tongue" as a linguistic family romance. The linguistic family romance helps to fantasize a bodily as well as familial grounding in language that does not exist, say, in Schleiermacher's image of language as changeable horses strapped to a carriage. At the same time, this model offers a blueprint for tracing the emergence of possible alternative family romances that produce different conceptions of the relationship between languages and subjects and the origins of their affective ties. As we will see, the

key elements of this linguistic family romance—namely, affect, gender, and kinship, tied to a story of origin and identity—reappear in numerous texts, albeit in altered form. Yoko Tawada, for instance, interpellates a German typewriter as her new “Sprachmutter” (language mother), in an ironic reversal of the organicist notions of “Muttersprache” (mother language). Time and again, going beyond the mother tongue towards a potential multilingual paradigm entails rewriting this linguistic family romance.

The notion of the unique “mother” insists on one predetermined and socially sanctioned language as the single locus of affect and attachment and thus attempts to obscure the possibility that languages other than the first or even primary one can take on emotional meaning. However, despite these strictures, different languages can and do elicit heterogeneous affective investments and emotional reactions. In fact, as psychoanalyst Jacqueline Amati-Mehler and her colleagues note, new languages can open up “new intellectual and affective pathways.”³⁸ Such a notion differs from presumptions that the mother tongue is always the language of emotion and subsequent languages are merely languages of distance and detachment.³⁹ In the case of Kafka, for instance, French serves to negotiate a much-needed opening between German and Yiddish, as I demonstrate in chapter 1. For Özdamar, on the other hand, German is the language in which she successfully works through trauma that took place in Turkish, her erstwhile “mother tongue” (see chapter 4).

The fact that “mother tongue” is a highly ideological, charged, and misleading term is in some ways easy to recognize. Yet simply avoiding this term and substituting it with a more neutral one, such as “first language,” does not in itself resolve the issues tied up in it. The conception of language, origin, and identity that “mother tongue” marks is very much in effect today, even when the term itself is not explicitly invoked.⁴⁰ It is therefore useful to think with this term rather than to ignore it. In fact, I argue that it is the affectively charged dimension of the “mother tongue” that accounts for the persistence of the monolingual paradigm and its homologous logic. We thus need to *work through*

the mother tongue and not simply sidestep its force. Viewed from this vantage point, writing “beyond the mother tongue” does not simply mean writing in a nonnative language or in multiple languages. Rather, it means writing beyond the *concept* of the mother tongue.

SITUATING BEYOND THE MOTHER TONGUE

The postmonolingual perspective helps to throw a new light on the simultaneous presence and absence of multilingual dimensions across many disciplines. As Doris Sommer demonstrates in her important contribution to a “bilingual aesthetics,” multiple languages appear in the margins or even at the center of many twentieth-century texts from philosophy, linguistics, psychology, literary and cultural criticism, and political theory, but remain unexplored. She points, for example, to Ludwig Wittgenstein’s philosophy of language, and draws attention to the fact that he seems to explore every possible language game, but does not ever consider “bilingual games,” although he himself lived in multiple languages.⁴¹ Yet, Wittgenstein’s insistence on publishing the German original of his text in the English edition of his work leads to the bilingualism of his *Philosophical Investigations*, in which German and English face each other on opposite pages. Such a “language game” goes “unremarked while monolanguage games get tireless attention from Wittgenstein,” Sommer comments (*Bilingual Aesthetics* 159). With the lens of the present study, Wittgenstein’s practice becomes legible as caught up in the postmonolingual condition. In contrast to scholars such as Sommer, who emphasize multilingual experimentation alone, this book keeps its focus on the tension between experimental practices and the dominant paradigm in order to explore why and how the monolingual persists even in the face of multilingual forays.

This focus on the postmonolingual tension is enabled by the interdisciplinary scholarship of the last two decades that has brought out the significance of multilingualism, albeit not that of monolingualism. Since the 1990s, literary and cultural studies

have begun in earnest to note multilingualism both in the present and in the past. Because of **the amnesia about multilingualism**, the first step has been to reestablish its existence as a widespread phenomenon. Building on the pioneering but long ignored work of Leonard Forster, contemporary literary scholars have expanded on his initial archive of multilingualism in literature.⁴² This has meant collecting diverse forms of multilingualism—from authors writing in two or more languages (such as Samuel Beckett, Yoko Tawada), writing in a so-called nonnative language (such as Joseph Conrad, Edwige Danticat), to mixing different languages in one text (such as James Joyce, Gloria Anzaldúa), to simply being multilingual, while writing in one language (such as Anita Desai).⁴³ Considering the twentieth century alone, these archives help to reveal the significance of multilingualism for modernism on the one hand and for postcolonial and transnational writing on the other. The makeup of *Beyond the Mother Tongue* pays heed to both of these realms of multilingual writing, and combines two chapters exploring a modernist framework (Kafka, Adorno) with three chapters exploring the globalizing present (Tawada, Özdamar, Zaimoğlu).

