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Writing Sample

Adorno, Culture and Feminism

edited by

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(This is a book of essays by Adorno scholars from England, Germany, Belgium, and the United States. My contribution was singled out as "superb" by the publisher's reader.)

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4 *Fremdwörter* as 'The Jews of Language' and Adorno's Politics of Exile

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In 'Heine the Wound' ('*Die Wunde Heine*'), Adorno observes that 'today, the fate Heine suffered has literally become the common fate: homelessness has been inflicted on everyone. All in *language and being*, have been damaged as the *exile* himself was' (1991a: 85/100; added emphasis).[1] The damaging impact of exile on language and being is even more concretely and vividly captured in *Minima Moralia*, where they come together in a chilling constellation: 'Foreign words are the Jews of language' (Adorno, 1974: 110/123; translation modified).[2] Adorno's anguish as an 'intellectual in emigration' is superimposed here upon his agony as a half-Jew caught between nationalism in Germany on the one hand, and the conformism of America's administered world on the other.[3]

The frequent presence of foreign words throughout Adorno's writings is more than a passive reflection of the conditions of alienation and displacement experienced by the author as part of an age of anxiety and estrangement.[4] Foreign words assume for Adorno an active moral dimension, such as when he insists that 'it is part of morality not to be at home in one's home' (Adorno, 1974: 39). Even more important is the hope Adorno places in the critical or what he calls the 'explosive' force of foreign words. Surprisingly, while Adorno valorizes most foreign words for their supposedly critical function of negation, he uses English expressions (in his German writings) to stage the 'absurdity' of American culture. Thomas Levin, a sympathetic reader of Adorno's *Fremdwörter*, uses Adorno's *oeuvre* to construct a catalogue of English words which reads like a 'paratactic social symptomatology'. The examples he gives include 'teamwork', 'hit parade', 'conditioned reflexes', 'corny', 'crooner', 'jitterbugs', 'sampling', and 'name bands', as well as the following whose foreignness is not even signalled by quotation marks or italics: streamlining, tough guy, underdog, lowbrow, discriminatory power, and best-seller (Levin, 1985: 115–16).[5] Levin himself refers to this list of *Fremdwörter* as a 'hilarious catalogue of cultural stereotypes' more revealing of 'Adorno's perception of America' than the German thinker's explicit accounts of his stay in the United States such as 'Scientific Experiences of a European Scholar in America' (Levin, 1985: 115–16). Without realizing it, Levin calls attention to a contradiction between Adorno's theory and the practical applications he derives from it:

Adorno himself commits the same habitual stereotyping for which he faults the anti-Semites and the nationalist fanatics.[6] These lapses seriously compromise Adorno's role as a spokesman against totalitarianism and its persecution of otherness. More disturbingly, Adorno's rejection and subsequent exclusion of American culture as irredeemably 'foreign' is matched by an uncanny return in some of his later writings to an unacknowledged linguistic and cultural nationalism. Despite his opposition to German nationalism and its campaign for linguistic purity, Adorno eventually returns home to the German language.[7] His account of the way foreign words create *discontinuities* that disrupt myths of organic unity is undermined by his longing for his German home(-land) and by his need to 'reestablish a sense of *continuity*' with the point of his 'origin' (quoted from Löwenthal, 1989: 70; added emphasis). His radical subversion of the mythical 'homeland' into 'the state of *having escaped*' (Adorno, 1972: 78; added emphasis) thus reverts to the state of *having escaped back to the mythical homeland*. In a way, Adorno repeats the trajectory of Odysseus whom he criticizes in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*: the writer, no less than the Homeric figure he criticizes, 'wrenches [himself] free from the mythical homeland only to return to it in another form'.[8]

What, then, explains this inconsistency between Adorno's theory and praxis? Given Adorno's identification in *die Wunde Heine* of the Jewishness pervading *both* language and being, what 'perversion' allows Adorno to find a home for his Jewish being in the German language? These are the questions I seek to address in this chapter, especially from the perspectives of Lacanian psychoanalysis and deconstruction.

Fremdwörter and Adorno's campaign against the myth of organic unity

Adorno's deep mistrust of social and political metaphors of organic unity leads him to be highly critical of the myth of a pure Ur-idiom and the associated ideology of an internally coherent and organic nature of language. The concept of the nation as an organic unity depoliticizes fundamental inequalities and injustices – be they injustices directed against race or inequalities established among classes. The non-identical must, Adorno insists, be made apparent in the form and the content of a work. By doing so, the non-identical poses a threat to the status quo. Both nationalists and the bourgeoisie find foreign words offensive because, by remaining the absolutely other in language, these words prevent an unreflected affirmation of society. As Adorno puts it, foreign words take on an 'alien' posture in language:

> They [foreign words] are residues of the operation of the social contradiction between cultured and uncultured strata, a contradiction that no longer permits either the unreflective 'folk-etymological' development of language or a thoroughgoing construction of language, because free use of the forces of language is reserved for the cultured stratum, which is alienated from itself as well as from the others. (Adorno, 1991b: 289)

Ironically, it is in their alienation from the organic whole of language that *Fremdwörter* open a space for freedom. As concrete embodiments of the non-identical, *Fremdwörter* erode consistency within a system, thereby disrupting the ontology of language and shattering the stifling grip of homogeneity:

> Foreign words demonstrate *the impossibility of an ontology of language*: they confront even concepts that try to pass themselves off as origin itself with their mediatedness, their moment of being subjectively constructed, their arbitrariness. (Adorno, 1991c: 189; added emphasis)[9]

Foreign terms cut through the mythical web of natural organicity and open a space for the experience of freedom:[10]

> foreign words are the points at which a knowing consciousness and an illuminated truth break into the undifferentiated growth of the aspect of language that is mere nature: the incursion of freedom. (Adorno, 1991b: 289)

Adorno does not confine the critical, disruptive function of *Fremdwörter* to a realm of 'mere language' abstracted from politics. The incorporation of foreign terms into a language helps realize Adorno's vision of *writing as a political act* – that is, as a series of analytic interventions into any closed system of thought and politics, whether Hegelian idealism or orthodox Marxism, German Fascism or American capitalism. The militant role of Adorno's *Fremdwörter* is evident from his two essays 'Alien Words' ('*Wörter aus der Fremde*') and 'On the Use of Foreign Words' ('*Über den Gebrauch von Fremdwörtern*').[11] Here Adorno explores the 'negative, dangerous, and yet assuredly promised power' of *Fremdwörter* (1991b: 291). For him, 'a determined defense of the use of foreign words' has a very specific goal:

> its task is not so much to demonstrate the harmlessness of foreign words as to release their explosive force: not to deny what is foreign in them but to use it. (1991a: 286)

This 'explosive' power comes precisely from the way the *Fremdwort* functions as an outlaw in the land of linguistic purity and organicity – as an outlaw which nonetheless promises to be the founder of a new law in the world 'to come':

> A worthy task for folklore would be to examine how foreign words operate beneath the sphere of culture but without fusing with the body of language – at the deepest level of language, in political jargon, in the slang of love, and in an everyday way of speaking that from the standpoint of organic language and linguistic purity would have to be called corrupt, but in which we may see the

> contours of a language to come that cannot be understood either in terms of the idea of the organic or in terms of education. (1991b: 290)

It is with this 'utopia of language, a language without earth, [and] without subjection to the spell of historical existence' (Adorno, 1991c: 192) that Adorno seeks to blast open the prisonhouses of nationalism on the one hand and capitalism on the other.

