

Behind the texts #3

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What's in a Word? Mother Tongue(s), Displacement and Cognitive Dissonance

Tuesday, 19th February 2019

St. Hild & St. Bede, Collier Room, 6pm

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for more information about this event.

What's behind a text? What's in a word? The literary texts examined crack open a number of evidences, revealing hidden dimensions relating to language in general and the 'mother tongue' in particular. The powerful and resilient expression, crossroad of metaphors, does not so much denominate a concept as it functions as a common expression that condenses various linguistic, ideological and emotional *imaginaires*, ranging from relations of longing or adulation to intense hatred and the desire to rupture logics of social, familial, and national belonging. How, specifically, do displacement and the cognitive dissonance it induces, affect the ability to express reality, identity, and shared experiences? A particular focus will be on Senthuran Varatharajah's acclaimed 2016 novel *Vor der Zunahme der Zeichen*. It transcribes the online conversation of two refugees, personal stories of wars over territory, language, and independence of ethnic minorities, of growing up in German and in Germany, of being uprooted and grafted, of the possibility of translating memories and narrating lives based on multilingual wordplays. In a world of uncertain and expanding signs, resembling Russian dolls, palimpsests or an infinite chain, the novel explicitly questions what's in and behind a word and a language – how you may discover “lungs” in stories, “vengeance” in language and “I” in nothing (“Früher dachte ich, dass jedes deutsche Wort aus anderen zusammengesetzt sei, ich dachte, dass in jedem Wort mindestens noch ein anderes liegt und dass sie zusammenhängen würden... für jedes Wort hatten wir fünf Sekunden, um ein Wort im Wort, zu finden, die Lunge in *Erzählungen*, die Rache in *Sprache*, ein Ich in *Nichts*”).