However, as this grouping of authors reveals, my archive differs from that of most scholars working in literary multilingualism. Most significantly, much scholarship on multilingualism focuses on constellations that involve English. Evelyn Ch'ien even goes so far as to claim that “weird English constitutes the new language of literature” (*Weird English* 4). Yet “weird German”—a version of which I will discuss via Zaimoğlu’s book *Kanak Sprak* (Kanak Speak) in chapter 5—and many other multilingualized languages surely are also producing new literary effects.⁴⁴ **It is also important to understand that the global circulation of English may even have limiting effects for multilingual experimentation.** Tawada’s German and Japanese writing, for instance, frequently builds on the presumption that her audiences do not understand one of the two languages she uses and therefore listen to its sounds or consider its forms more closely, a situation that would be radically different if she wrote in English and Japanese. To be sure, English

figures as an important element of multilingualism in other places in this book, such as in its role in defining the place and racialized masculinity of young male migrants in Germany (chapter 5). However, considering constellations that involve languages other than English also opens up a view of different historical legacies. While the postcolonial legacy of German continues to be investigated, German has figured more prominently as a post-Holocaust language.⁴⁵ Embracing such a “tainted” language and bringing it into contact with others thus has different connotations, both for Jewish and non-Jewish writers of German, as chapter 2 demonstrates with regard to the crucial function of the “foreign-derived word” for Adorno’s attachment to the language after Auschwitz. *Beyond the Mother Tongue* thus aims to contribute to the decentering of the study of multilingualism as a phenomenon limited to English.

This book’s interest in monolingualism is partially inspired by Jacques Derrida and his reflections on the topic. In his autobiographically informed book, *Monolingualism of the Other, or, the Prosthesis of Origin*, which I discuss at greater length in chapter 1, Derrida suggests the exclusionary institutional force of this concept as well as the inherent fissures that could help unravel it. In his focus on monolingualism, even if it is the “monolingualism of the Other,” he tends to overlook multilingualism too completely, however.⁴⁶ His discussion of German-Jewish political theorist Hannah Arendt’s famous 1964 TV interview “Was bleibt? Es bleibt die Muttersprache” (What Remains? The Mother Tongue Remains), for instance, demonstrates this tendency. In that interview with a West German TV station, Arendt insists on the singularity of the German “mother tongue” and the place it occupies for her. Just as she attempts to articulate this position, however, she is suddenly at a loss for words and briefly switches into English.⁴⁷ This momentary code-switching constitutes a multilingual practice that slips into the very assertion of the unalterable monolingual core of the subject, and yet it has until now gone unmentioned upon. Derrida beautifully unravels the notion of the singularity of the mother tongue that Arendt articulates, yet he does not register the multi-

lingual practice, and thus postmonolingual tension, that occur at the very moment of articulation.

The institutional nature of monolingualism is a significant aspect of the postmonolingual condition that other scholars are also beginning to stress. In an important contribution, Brian Lennon draws attention specifically to the role of the Anglophone trade publishing industry and the ways in which its conventions stifle the actual expression of “plurilingualism,” his term for the presence of untranslated words, phrases, and passages from other languages in a text (*In Babel’s Shadow*). To put it in the terms suggested in the present book, Lennon demonstrates the workings of the monolingual paradigm in the very publishing of multilingual texts and the ways that industry actively limits the types of multilingualism that circulate widely in the public sphere. While Lennon’s case study of publishing is a timely intervention, his exclusive focus on plurilingualism as a multilingual form cannot account for other writing strategies and the particularity of their challenges to the monolingual paradigm. *Beyond the Mother Tongue*, in contrast, insists on the necessity of analyzing a range of forms that multilingual writing can take and of seeing these in their context.⁴⁸

With its focus on “German” writing, this book not only contributes to the ongoing discussion of multilingualism in Anglophone literary and cultural studies, but also seeks to recast the German language both inside and outside German studies as detached from German ethnicity. Instead of viewing German either as a dominant, oppressive language that is the property of socially sanctioned, ethnically German subjects or, inversely, as a minor language threatened by global English, *Beyond the Mother Tongue* makes visible contradictory, changing, and surprising meanings that can accrue to the multilingualized language, especially when delinked from ethnicity.⁴⁹ Even post-Holocaust German can then become an antitraumatic, healing language in new ways and for different subjects, as chapter 4 shows.