A *language in exile and the exile's language: the disruption of the national order of things*

Paradoxically, it is the proliferation of myths of an organic homeland which is responsible for the creation of exile as a generalized condition in the twentieth century. Expelled outward, victims of exclusion return to haunt the ideology of nationalism – in the figure of the Jew – both in language and in being. Forbidden to 'exist', *die Wunde Juden* nonetheless insists.[12] Prevented from rooting themselves legally and socially, the exiles refuse to root themselves linguistically. Adorno himself exemplifies this by insisting on being 'a [writer] unhoused and a wanderer across language'.[13] This refusal of confinement within one national language is one of Adorno's most important forms of socio-political resistance around which different kinds of political protest – for example, protest against nationalism – can be structured. In 'Alien Words' Adorno recounts how, as a child, he delighted in using foreign words to offend his 'indispensable patriots' along with their close ally, the educational institution: 'Foreign words constituted little cells of resistance to the nationalism of World War I' (1991c: 186).

It is no surprise that the Nazis should systematically eliminate *Fremdwörter* from their literature and pedagogy.[14] Given the significant role played by language in the construction of national and cultural identity, the threat posed by foreign words to the national order of things cannot be easily ignored. From the onset of the ideology of nationalism, language as much as human beings has been subjected to inclusion/exclusion based on categories of 'citizenship'; thus the status of the *Fremdwort* has always been debated within the framework of linguistic nationality. Adorno calls *Fremdwörter* 'the Jews of language'. Like Georg Simmel's 'stranger', neither foreign words nor the Jews are '*organically* connected, through established ties of kinship, locality, and occupation, with any single one' of the community in which they uneasily reside (Simmel, 1950: 404; added emphasis). As much as 'people without a homeland' are looked upon as 'matter out of place', a 'homeless language' is discriminated against for its symbolic danger. To the extent that people without citizenship are deemed to be devoid of personal, social and political responsibilities (see, for example, Cirtautas, 1957: 70, 73), words that move across national linguistic borders are also suspect because they float free of language rules and clearly defined meanings. In other words, the exile – be it a linguistic form or a human being – is an anomaly existing outside the national order of things. It is the unwanted

'infiltrator' who threatens the purity of the nation as well as the prerogative of the state to define its citizenry.

Adorno does not limit himself to exploring the fear of otherness as the sole basis for nationalism's exclusion of the racial and linguistic other. He points out in addition how the purists' fear is a fear of facing their own truth – that is, the fear of confronting existing reality in its disjunctions and 'suffering'. Citing Benjamin's 'silver rib of the foreign word', Adorno demonstrates the way *Fremdwörter* return to linguistic purism its own truth in inverted form.[15] This operation allows Adorno to underscore the bad faith of the Nazis' violent attempt to impose a false unity upon a Germany saturated with social contradictions:

> Benjamin spoke of the author inserting the silver rib of the foreign word in to the body of language. *What seems inorganic here is in actuality only historical evidence, evidence of the failure of that unification.* Such disparateness means not only suffering in language, and what Hebbel called the 'schism of creation', but suffering in reality as well. From this perspective Nazism may be regarded as a . . . deadly attempt to force a bourgeois integration of Germany that had not taken place. (Adorno, 1991c: 187–8; added emphasis)

Pushing this logic, Adorno is able to detect, long before the development of post-colonial scholarship, the relationship between imperialism and organic language:[16]

> No language . . . is organic and natural[17] . . . but every victory of the advanced civilizatory linguistic element contains as a precipitate something of the injustice in something like the way British imperialism dealt politically with its subject peoples. (1991c: 188)[18]

Nationalism is not only a set of explicit political propaganda. The idea of nation is also a deeply metaphysical construct. By revealing the heterogeneous nature of existing reality, foreign words can prevent an unreflected affirmation of society and dismantle the metaphysics of authenticity used for its legitimation:

> Every foreign word contains the explosive material of enlightenment, contained in its controlled use the knowledge that what is immediate cannot be said in unmediated form but only expressed in and through reflection and mediation. Nowhere do foreign words in German prove their worth more than in contrast to jargon of authenticity, terms like *Auftrag, Begegnung, Aussage, Anliegen* [mission, encounter, message, concern], and the like. (1991c: 190)

By debunking the ideology of immediacy, foreign words mount a robust challenge to cultural and nationalist metaphysics that naturalize scholarly and popular quests for 'authenticity'. The myth of immediacy or authenticity, it should be noted, is partly a product of the 'rootedness' of culture. The culture of national essentialism is always 'rooted in place'. In contrast to this rootedness, Adorno emphasizes cultivating a 'state of awareness' modelled

upon the rootless and restless character of the exile. This critical awareness renders Adorno an adversary not only to nationalism but also to the administered world.

Jewishness in language and being: a threat to the administered world (Verwaltete Welt)

The perniciousness of the myth of the home(-land) makes it a moral obligation for the exile to refuse the temptation of settling down in a new 'home' in place of the old. Adorno confirms this principle by following his flight from Germany with a no less strong desire also to flee the American 'burden of conformism' (1971: 103). That Adorno should find America to be as damaging to his 'language and being' as Nazi Germany is not surprising, given Adorno's conviction that capitalist America is an equally 'totalitarian' system that has managed and processed all differences out of existence. Like fascism, the exchange economy of capitalism operates according to a logic of identity that strives to suppress all contradictions and differences.[19] Both systems are 'revolted by the sight of otherness, of that which threatens to escape its own closed system' (Eagleton, 1991: 126). Whereas Fascism responds to otherness by eliminating it, capitalism 'violently reduces it [otherness] to its own image and likeness' (Eagleton, 1991: 126).[20]

The other which refuses to be totally silenced, returning to haunt the system's will-to-closure, is well captured by the image of the Jew. As Martin Jay puts it, the Jews become for the first generation Frankfurt School thinkers 'the metaphoric equivalent of that remnant of society preserving negation and the non-identical':

> The Jews, in other words and in their very refusal to be assimilated, represent an obstacle to the total integration of the 'administered world' or 'one-dimensional society', as Marcuse was to call it. (1980: 148)[21]

In a similar spirit, Adorno pays homage to foreign words – the 'Jews of language' – for effecting 'a beneficial interruption of the conformist moment of language' (1991c: 189) and for validating individual experience against the objectifying force of reified consciousness:

> When language confronts the language-forming subject as something objective, the subject forces its own impulses through, in opposition to language, in words that are not subject to language, words it mobilizes in opposition to linguistic convention, however rigidly conventional those words may be when one meets them in everyday language. *Foreign words become the bearers of subjective contents*: of the nuances. The meanings in one's own language may well correspond to the meanings of the foreign word in every case; but they cannot be arbitrarily replaced by them because the expression of subjectivity cannot simply be dissolved in meaning. (1991b: 287; added emphasis)

Not unlike Lacan's idea of the Real which cannot be contained by the symbolic order, foreign words as Adorno conceives them explode the

reification and ontologization of language by disrupting conventions of language and meaning. The decompletion of the big Other opens a space for the 'expression of subjectivity' and for the preservation of 'the social force of liberation' in face of 'the totalitarian unison, with which the eradication of difference is proclaimed as a purpose in itself' (Adorno, 1974: 18).[22]

While the subject finds a refuge in foreign words, those who fall victim to the ideology of linguistic purity are no longer subjects but 'objects of manipulation':

> A critique of foreign words that mistakenly considers itself progressive serves a communicative ideal that is in actuality an ideal of manipulation; today the word that is designed to be understood becomes, precisely through this process of calculation, a means to degrade those to whom it is addressed to mere objects of manipulation and to harness them for purposes that are not their own, not objectively binding. (1991c: 191)[23]

Adorno's insistence on preserving the individual's 'integrity' along with his/her claim to a 'rational indissolubility in language' and in society (1991b: 287) is no doubt closely connected to his negative dialectics which uphold non-identity as a process of concrete negation, and propose 'the preservation of the enclaves of negation' as 'the best to be hoped for in the present world' (Jay, 1980: 149). Foreign words, modern art and the Jews are all symbols of non-identity resisting the exchange process, bureaucracy and the culture industry. Much Like Horkheimer's understanding of Critical Theory as 'the Jew' of the administered society, Adorno's dictum that 'Foreign words are the Jews of language' affirms the critical function of the non-identical.