Because of the long history of Jewish engagements with the German language and the rich tradition of thinking about Jew-

ish multilingualism, (German-) Jewish studies informs the book throughout.⁵⁰ As chronicled in chapter 1, neither Jewish multilingualism nor Jewish monolingualism ever fit easily into the monolingual paradigm. Contemporary reemergent multilingualism can draw productively on the history of Jewish encounters with the monolingual paradigm, which now appears as a privileged vantage point. In this regard, “Kafka,” specifically, constitutes both a particular case of the postmonolingual condition *and* a shorthand for a linguistic position outside the monolingual paradigm usefully employed in contemporary contexts. The postmonolingual lens this book offers may also productively be used to approach other German-Jewish writers than the ones discussed here. Paul Celan, for instance, famously dismissed the notion of bilingualism in no uncertain terms and insisted on the singularity of the “mother tongue” for his poetry (“Antwort”). Yet the configuration of this mother tongue differed significantly from the monolingual ideal: although German was the language he learned from and spoke with his beloved mother, it was not sanctioned by ethnic, religious, or national categories. In the end, it was also the language of his mother’s murderers. At the same time, Celan was thoroughly multilingual in many ways: from his multilingual upbringing in Czernowitz and the fact that he never wrote in a purely monolingually German environment to his specific multilingual poetic practices. Charting the tension between his monolingual assertion and his multilingual contexts and practices may illuminate his work in new ways. In his case, voicing adherence to the monolingual paradigm may even be a case of resistance precisely because he is not supposed to fit into it.

While notions of Jewish “assimilation into” and “enrichment of” German culture through the use of the German language had long prevailed in German-Jewish studies, alternative conceptualizations have been emerging more recently.⁵¹ Stephan Braese’s study of German as a Jewish language is an important step in the reimagination of German beyond its status as the allegedly exclusive property of fully sanctioned, ethnic, Christian German speakers (*Eine europäische Sprache*). Braese’s account shows

Jewish speakers of German as active and important agents vis-à-vis the language rather than as passive assimilators to a ready-made product. He thus contributes to a scholarly decentering of the purely national definition of the German “mother tongue” and provides evidence for the long-standing function of German as a nonethnic lingua franca.

As the final three chapters of this book argue, this decentering of German is not limited to the German-Jewish context but extends to contemporary “migratory settings” as well (Aydemir and Rotas). Expanding Braese’s use of the phrase, German may even be a “Turkish” language, or a “Kurdish” one, just as migrations may have turned Turkish into a “German” language, as I elaborate in the concluding chapter. The parallels and differences between German-Jewish experiences with the monolingual paradigm and those of young Turkish-Germans that chapter 5 in particular draws out also situate the longer Jewish history with German in greater proximity to new globalized developments in contexts that might at first appear rather distant. Like a number of scholars, I believe that these two fields are not entirely separate but that cross-connections exist. Following the lead of Leslie Adelson, this study takes up multilingualism as a site of “touching tales”—that is, as a site where “things Jewish” and “things Turkish” touch without being equated or translated into each other (*The Turkish Turn* 85).⁵²

With two chapters on prominent Turkish-German writers, this book also participates in the field of Turkish-German studies. Like many other literatures born from migration, Turkish-German literature does not fit the monolingual paradigm. The majority of Turkish-German authors speak both languages, albeit with varying fluency. While most do not write in both languages, this multilingual context is ever-present in the reception of their works, if not their production.⁵³ Scholars have long been preoccupied with the question of how to classify this literature, using differing labels over the years.⁵⁴ If this question continues to be unresolved today, it is not due to a lack of scholarly agreement, I contend, but rather to the challenge that this literature poses to conceptions

dominated by the monolingual paradigm.⁵⁵ Existing categorizations are inadequate for literatures where the language(s) of the author, his or her ethnicity and residence as well as the content and the language(s) of their texts no longer fit the monolingual equation of language, ethnicity, and culture. Because of this pronounced yet varied multilingual dimension, Turkish-German literature offers a fruitful site to investigate the tension between monolingual paradigm and multilingual practice.