Fremdwörter *and the exile's refusal to assimilate*

By remaining untranslated and untranslatable, Adorno's *Fremdwörter* constitute a politics of refusal – that is, a refusal to conform and assimilate. Contrary to common sense, Adorno does not think that German nationalists and the German immigrants eager to assimilate into American culture are in opposition to each other. Rather, nationalists easily become immigrants ready to adapt themselves to a new nation when circumstances require, since both of them subscribe to the logic of conformity:

> People who conform, who generally feel comfortable with the given environment and its power relations, always adapt more easily in the new country. Here a nationalist, there a nationalist. Anyone who, as a matter of principle, is never completely in agreement with the state of things and not predisposed to playing along also remains oppositional in the new country. (Adorno, 1985: 126)

In a similar spirit, Adorno's reading of 'Aldous Huxley and utopia' (1967: 85–118) criticizes the intellectual *émigrés* for their obsequious drive for successful adjustment. Their 'interests of self-preservation', he says, are 'stronger than those of preserving the self' (1967: 97). For Adorno, 'the True

and the Better in every people is much more likely that which does *not* adapt itself to the collective subject but, wherever possible, even resists it' (1985: 121). Adorno's preoccupation with *Fremdwörter* can be understood in the light of Said's description of the exile who 'clutch[es] difference like a weapon to be used with stiffened will', thereby 'jealously insist[ing] on his or her right to refuse to belong' (Said, 1990: 363).[24]

For Adorno, objections to *Fremdwörter* raised by both the purists in Germany and the immigrants who have assimilated themselves to American culture can be traced primarily to 'a defense against ideas, which are imputed to the words'. To prove his point, Adorno cites his experience in the United States delivering a lecture in which all foreign words had been carefully deleted; despite this precaution, he was still criticized for sounding foreign (1991c: 185). According to Adorno's logic, complaints made by Americans against the linguistically alien betray the hypocrisy of the 'spokesmen of unitary tolerance' who are 'always ready to turn intolerantly on any group that remains refractory' (1974: 103). Indeed, Adorno does not hesitate to call the editorial policy of a psychoanalytic journal in San Francisco a 'machine' to whose 'universal technique of adaptation' those without power will 'have to submit'.[25]

Adorno's criticism of the ideology of adjustment no doubt goes hand in hand with his aversion to the 'reified, bureaucratized, administered world of advanced capitalism' (Eagleton, 1991: 127) – a world that 'adjusts' all distinct phenomena to the homogenizing exchange principle. In a rather strange way, however, Adorno seems to consider the 'nature' of commodity as intrinsic to the English language itself. In a piece called 'English Spoken' from *Minima Moralia*, Adorno describes his childhood reaction to the English picture books given him by some elderly British ladies. Even though he had no understanding of English at the time, he immediately linked the language to blatant commercialism:

> The peculiar inaccessibility of the books, with their glaring pictures, titles and vignettes, and their indecipherable text, filled me with the belief that objects of this kind were not books at all, but *advertisements* . . . (Adorno, 1974: 47; added emphasis)

Adorno even congratulates himself on having the 'truth' of his intuition confirmed later by his experience living in English-speaking cultures: 'Since I came to live in Anglo-Saxon countries and to understand English, this awareness has not been dispelled but strengthened' (ibid.).

By contrast, Adorno never associates commercialism with the German language. To appropriate Eagleton's expression, if advanced capitalism is guilty of 'transmut[ing] the uniqueness and plurality of things into a mere simulacrum of itself', Adorno can be taken to task for expelling his American other 'beyond [his] own borders in a panic-stricken act of exclusion' (Eagleton, 1991: 126).

'Das Eigene' is already 'das Fremde', and 'das Fremde' reverts to 'Das Eigene': the restricted economy of Adorno's politics of exile[26]

Two kinds of Fremdwörter, *or two faces of the other: the sacred and the profane*

Even though *Fremdwörter* have often been idealized by Adorno, in practice one can detect in his writings two varieties of foreign words treated by the author respectively with veneration and contempt.

In 'Alien Words' Adorno points out that foreign terms '[illuminate] something true of all words: that language imprisons those who speak it, that as a medium of their own it has essentially failed' (1991b: 189). However, if most foreign expressions are employed by Adorno to highlight the limits and inadequacy of the (German) national idiom, English words are, by contrast, often used as vivid tableaux that stage the peculiar 'absurdity' of Anglo-American culture – a phenomenon for which one can find 'no possible German equivalent'. The Anglicisms and Americanisms in Adorno's works make up a striking list of cultural stereotypes.[27] Terms like 'teamwork', 'best-seller', 'healthy sex life' and 'likes and dislikes' are consistently left in the original in Adorno's texts, drawing attention to the alien character of such concepts and expressions to the German culture. In so doing, *Adorno's own practice ironically turns English words into 'the Jews of language' – or, to expropriate his expression elsewhere – it is Adorno who makes English terms into 'language's scapegoat'* (1991c: 189; added emphasis).

The 'profane' English language finds its 'sacred' counterpart in other foreign words used by Adorno – primarily French, Latin, Italian and Greek. However, even the latter group of *Fremdwörter* are not unproblematic. As much as Adorno talks about the non-identical, critical function of foreign words, he does not always choose them to obstruct unreflected affirmation or to prohibit premature positivity. At times, Adorno's fascination with foreign expressions resembles a superficial longing for exotic women:

> since language is erotically charged in its words, at least for the kind of person who is capable of expression, love drives us to foreign words. In reality, it is that love that sets off the indignation over their use. The early craving for foreign words is like the craving for foreign and if possible exotic girls; what lures us is a kind of exogamy of language, which would like to escape from the sphere of what is always the same, the spell of what one is and knows anyway. (1991c: 187)

The sexist and racist overtones of this passage become even more disturbing when read alongside Adorno's '*On parle français*', (1974: 27) where he describes the *im*-mediate, instinctive feel foreign language allows for understanding pornography. Here, Adorno's eroticization of foreign language by attributing to it a mysterious power which grants immediate access to

meaning contradicts and undermines his usual valorization of foreign words for their resistance to the ideology of immediacy:

> How intimately sex and language are intertwined can be seen by reading pornography in a foreign language. When de Sade is read in the original no dictionary is needed. The most recondite expressions for the indecent, knowledge of which no school, no parental home, no literary experience transmits, are understood with the instinctive feel of a sleepwalker [*nachtwandelnd*], just as in childhood the most tangential utterances and observations concerning the sexual crystallize into a true representation. (1974: 48/53; translation modified)

In other words, Adorno himself has made a fetish of foreign words.[28]

Ironically, despite Adorno's glamorization of foreign words, it is ultimately German that turns out for him to be the 'most sacred' of all languages – that is, the language with an undefined, almost mystical character that allows it to 'express something about phenomena that does not exhaust itself in their mere this-ness, their positivity and given-ness' and as such best captures the 'speculative element' of philosophy (1985: 129). And it is to this language that Adorno must return after his exile. *Fremdwörter*, be they sacred or profane, in the end amount to being merely two faces of 'the other'. It is the *self-presencing* of the German language, rather than 'the other', that calls Adorno back to his 'home(-land)'.

The 'special character' of the German language

Adorno opens his 1965 Hessische Rundfunk lecture 'On the Question: "What is German?" ' by rejecting the 'reified consciousness' of 'national collectivities' (1985: 121). At the same time, however, he mentions language as an 'objective factor' compelling his return to Germany:

> The decision to return to Germany. . . . There was an *objective* factor. It is *the language*. . . . *[T]he German language seems to have a special elective affinity for philosophy* and especially for its speculative element [*Moment*] which is so easily distrusted in the West as dangerously unclear – and not entirely without justification. Historically, in a process which has yet to be seriously analyzed, the German language has acquired the capacity to express something about phenomena which does not exhaust itself in their mere this-ness, their positivity and given-ness. (1985: 129; added emphasis)

Despite his cautions against an uncritical hypostatization of the 'speculative element' in German language and metaphysics, Adorno's belief in the 'special elective affinity' between the German language and philosophy makes him an ally, at least on this issue, of his enemies Hegel and, above all, Heidegger. Adorno is just as enthusiastic about the uniqueness of the German language as the other two great ontologizers of the German language:

> German is not merely the signification of fixed meanings; rather it has retained more of the power of expression, in any case, than would be attributed to Western languages by someone who did not grow up in them, for whom they are not second nature. But whoever is convinced that . . . what is essential to philosophy is the mode of presentation . . . will gravitate to the German language. . . . [T]he impossibility of non-violently transposing into another language not only highly developed speculative thoughts but even particular and quite precise concepts such as those of spirit [*Geist*], the element [*Moment*], and experience [*Erfahrung*], with all the connotations with which they resonate in German – this impossibility suggests that there is a specific, objective quality of the German language. (1985: 129–30)

It is the untranslatability of certain German concepts and idioms that confirms the special character of the German national idiom, and compels Adorno to return to Germany. Returning to the 'homeland' of the German language, Adorno claims, is necessary in order to 'spare' himself an uncomprehending audience and the violent editing of his writing by American publishers.[29] Adorno the committed defender of *Fremdwörter* – of those 'heterogeneous fragments that slip through the conceptual net' (Jay, 1984: 178) – ends up reinscribing himself within an idealist economy that privileges identity over non-identity as he espouses the ideologies of expressive self-presencing and unproblematic intersubjective communication associated with the 'native tongue':

> In one's own language, however, were one only to say something as exactly and as uncompromisingly as possible, one might also hope through such relentless effort to become understandable as well. In the domain of one's own language, it is this very language which stands in for one's fellow human beings. (Adorno, 1985: 130)

In spite of his concern for 'preserving the subject' (1967: 97), Adorno also becomes implicated in the 'national collectivities' (1985: 121) the moment he believes that his 'own' language can allow him to fully articulate his thoughts as well as to unproblematically 'share the world' with those speaking his own tongue. In Lacanian terms, if immigrants who too readily give up their subjectivity to their host culture are alienated in the undivided big Other, Adorno's subjectivity suffers a similar fate at the precise moment he believes his 'native' tongue grants him the happy coincidence of thought and expression.[30]

Adorno's inability to separate himself from the big Other is not without political ramifications. He deliberately avoids a traditional ontological approach to the question 'What is German?' and addresses instead the subject matter obliquely, via a detour through the 'nature' of the German language. Nonetheless, his talk still ends up as a mere recasting of the question of nationality as an issue of language. The reason is, in order to trace the contours of the German language, one must establish the 'foreign' against which the 'character' and 'identity' of a national idiom can be defined. In the same way, one cannot map out the boundaries of a nation except by delineating it against other countries. Adorno cannot avoid

duplicating the structure of a national territory in his tracing of a linguistic territory. In fact, the history of Adorno's exile and return is telling evidence of the impossibility of separating linguistic nationality from political geography and the boundaries of the nation-state. Despite his misgivings about nationalism, Adorno finds it impossible to return to the German language without returning to Germany the nation. The *home-land* of his language is also the country where he feels 'at *home*' with himself. The non-conforming Adorno, who insists that he is at home in neither the old world nor the new, ultimately re-cognizes Germany to be a 'home' for both his 'language and being'.[31]

The dialectic between 'das Fremde' *and* 'das Eigene': *Adorno's return to his linguistic homeland*

Upon a first reading of 'On the question: "What is German?" ', it would be easy to dismiss Adorno's neglect of the intimate relationship between language, culture and nationalism as his blindspot or a gesture of bad faith. It would be tempting, for example, to fault Adorno for failing to understand that nationalism can never be reduced to self-consciously held political ideologies. Or, to borrow Benedict Anderson's expression, one could say that Adorno has avoided confronting the alignment between nationalism and 'the large cultural systems that preceded it, out of which – as well as against which – it came into being' (Anderson, 1983: 19; see also Bhabha, 1990: 1ff.). However, what makes Adorno's case so puzzling is precisely his apparent sensitivity on other occasions to the danger of fetishizing one's own language and culture – a sensitivity evident in his relentless attacks on jargons of authenticity and on ideas of 'German *property*' and 'cultural *property*' (1985: 122; added emphasis).

Why, then, given his critical awareness, should Adorno still insist on the unique 'property' of the German language which inevitably evokes ideas not only of cultural but also of national boundaries and boundedness? In arguing for the 'fundamentals' of the German language, isn't Adorno guilty of – to borrow David Morley and Kevin Robins's expression – protecting 'exclusive, and therefore, excluding, identities against those who are seen as aliens and "foreigners" ' (1990: 5)? To further complicate the case, in the same essay where Adorno discusses the 'elective affinity for philosophy' of the German language (1985: 126), he begins by speaking, in a spirit very similar to Morley and Robins's, against a narrow-minded glorification of 'one's own group' and its correlative exclusion of the alien:

> The fabrication of stereotypes . . . promotes collective narcissism. Those qualities with which one identifies oneself – the essence of one's own group – imperceptibly become the Good; the foreign group, the others, Bad. (1985: 121)

Considering Adorno's passionate criticism of exclusionism, and his enthusiastic defence of foreign words, what could possibly explain his vehement repudiation of the other – as he does with his long-standing rejection

of American culture as incomprehensible to the European mind? Instead of hastily brushing aside the various inconsistencies in Adorno's theory and practice as mere naivety or a want of philosophical rigour, I would prefer to examine the ways Adorno contradicts himself *in spite of*, and perhaps even *because of*, his sophisticated critical theory and cultural criticism. Specifically, I will examine the uncanny way Adorno seems to get caught up in the same dialectic that, according to his argument elsewhere, binds myth and enlightenment into a vicious cycle. He escapes through his critical vigilance the ideology of 'home(-land)' only to be entrapped by it anew because, to expropriate Adorno's own expression, his valorization of foreign words 'already contains the seed of [its] reversal' (1972: xiii). Which is to say, '*das Eigene*' is already '*das Fremde*', and '*das Fremde*' reverts to '*das Eigene*'.

'Breaching the limit' ('*Franchir la limite*') versus 'crossing the border': 'the step beyond' and the politics of exile from exile[32]

'Internal limit' versus 'external boundary'

In 'On the question: "What is German?" ', Adorno ascribes his decision to return to a sense of 'continuity and loyalty to one's own past'. In his account, he '*simply* wanted to go back to where I had spent my childhood, to where whatever was most specifically mine was mediated to the core' (1985: 126; added emphasis). In other words, he postulates an unproblematic past to which he can 'simply' return, and a point of origin with which he can re-establish his 'continuity'.[33] Interestingly enough, even his idea of 'mediation' is itself unmediated, as he assumes uncritically that in his 'homeland' 'whatever was most specifically [his]' was necessarily 'mediated to the core'.