Situating Turkish-German literature in relationship to the postmonolingual condition, in turn, adds a new analytic framework to the study of this writing, which complements and broadens existing approaches.⁵⁶ By shifting the focus to the monolingual paradigm, unexpected constellations and potential literary affiliations that had heretofore remained obscure can become visible, such as the ways in which Zaimoğlu's *Kanak Sprak* relates to Kafka's linguistic situation, on the one hand, and to James Joyce's literary experiments, on the other. I consider this broadening as contributing to the project of undoing the "presumption," critically diagnosed by Adelson, "that Turks figure a cultural difference and a social reality that are a priori known and knowable only in predetermined ways" (*The Turkish Turn* 17).

Among scholars investigating the multilingual dimension of Turkish-German literature, Azade Seyhan has been most forceful. In *Writing outside the Nation*, she specifically focuses on diasporic, exilic, and transnational literatures that are also multilingual in some form, adding a welcome comparative perspective through the inclusion of U.S. minority literatures alongside Turkish-German ones. Because of the particular nature of these texts, which frequently thematize loss and displacement, Seyhan stresses the recuperative power of literature, where cultural memories of a lost land can be safeguarded and reconfigured. This approach yields valuable insights into some forms of multilingualism. However, it also risks limiting the understanding of other potential literary effects. While multilingualism can indeed be used to restore and recuperate loss and memory, it can also function to liberate from and challenge the mother tongue,

as this study emphasizes. More importantly, while “bi- and multilingualism” are important reference points for Seyhan throughout her study, her actual analyses do not necessarily highlight multiple linguistic perspectives. In her readings of Özdamar, to which I return in chapter 4, for instance, Seyhan offers insightful readings of the Turkish linguistic dimension inherent in Özdamar’s literary texts. Yet the impact of the German dimension of this writing remains absent from her discussion. This book, in contrast, proposes to think multilingualism in open-ended ways and from multiple vantage points simultaneously.

But how does a postmonolingual mode of reading—that is, a mode of reading that is attentive to both multilingual practices and the monolingual paradigm—proceed, and what does it reveal? A return to the artwork that I introduced at the outset demonstrates the productivity of this approach.

WORDSEARCH: A POSTMONOLINGUAL READING

The difficulty of moving into a new multilingual paradigm is exemplified by the artwork *Wordsearch*. A closer look at Sander’s piece demonstrates that even forms that appear to be highly multilingual may ultimately follow a monolingual paradigm and thus do not automatically carry an innovative potential. Most strikingly, *Wordsearch*’s focus on the image of societal multilingualism in a global city, in fact, rests on a conception of the monolingualism of individuals. The magazine insert, which functions as the catalogue to the final art piece, features numerous full-page color photographs of individuals in the midst of their busy workdays as they take a moment to write down their particular words on pieces of paper. In these pictures, the catalogue highlights the individuals constituting the multilingual global city as speakers of distinct mother tongues who are effectively associated with that language only. Although the magazine insert mentions the multilingual competencies of the pictured individuals (Deutsche Bank Art 28; “Julia [. . .] speaks Tajiki, Russian, and English”), it identifies them solely with one language, their osten-

sible mother tongue: Julia is introduced under the heading “Tajiki” and is asked to contribute a word from this one language only. While the artwork does render the social space as marked by the presence of multiple disparate languages, it also continues to cast the individual according to a monolingual model where all languages but the singular mother tongue are treated as secondary and irrelevant.

The claim to the exclusivity of the mother tongue, however, rests on the continued disavowal of multilingualism. Like Julia, many of the participating individuals actually speak multiple languages, as the brief notes on the speakers in the catalogue and the accompanying website reveal. Gambian immigrant Sanna Kanuteh, who contributes a word in the West African language Soninke, for instance, also speaks “nine languages,” with Soninke just “one of his mother tongues.”⁵⁷ By denying what it also acknowledges on the margins, the artwork effects a form of disavowal: “I know very well that these are speakers of multiple languages but nevertheless I will present them as possessing a single language only.” This “I know very well, but nevertheless” structure is, of course, the signature of fetishism. Fetishism, we recall, preserves the wholeness of the mother in order to disavow castration and lack.⁵⁸ In the case of the monolingual paradigm, it is the mother tongue whose wholeness and exclusivity needs to be preserved.

What is at stake in this staging of *individuals* as primarily monolingual, as defined by their mother tongue, when at the same time they are posited as the building blocks of a larger multilingual whole? Throughout the catalogue text, printed in both English and German, the predominantly German commentators equate language with culture. Sander, for instance, states about the prospective reader of her translinguistic sculpture: “through the use of his language [. . .] the reader finds his own culture of origin represented” (“Wordsearch, 2002” 17).⁵⁹ The reference to “origin” suggests that the term “culture” is in fact used in the anthropological sense of ethnicity. The prevalence of embassies and consulates as sources for native speakers for the project ex-

tends and further underscores the assumed homology between language, culture, ethnicity, and nationality that underwrites the project.⁶⁰ The insistence on identifying the individual with one language only—namely, the presumed mother tongue—then amounts to the insistence on the continued validity of a Herderian conception of language. The individual, in other words, becomes the site (or scale) at which the Herderian conception can be preserved even in the face of globalization.

To understand more fully the stakes behind reestablishing the distinctness of cultures and ethnicities, it is necessary to turn to another issue that *Wordsearch* raises but does not explicitly address. The project is the brainchild of a German artist who realizes it for a nominally German, but in fact transnational financial institution. To explore the coexistence of multiple languages, she turns to New York rather than considering a German site. Frankfurt am Main, the bank's headquarters, would have been a viable alternative as it is one of the country's most diverse, multiethnic, and multilingual cities.⁶¹ Instead, it serves only as a place of reception, where the entire *New York Times* issue with the *Wordsearch* insert was printed by special arrangement and distributed to pedestrians on the same day. As so often since the nineteenth century, the United States—and New York in particular—serves as a site for German fantasies about cultural heterogeneity that are implicitly contrasted with an imagined German homogeneity.⁶² *Wordsearch* displaces multilingualism outside Germany, into a space whose globalized and transnational nature is more readily recognized and acceptable than that of Germany. The displaced form of the project's multilingualism offers a safe distance for savoring difference and internal heterogeneity without having to acknowledge it at home. Ultimately, the assertion of the distinctness and separateness of cultures and ethnicities attempts to assuage the often-voiced German fears of being leveled by globalization. Rather than reconfiguring and altering languages, cultures, and ethnicities, the *Wordsearch* catalogue presents globalization as preserving and accommodating them harmoniously. The configuration of languages in this artwork thus carefully

manages difference by producing it along preserved homogeneous, ethno-cultural lines and by situating it outside Germany. Multilingualism, in other words, does not simply constitute a straightforward expression of multiplicity, but rather a *malleable form* that can be put to different, and contradictory uses.

Wordsearch itself demonstrates this possibility in its dual form. The catalogue to *Wordsearch* is after all only one side of this artwork. The final piece itself lays out an entirely different logic. In contrast to the emphasis on particularity, cultural origin, and identity in the colorful catalogue, and to its stress on hand-written, and thus authenticated, words, the final “translinguistic sculpture” itself celebrates abstraction, universality, and equivalency. The arrangement of the words in stock market tables suggests that language is a commodity to be traded like any other, while translation becomes the means of producing equivalency and surplus value. As in a financial dream, the collected words begin to multiply; through translation, the starting capital of 250 words generates a massive 62,500.

This proliferation differs from heteroglossia by its very orderliness.⁶³ While multilingual environments generally lead to language contact and thus to new linguistic forms via borrowing and code-mixing, the words in these stock market columns stay separate and untouched by each other. They too, thus, reproduce globalization as a process that preserves distinctness. In this case, the unchanged nature of the words obscures the results of the global financial activity to which the arrangement of the words refers—namely, the deep-seated transformations such financial activity causes, the destabilization it brings, and the uneven distribution of wealth to which it leads.