Against the very specific contours of 'that which is specifically mine' ('*das Eigene*') we find the no less fetishized concept of '*das Fremde*' in Adorno's writings. Adorno refers to the explosive force of *Fremdwörter* (1991a: 286), as if there were a generic *Fremdwort* that challenged the 'ontology of language' (1991c: 189) and prevented unreflected affirmation of society (1991b: 289). Even as Adorno insists on opposing ideology with the differential and non-identical, he himself hastily collapses particularities into a general category.

As a result, Adorno has a rather positivized and self-contained notion of *Fremdwörter* on the one hand, and of the German language on the other. Adorno's critical thinking thus lapses into ideology, as his emphasis on foreign words as the embodiments of heterogeneity is undermined by his inability to see how difference also 'differ[s] from itself' (Derrida, 1973: 129). To deny this difference internal to the different – or the foreignness internal to the foreign – is to revert to thinking in terms of identity. The problem is that difference without self-distancing implies the possibility of becoming identical with – or, in Derrida's terms, 'fully present to' – itself.

Because of his obliviousness to the difference within the different, or the foreignness within the foreign, Adorno stops short of taking into account the ways '*das Fremde*' is always already inhabited by '*das Eigene*', and vice versa, since the two fields cannot be defined except with reference to one another. What is missing from Adorno's theory is the fact that heterogeneity is not merely a matter of defining the other *externally* to the self, nor simply an assertion of the foreign as that which exists outside the boundaries of the German language. Rather, there is a *limit* or an otherness internal to language *per se* – that is, an opposition internal to both foreign words and words of one's native tongue – by which language turns against its own fulfilment. 'Foreignness' is by no means a private property of *Fremdwörter*. Rather, *language is always already in exile from itself*. Derrida's comment in *Aporias* on the ambiguity of the word *hôte* helps dislodge language from itself by pointing out the mutually dependent relations between the self and the other, the host and the guest:[34]

> Babelization does not therefore wait for the multiplicity of languages. The identity of a language can only affirm itself as identical to itself by opening itself to the hospitality of a difference from itself or of a difference with itself. Condition of the self, such a difference *from* and *with* itself would then be its very thing, the *pragma* of its pragmatics: the stranger at home,[35] the invited or the one who is called. The *at home* [*chez-soi*] as the host's gift recalls a being at home [*chez-soi*] (*being at home, homely, heimisch, heimlich*) that is given by a hospitality more ancient than the inhabitant himself. As though the inhabitant himself were always staying in the inhabitant's home, the one who invites and receives truly begins by receiving hospitality from the guest to whom he thinks he is giving hospitality. (Derrida, 1993: 10)

Derrida's discussion deconstructs the 'autonomy' of both '*das Eigene*' and '*das Fremde*'. The identity of any language – be it foreign or native -'can only affirm itself by opening itself to the hospitality of a difference from itself or of a difference with itself'. That is to say, one must move beyond an idea of '*das Fremde*' which is identical to itself to a politics of the foreign which is itself inhabited by a foreignness that prevents it from being positivized into an objective entity called 'the foreign'.

The 'Other' versus the 'other': a challenge to Adorno's nostalgic negative dialectics

Other post-structuralist perspectives can also help elucidate problems in Adorno's thought. Jean-François Lyotard, for example, points out that nostalgia for a lost totality permeates even a negative dialectics. In addition to Adorno's explicit association of foreign words with a lost plenitude,[36] there is another more subtle nostalgia supporting the straight distinctions he makes between '*das Fremde*' and '*das Eigene*'. Lurking behind his self-enclosed categories of '*das Eigene*' and '*das Fremde*' is a yearning for, and even a belief in, some originary coherence and unity capable of binding

distinct speech phenomena into clearly separated language groups.[37] What Adorno does not realize is that this originary plenitude or, in Lacanian terms, the 'good object' (whether in the form of a non-lacking self or a complete other), is 'impossible' because it is always already lost. Failure to recognize the void opened by the lost object results in Adorno's inability to register what Lacan would refer to as the heterogeneous structure of desire or guilt. Lacan discusses desire in terms of 'the desire of the Other'.[38] In the language of Samuel Weber, desire is 'constitutively involved in a debt that can never be entirely effaced' (1993: 140). Adorno misses the critical possibilities opened up by such a radical heterogeneity when he dwells on the external oppositions between languages rather than pursuing 'the foreign' always already inhabiting any/all language.

To acknowledge the foreign as the truly foreign entails appreciating an Other within the other – a third term that exceeds the dual economy governing the self and the other. Adorno's *Fremdwort* occasionally lapses into an exotic other – sometimes sacred, sometimes profane – because, failing to acknowledge a third term which is radically other to both 'the native' and 'the other', his schema is locked into an imaginary binary opposition between '*das Fremde*' and '*das Eigene*'. To resolve this impasse, it would be instructive to look at Lacan's critical revision of Kojève. Like Kojève, Adorno does not distinguish between the 'other' and the 'Other'. Lacan disrupts an intersubjective (or binary) notion of desire by 'unleashing' a new level of difference at the moment when he seems to be repeating Kojève's formulation 'man's desire is the desire of the other'. As Charles Shepherdson points out, Lacan's rewriting of Kojève's formulation into 'man's desire is the desire of the *O*ther' (with a capital 'O') 'takes the entire analysis out of the domain of intersubjective rivalry and places it in a triangulated structure, governed by the logic of the symbolic order (the Other)' (1999: 9). The 'Other' cannot be understood in intersubjective terms, since, according to Lacan, the Other's presence 'can only be understood at a *second degree of otherness*, which situates him from the very start in the position of *mediating between me and the double of myself*' (1977: 172/524: Shepherdson's translation and italics).

It is the absence of this second degree of otherness that allows Adorno's '*das Fremde*' and '*das Eigene*' to remain self-contained categories. Lacanian desire, by contrast, can never have such a calm presence. As Lacan tells us in 'Subversion of the Subject and Dialectic of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious', 'it is precisely because desire is articulated that it is not articulable' (1977: 302/804).[39] As such, desire can never be recuperated into the economy of the selfsame. Seen in the light of the heterogeneous structure of desire, neither 'the foreign' nor 'the native' tongue can be traced back to an originary plenitude. In 'The Direction of the Treatment', Lacan explicitly points out that desire is both 'produced in the beyond of demand' and 'hollowed within the demand' (1977: 265 and 629). As the 'essentially unspeakable, the "unsaid" or the half-said (*le mit-dit*)' haunting the discourse of the ego (Shepherdson, 1999: 10), the Lacanian concept of desire opens a

space for thinking of a foreignness that continues to evade the regimentation of any symbolic category.[40]

When theorizing about '*das Fremde*', Adorno does not demonstrate a sensitivity toward the radically foreign. He remains unaware of 'the relation of the symbolic to the real'. Which is to say, he is unmindful of the 'symbolic "containment" of lack' (Shepherdson, 1999: 19).[41] By opposing 'the foreign' *externally* to 'the German', Adorno domesticates 'the awareness of the Other' into an 'awareness of others'.[42] This is why, despite the special role the *Fremdwort* assumes in Adorno's writings as a concrete embodiment of mediation, it occasionally lapses into a mere fetish of immediacy, or else becomes a mysterious, alien object from the realm of the sacred or the profane. Adorno has failed, in other words, to take the step *beyond* a mere crossing of boundaries or borders to 'breaching the limit'[43] – a '*franchissement*' that would reverse without return the identity of the other into the Other of identity. Only by embracing the Real within the symbolic can one preserve the perpetual otherness of the other. And only then will it be possible for foreign words to 'stick out' (Adorno, 1991c: 187) and to remain 'unassimilated' (1991c: 187) as Adorno wants foreign words to be.[44]