Between the pictures of individuals in the catalogue and the endless columns of words in the verbal sculpture, *Wordsearch* performs multilingualism as a fantasy of preserved particularities and individuality, on the one hand, and as a fantasy of complete equivalency, anonymity, and unencumbered universality of the financial markets, on the other. Given this perfect self-image of neoliberal globalization, it may be symptomatic that an

art critic refers to *Wordsearch* as an “artwork” and “exhibition” by Sander (Gregory Volk), while a business news report calls it a Deutsche Bank “integrated advertising campaign” (Businesswire). Through its form, *Wordsearch* enacts the tension between reemergent multilingualism and persistent monolingualism that defines the postmonolingual condition, but it does so in a way that recasts the monolingual paradigm for a new age and thus retains it.

OUTLINE OF THE BOOK

As the example of *Wordsearch* begins to indicate, the configuration of languages in aesthetic works shapes *how* social formations are imagined. That is, the particular *form* of multilingualism in a given cultural text encodes visions of social formations, individuals, and modes of belonging. As a result, the fact that an artwork—or any other cultural production—features multiple languages does not automatically mean that it stands for pluralism or multiplicity. Not the fact of multiple languages, but the form in which they are brought together and related to entities such as the social, the individual, and the affective plane matters. The work of multilingualism in the cultural sphere can thus only be understood if the particular form it takes is analyzed. Therefore, each of the subsequent chapters focuses on specific formal strategies of breaking with the premises of monolingualism and evaluates the promises and shortcomings of those strategies. While these strategies of literary multilingualism are in the forefront, my analysis also takes into account multilingualism in everyday practices. In many cases, the texts I examine take everyday practices (such as code-switching) as a starting point, yet they rework them in different ways. In other words, literary multilingualism may relate to quotidian, sociolinguistic practices but does not simply reflect them. In contrast to *Wordsearch*, the literary and essayistic texts to which I turn in the remainder of the book configure languages in ways that imagine new formations, subjects, and modes of belonging and, most crucially, offer a more critical way of dealing

with the monolingual paradigm. Though the texts that I consider grapple with the ongoing force of the “mother tongue,” they do so in ways that seek to disrupt the homology between language and ethno-cultural identity that the paradigm installs. In the process, they create a wide variety of multilingual aesthetics.

While monolingualism is a quintessentially modern structure, it is modernism that most clearly begins to unsettle it and that attempts to find ways out of it, even if the language crisis that animates modernism is generally articulated around “language” in the singular. The first two chapters of *Beyond the Mother Tongue* therefore consider authors working within a modernist framework. Because the book is interested in the force of the monolingual paradigm, however, it focuses on authors who seem to be indebted to it to some degree. Chapter 1 turns to Franz Kafka, who wrote in one language only, yet nevertheless did not fit easily into the monolingual paradigm because he did not have a socially sanctioned “mother tongue.” As a Jewish speaker of German in the increasingly polarized multilingual environment of early twentieth-century Prague, Kafka had to contend with what Derrida calls the “monolingualism of the Other.” I focus on Kafka’s 1911 encounter with the Yiddish theater, which not only prepared the artistic breakthrough to his mature style, as has been well documented, but also, I argue, confronted him with a language through which Jews could potentially inhabit the monolingual paradigm. Although Kafka never considered writing in Yiddish, this chapter reveals that his writings *about* that language productively altered his relationship to the German language and allowed him to express the uncanniness of his “mother tongue.”

Chapter 2 takes up a form of multilingualism frequently overlooked in contemporary scholarship in the field—namely, the presence within a given language of other languages via words of foreign derivation. Their presence constitutes a form of “internal multilingualism,” as I call it, that inheres in all languages but that takes on different meanings in different contexts. Foreign-derived words have long been the objects of charged attacks by language purists, who have treated them as intruders to be repelled and ex-

cised from a “mother tongue” held to be pure. With his privileging of the German language, German-Jewish philosopher Theodor W. Adorno would not seem to be an obvious choice for thinking about multilingualism. Yet essays such as “Words from Abroad” (1959) offer important insights into *Fremdwörter* (words of foreign derivation) as indicative of the tensions of the postmonolingual condition. Adorno, who grew up at the historical height of chauvinistic anti-*Fremdwort* sentiment in the early twentieth century, explicitly comments on this category at significant moments in the development of his thought. In *Minima Moralia*, he memorably calls *Fremdwörter* “the Jews of language,” thus suggestively linking linguistic conditions and historical experiences (200; tr. 110). In reading both his explicit commentary on these “words from abroad” and his own writing practice in drawing on them, this chapter shows how Adorno held on to German even after Auschwitz: he redefines the presence of the unassimilated *Fremdwort* as the core characteristic of the German language that retains the memory of enforced foreignness and fundamental alienation. As my chapter demonstrates, moreover, Adorno consistently relies on the interplay between “native” and “foreign-derived” words as part of his dialectical mode of writing, a strategy that turns his writing into a critically postmonolingual form.