'Antagonism' versus 'contradiction'

In fact, despite Adorno's hypostatization of *Fremdwörter*, there are also occasions when he senses the radically foreign dimension of foreign words – a new level of difference that would enable them to resist absolutely the purists' sophisticated programme of integration. Take, for example, the special attention Adorno pays to the artificiality of foreign words. By asserting their artificiality, foreign words interrupt the easy flow of 'meaning' and resist being neutralized by the machinery that collapses difference into the organic history of language:

> the hard, artificial, unyielding foreign words whose life intersects the sphere of nuance for only a moment; the words that do not yield, do not even carry the expression of their own past . . . (1991b: 288)

Like Lacan's 'Thing', foreign words as Adorno envisions them here cannot be so easily made transparent.[45] There is a 'little piece' of subjectivity subsisting in *Fremdwörter* which cannot be glossed over by the 'organic flow' of one's native tongue, nor can it be exchanged for meaning.[46] *Fremdwörter* operating in this manner can be as unyielding as the Lacanian Real to the exchange economy:

> The meanings in one's own language may well correspond to the meanings of the foreign words in every case; but they cannot be arbitrarily replaced by them because the expression of subjectivity cannot simply be dissolved in meaning. (1991b: 287)

This way, *Fremdwörter* 'insist' as 'foreign bodies assailing the body of language' (1991b: 288).[47] In Lacanese, the *Fremdwort* in its radical otherness is a 'perpetually alien element' that cannot be assimilated into the host language. Like the unconscious, the foreign word remains as 'the "unspeakable" dimension of desire, the "symbolic debris" that disrupts the narrative of the ego' (Shepherdson, 1999: 10).

The resemblance between Adorno and Lacan, nonetheless, turns out to be superficial. Take, for example, Adorno's discussion of foreign words as an indicator of suffering in both language and reality (1991c: 187–8). Suffering is also a condition pertaining to the Lacanian structure of desire – the lack barring both the Subject and the Other, for instance. However, it is important to bear in mind that for Lacan the split is constitutive of the human subject and as such can never be erased.[48] Adorno, by contrast, believes that suffering is a historical product and can be alleviated along with improved social conditions. In 'Alien Words', for example, Adorno alludes to the disparity between the foreign word and 'the body of language' as merely the 'historical evidence . . . of the failure of that unification'. This leads him to trivialize Nazism as an attempt to 'force a bourgeois integration of Germany that had not taken place':

> Benjamin spoke of the author inserting the silver rib of the foreign word into the body of language. *What seems inorganic here is in actuality only historical evidence, evidence of the failure of that unification.* Such disparateness means not only suffering in language, and what Hebbel called the 'Schism of creation,' but suffering in reality as well. From this perspective Nazism may be regarded as a . . . deadly attempt to force a bourgeois integration of Germany that had not taken place. (1991c: 187–8; added emphasis)

Here, one can begin to grasp why Adorno's foreign words can be recuperated into the economy of the selfsame, and why his advocacy of critical heterogeneity reverts to an ideology of identity. Adorno dreams of a better society where 'the two spheres of language' can be reconciled. In other words, Adorno grants the possibility of a state of society wherein tension between the foreign and the native can be 'done away with':

> The isolated position of foreign words could not be *done away with* through the restitution of an integral language but only *by society*, which names itself along with things. But then it is not the foreign word, the dead-tired messenger from the future kingdom of language, that is replaced by the quasi-natural and historically inappropriate word; instead, the tension between the two spheres of language in which we exist today can prove productive, and the two spheres can move closer to one another in the use of a ready, serviceable terminology. (1991b: 290; added emphasis)

Adorno thus neutralizes the Other by turning it into a product of social contradiction when antagonism is, in fact, ineliminable.[49] While the Other is always already beside itself, in and of itself, Adorno would recognize the

foreignness of foreign words as merely contingent, externally caused by deficient social conditions.[50]

In order to break through such a circumscribed notion of the 'foreign'[51] Adorno would need to exceed the restricted economy of *exile versus home(-land)* and instantiate a politics of *exile from exile*. Such a politics would move him away from determination to overdetermination, from positivized notions of '*das Fremde*' and '*das Eigene*' to an uncontainable, non-phenomenal 'Other' and a radical Alterity that would remain in perpetual flight before any kind of formalization.[52]

'Breaching the limit' versus 'crossing the border': beyond Adorno's politics of exile

What is at stake in the leap from a politics of *exile* to a politics of *exile from exile* is a struggle to go beyond *an exile with the possibility of returning* to *an exile without return*.[53] This is the leap which marks, in the language of Levinas, a radical reversal of the possibility of impossibility into the impossibility of possibility. While the exile without return 'breaches the limit', the exile which contains the possibility of an (imaginary) return merely 'crosses the borders'. Return in the latter case is possible because the border is, as Derrida puts it, an 'indivisible line'. The line institutes an (imaginary) origin from which one has been exiled and to which one, under favourable circumstances, can return:

> The crossing of borders always announces itself according to the movement of a certain step [*pas*] – and of the step that crosses a line. An indivisible line. And one always assumes the institution of such an indivisibility. Customs, police, visa or passport, passenger identification – all of that is established upon this institution of the indivisible, the institution therefore of the step that is related to it, whether the step crosses it or not. (Derrida, 1993: 11)

'Breaching the limit', on the other hand, is a 'crossing' that originates in a violation of crossing. Such an act, in the words of Samuel Weber, would be performed upon 'a limit whose origin is a delimitation' (1993: 146). This would be the moment when the 'indivisible line' described by Derrida 'divides the relation to itself of the border and therefore divides the being-one-self of anything' (Derrida, 1993: 11). As such, the exile from exile can be compared to the Sadean 'second death'. The Sadean 'death beyond death' is a crime against nature which subverts the 'natural' opposition of, and even the distinction between, death and life.[54] Likewise, the exile from exile unequivocally disrupts the facile opposition between '*das Fremde*' and '*das Eigene*'. What emerges from such an exile-of-excess is, in Lacanian terms, a movement of 'outrage' that breaches all limits.[55]

This way, the exile from exile, like Žižek's 'sacrifice of sacrifice', brings us to 'the "zero point" of the symbolic suicide' (Žižek, 1990: 33). The exile from exile assumes a particular significance for ethics and politics since, as Žižek tells us, 'the *act* in the Lacanian sense is nothing but this withdrawal

by means of which we *renounce renunciation itself*' (1990: 33). Exile in its restricted economy still has a 'homeland' as its point of reference and as its addressee even in its renunciation of home.[56] The exile-of-excess, on the other hand, abandons beyond retrieval 'home' as the 'master of signification'[57] – that is, the abandonment of the Master whose very presence assures that any kind of exile and digression will ultimately obtain meaning and consistency by imposing a retroactive temporal schema.[58] The exile-without-reserve hence facilitates a separation (in the Lacanian sense) of the subject not only from the Master-Other but also from itself whose identity is guaranteed by the undivided Other.

In the politics of exile from exile, or the abandonment of abandonment, the Master-Other or the home(-land) which is being abandoned is discovered to be totally null in itself and hence already in exile. The exile-of-excess thus decentres and puts into exile not only the subject, but also the big Other. It displaces the relationship between the two in such a way as to put the imaginary-originary 'homeland' in motion, giving it a movement which is a movement of disintegration, of fragmentation, and of permanent exile with no return. This way, 'homeland', or that which is supposedly one's own, emerges as the bottomless depths of displacement and alienation. In other words, the exile-without-reserve dispossesses and undoes the idea of home-land in a way that reveals homeland to be always already dispossessed. It reveals how exile – seemingly a deviance from one's 'original habitat' – itself reveals a more primary deviance and a more deep-seated dispossession always already there at 'home'.[59] In so doing, the exile from exile brings about a dis-membrance of membership in linguistic nationality, and a de-familiarization of the 'family' of people supposedly 'belonging' to the same national language.

In sum, what is at stake in this chapter is a 'limit' upon which Adorno's politics of writing as an act of exile and a crossing of frontiers calls for critical re-examination. One can of course challenge Adorno's binary opposition of '*das Fremde*' and '*das Eigene*' from a perspective parallel to the one held, for example, by Guy Scarpetta, for whom 'every language is a foreign one, for which *the* language doesn't exist' (1981: 183). However, a position such as Kafka's seems to come even closer to the uttermost 'limit' – as when Kafka abandons explicitly expressions of 'possibility' and transforms instead the writing of the dispossessed into marks of 'impossibility'.[60] Deleuze and Guattari succinctly observe that 'Kafka marks the impasse that bars access to writing for the Jews of Prague and turns their literature into something impossible, the impossibility of not writing, the impossibility of writing in German, the impossibility of writing otherwise' (1986: 16). Deleuze and Guattari also discern in Kafka the ways in which the impossibility of writing for the dispossessed in turn 'deterritorializes' the German population and dispossesses the Master-Other. Kafka's writings, in other words, are an example of how to 'camp on the limit' or 'camp out on the breach', from which one can begin to displace Adorno's nostalgia with a love that is outside the limits of the law.[61]

Notes

1 Throughout this paper, the first page number refers to the translation, the second page number to the original. For this particular passage, I have chosen to adopt Martin Jay's translation provided in his essay 'Adorno in America' (1984: 182). Adorno's observation that 'homelessness has been inflicted on everyone' finds a sympathetic echo in Said's remark in 'Zionism from the Standpoint of its Victims' (1979) about the 'generalized condition of homelessness' in the twentieth century. Interestingly enough, Adorno's comment that 'All in language and being, have been damaged as the exile himself was', also predates contemporary anthropology and ethnography's move beyond examining exile as physical movements of people to exploring the cultural displacements of people, things and cultural products. See, for example, James Clifford's *The Predicament of Culture* (1988).

2 The original goes as follows: '*Fremdwörter sind die Juden der Sprache.*'

3 For a substantial period of time, Adorno and Horkheimer regarded fascism as the perverted truth of capitalism. See, for example, the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, where they claim that 'anyone who subscribes to the destruction of the trade unions and the crusade against Bolshevism . . . automatically subscribes also to the destruction of the Jews' (1972: 201). The equation of fascism with liberal/capitalist regimes was actually common to the majority of the early members of the Frankfurt School. Leo Löwenthal, for instance, makes the following observation:

> modern anti-Semitism and the culture industry were in the final analysis part and parcel of the same social configuration, even if they may occasionally serve different political functions. What they have in common is the blockage of genuine experience that was paradigmatically apparent for us in the encounter with art. (1991: 180)

4 Adorno's writings are filled at various times with Italian, French, English, Latin, Greek and German expressions. The titles of the aphorisms in *Minima Moralia*, for instance, are indicative of the frequency and variety of foreign words in Adorno's works.

See 'On the Use of Foreign Words', where Adorno explains the pertinence of foreign words as 'an expression of alienation':

> The more alienated human beings have become from their things in society, the more strange are the words that will have to represent them if they are to reach them and to indicate allegorically that the things have been brought home. The more deeply society is cleft by the contradiction between its quasi-natural and its rational character the more isolated will foreign words necessarily remain in the arena of language, *incomprehensible* to one group of human beings and *threatening* to the other; and yet they have their legitimacy as an *expression of alienation itself*, and also as the transparent crystals that may at some future time *explode human beings' dreary imprisonment in preconceived language*. (1991b: 289; added emphasis)

5 Levin further adds to his list H. Stuart Hughes's findings of Anglicisms and Americanisms in Adorno's sociological writings (1985: 116, n.6).

6 See especially his *Authoritarian Personality* and his essay, 'On the Question: "What is German?" ' In the latter, Adorno even draws attention to critical theory's mission to fight stereotypes:

> The fabrication of national collectivities . . . common practice in the abominable jargon of war which speaks of the Russian, the American, and certainly also of the German – is the mark of a *reified consciousness* hardly capable of experience [*Erfahrung*]. Such fabrication remains within precisely those *stereotypes which it is the task of thinking to dissolve*. (1985: 121; added emphasis)

7 See especially his 'Scientific Experiences of a European Scholar in America' (1968).

8 This expression is appropriated from Habermas's 'Entwinement of Myth and Enlightenment' (1982).

9 Thomas Levin comments that 'foreign terms [serve] as jarring reminders that no language [is] a self-contained system, nor, moreover, should it be' (1985).

10 Adorno shares Benjamin's apprehensions about myths of organic unity. The following passage taken from 'On the Use of Foreign Words' is, in both language and content, very much reminiscent of Benjamin's works on the subject. See, for example, 'Goethe's *Elective Affinities*', 'Critique of Violence' (in Benjamin, 1978) and 'The Task of the Translator' (1955).

11 I modify Shierry Weber's translation to 'Alien Words' in order to better preserve the idea of '*das/die Fremde*' in the original title. In observance of English linguistic conventions, I have, however, chosen to use the term 'foreign words' rather than 'alien words' in my own discourse.

12 The expression *die Wunde Juden* is coined after Adorno's '*Die Wunde Heine*'. The terms 'exist' and 'insist' are derived from Lacan's *Encore Seminar* (1998).

13 This is a saying by George Steiner (quoted from Said, 1990: 357).

14 As early as May 1933, Wilhelm Frick, Minister of the Interior, proposed a programme of 'New Education' at a conference of ministers of state governments:

> Our mother tongue, whose harmony, power and flexibility we can be proud of, belongs to the noblest of values, whose preservation lies close to our hearts. Unfortunately, its purity is not always cared for as much as is desirable. Even government offices employ superfluous *Fremdwörter*, which plainly endanger the comprehension of language among wide sections of the people. The school has in this respect important tasks to fulfil so that we can hand down the precious treasure of the German language pure and unadulterated. (Noakes and Pridham, 1974: 352; Michaelis, 1956–79: 445–6)

15 The way in which the other returns to the subject the truth of the latter's message in its inverted form is examined at length in the four graphs put forward by Lacan in his 'Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious' (in Lacan, 1977).

16 It is no surprise that Edward Said, the 'grandfather' of post-colonial studies, is a great admirer of Adorno.

17 'No language . . . is organic and natural': this idea is explored in depth by Benjamin in 'Task of the translator' (1955: 69–82).

18 It is very likely that in this extract Adorno is echoing Benjamin's famous dictum in 'Thesis on the Philosophy of History': 'There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism' (1955: 258).