The next three chapters move from the post-World War II period to the post-Cold War present and to prominent contemporary writers who embrace a much more visible multilingualism than Kafka or Adorno. Chapter 3 discusses a writer who draws on earlier avant-garde and modernist forms of writing, yet transforms these in new, globalized ways. It focuses specifically on “bilingual writing,” defined here as writing and publishing in two (or more) languages.⁶⁴ Since the late 1980s, Yoko Tawada has produced two minimally overlapping oeuvres in Japanese and in German, for which she has been recognized separately in both countries. In contrast to her most famous twentieth-century predecessors in bilingual writing, Beckett and Nabokov, however, she does not go through periods of only writing in one of her languages, but rather uses the defamiliarizing effect of constantly

switching between them. As this chapter demonstrates, Tawada's particular multilingual strategies serve to illuminate and alter a condition not often recognized as problematic—namely, *inclusion* into the monolingual paradigm. With Tawada we can see the cost of this inclusion, in addition to the forms of exclusion illuminated by the other writers.

While Tawada can be described as an expatriate writer in Germany, the last two chapters turn to multilingual effects coming out of different modalities of movement in the late twentieth-century: exile and mass migration. As a result of postwar labor recruitment, Germany has become home to a large resident Turkish community. The last two writers considered both hail from this group, although they belong to different generations and are differently situated in relationship to the monolingual paradigm. The striking dimension of Emine Sevgi Özdamar's texts has long been recognized as her strategy of literally translating Turkish expressions into German, thereby creating a jarring and poetic effect. This multilingual form, which I refer to as "literal translation" and which has analogues among postcolonial writers such as Gabriel Okara, has been primarily read as an expression of migration. My reading of Özdamar's key text "Mutterzunge" (Mother Tongue, 1990), however, reveals a different underlying issue that this form addresses, which is the traumatic experience of state violence prior to migration. Özdamar's literal translations both recall and forget that violence in German and in the process become a means of working through the original trauma, underscoring the affective possibilities opened up by going beyond the mother tongue.

In contrast to Özdamar and Tawada, who both arrived in Germany as adults and learned (one of) their literary language(s) belatedly, Feridun Zaimoğlu grew up with two languages from the start, so that German was never a foreign language to him. Yet it has been difficult for him, as it has for many nonethnic Germans, to be accepted as a legitimate user of the language by his ethnically German compatriots, confirming how the monolingual paradigm reproduces ethnically based exclusions. Accord-

ing to this logic, a “Turk” could only ever have Turkish as his mother tongue never German, and certainly not both. In his best-seller *Kanak Sprak* (1995), Zaimoğlu responds to this situation by creating a stylized language inspired by the code-switching creativity of socially marginalized young Turkish-German men. In a virtuoso performance mixing different codes drawn from such diverse sources as biblical German, hip-hop English, and Germanized Yiddish to render a provocative, dense, and highly original language, Zaimoğlu aims to unsettle the exclusionary logic of the monolingual paradigm by laying claim to a broad linguistic home. His book thus allows a consideration of the particular multilingual form of “mixed writing”—that is, of featuring multiple languages within one literary text. The surprising absence of Turkish from this mix, however—an absence motivated by fear of “feminization”—indicates that even innovative and critical projects of multilingualism remain haunted by aspects of the paradigm.

The concluding chapter reflects on the political significance of introducing a postmonolingual analysis today. It takes stock of contradictory developments in contemporary Germany and suggests a highly “selective” embrace of multilingualism at work. Asking how a critical multilingual paradigm might look based on the readings developed throughout this book, it finally offers an alternative conceptualization of the mother tongue that disaggregates linguistic origins, communal belongings, and affective investments.

Multilingual forms are most productive and promising when they help to change the conceptual frameworks through which we perceive languages and the arenas in which they circulate. A critical multilingualism can help open “new affective paths” via linguistic practices not tied to kinship and ethnic identity. As this book argues throughout, the postmonolingual condition holds this promise, but without guarantees.