19 As if to pre-empt possible objections to his equation of fascism with capitalism, Adorno makes the following argument:

> There is no need to deny the difference between a so-called culture of the spirit and a technological culture in order to rise nonetheless above a mindless juxtaposition of the two. A utilitarian lifestyle which is insensitive to the

relentlessly increasing contradictions and believes that everything is for the best just as long as it functions, is just as myopic as the belief in a culture of spirit *[Geist]* which, due to its ideal of self-sufficient purity, renounces the realization of its content and abandons reality to power and its blindness. (1985: 127)

20 Jamie Owen Daniel describes Adorno's plight as follows:

paradoxically, Adorno's German-Jewish identity, his particular type of 'European selfhood,' was as endangered by the seductive ideology of *inclusion* in the American melting pot as it had been in Germany by the ideology of *exclusion*. (1992: 31)

21 'That remnant of society' representing 'an obstacle to the total integration of the "administered world" ' can be read in the light of Lacan's traumatic Real which cannot be integrated into the symbolic order. I will elaborate on this subject on pp. 88–92.

22 Note, however, that the 'convergence' of Adorno and Lacan's thoughts is merely contingent. The differences between their understanding of the Subject is a case in point. For Lacan, what emerges along with the splitting of the big Other is a Subject divided by desire. Adorno's subject, by contrast, seems to belong more to the realm of the imaginary than that of the Real. The contrast between Adorno and Lacan will be spelled out in detail on pp. 90–3, where I challenge Adorno's politics of 'crossing the border' with Lacan's politics of 'breaching the limit'.

23 'The word that is designed to be understood' is comparable to cheap art produced for easy consumption. Adorno's defence of foreign words can be compared to his 'stubborn defence of a free "spirit" unwilling to succumb to the fetishism of culture' (Piccone, 1993: 3). The faith Adorno puts in modern art or 'genuine' culture in general, for example, can equally well describe the hope he places in foreign words:

what may rightly be called cultural is solely what realizes itself by virtue of the integrity of its own spiritual form, intercedes only via this integrity, reacts to society but not in direct conformity with its laws. (1993: 38)

24 Said's further elaboration on this subject is also pertinent to understanding Adorno's attitude toward America:

This [the exile's refusal to belong] usually translates into an intransigence that is not easily ignored. Wilfulness, exaggeration, overstatement: these are characteristic styles of being an exile, methods for compelling the world to accept your vision – which you make more unacceptable because you are in fact unwilling to have it accepted. (1990: 363)

25 Adorno recounts the incident as follows:

I had presented a lecture at the Psychoanalytic Society in San Francisco and had given it to their professional journal for publication. In proofreading the galleys, I discovered that they had not been content simply to correct the stylistic flaws of an emigrant writer. The entire text had been disfigured beyond recognition, the basic intentions no longer recoverable. In response to my polite protestation I received a less polite and sympathetic explanation that the journal owed its reputation precisely to its practice of subjecting all contributions to such *editing* [*Reduction*]. This editorial policy accounted for the journal's *homogeneity* [my italics], they said; I would be standing in my own way if I passed up its advantages. I passed it up nevertheless: today this essay can be found under the title '*Die revidierte Psychoanalyse*' ('Psychoanalysis Revisited') in the volume *Soziologica II* in a quite faithful German translation. It could be used to check whether the text really had to be filtered through a machine according to that almost universal technique of *adaptation* [added emphasis], reworking and arranging to which authors without clout have to submit in America. (1985: 128)

26 '"Das Eigene" is already . . .': I am alluding to Horkheimer and Adorno's famous formulation: 'myth is already enlightenment; and enlightenment reverts to mythology' (1972: xvi).

The 'restricted economy': compare this to Wim Wenders:

The idea is that, not being at home [my heroes] are nevertheless at home with themselves. In other words, not being at home means being more at home than anywhere else. . . . Maybe the idea of being more oneself when one's away is a very personal idea. . . . Identity means not having to have a home. Awareness, for me, has something to do with not being at home. Awareness of anything. (Quoted in Elasasser, 1985: 48)

27 For a quick reference, see the list provided by H. Stuart Hughes of the Anglo-American idioms in Adorno's sociological writings: healthy sex life, some fun, go-getters, social research, team, middle range theory, trial and error, administrative research, common sense, fact finding, statement of fact, case studies, facts and figures, nose counting, likes and dislikes (1975: 166, n. 50). See also Levin's 'Nationalities of language' (1985: 115–16).

28 Paul F. Lazarsfeld, director of the Princeton Radio Research Project and long time supporter of Adorno, is annoyed by another fetishistic use of *Fremdwörter* in Adorno's works. He makes no effort to hide his irritation when he tells his friend and colleague the following in a letter:

Don't you think it is a perfect fetishism the way you use Latin words all through your text? There is no doubt that the words 'necessary condition' express everything which the corresponding Latin words express, but you evidently feel magically more secure if you use words which symbolize your education. (quoted in Morrison, 1978: 336)

29 See the account given by Adorno in 'On the Question: "What is German?" ' (1985: 127–9).

30 The fact that Adorno is always already alienated in the myth of the plenitude of (the German) language is further complicated by the fact that German is never really his 'native tongue', given his half-Jewish identity. If Adorno's fellow intellectual *émigrés* are 'more American than the born Americans', Adorno is no more capable of sustaining his Jewish 'self' in the German context. In a way, Adorno is even more mystified by the big Other than his fellow immigrants, since he does not even recognize the German tongue as already the tongue of the other, and as such (following his own logic) would never be fully present to his half-Jewish 'self'.

31 In ' "What is German?" ', Adorno claims that his decision to return to Germany 'was hardly motivated simply by a subjective need, by home-sickness [*Heimweh*], as little as I would deny having had such sentiment' (1985: 129). While

denying homesickness as the main reason prompting his return to Germany, it is worth noting that he does use the word *Heim*weh to describe his relationship to Germany.

32 I borrow the expression 'franchir la limite' from Lacan's Antigone chapters in the *Ethics Seminar* (1992).

Note that the word 'versus' throughout this section is used in an overdetermined manner: terms joined by it in the present chapter by no means form a binary opposition.

33 Needless to say, the reference to his childhood presupposes a metaphysics of the self.

34 Prior to Derrida, J. Hillis Miller had already pointed out in his essay 'The Critic as Host' (1991) the equivocal and 'inter-parasitic' relations between the host and the guest (see especially *Theory*, 1991: 146).

35 The 'stranger' in German modernity is perhaps even more pertinent to a critique of Adorno. Contrast, for example, Simmel's stranger as an internally split figure with Adorno's rather self-enclosed notion of '*das Fremde*': 'distance means that he [the stranger], who is close by, is far, and strangeness means that he, who also is far, is actually near' (Simmel, 1950: 402).

36 Note that the utopian thrust Adorno grants to foreign words is very much a product of the 'lost plenitude' he attributes to them:

> Like Greeks in Imperial Rome, foreign words, used correctly and responsibly, should lend support to the lost cause of a flexibility, elegance, and refinement of formulation that has been lost and that people do not want to be reminded of. . . . In this way foreign words could preserve something of the utopia of language. (1991c: 192)

37 Adorno's linguistic nostalgia is matched by his *Heimweh* for the land of his childhood and his wish to re-establish continuity with that 'originary' home. His indulgence in the memory of the 'protected beautiful life' of his childhood (see Löwenthal, 1989: 63–4) might, at least partly, have prevented him from realizing that the idea of 'originary plenitude' in both 'language and being' is a mere fiction.

38 Note that the Other associated with desire and radical Alterity is a big Other for Lacan. I will soon turn to address the significance of this capitalization.

39 Recall also Lacan's famous slogan in 'Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious': 'the unconscious is the discourse of the Other' (1977: 172/524). Shepherdson clarifies the radically heterogeneous structure of desire by pointing out that the unconscious is a *perpetually* alien element in its 'appearance' in speech within the 'articulations' of demand (1999: 11).

40 This is how desire preserves the other in its *radical singularity*.

41 In other words, Adorno has overlooked the 'loss of the object' – the 'small part of the subject that detaches itself' (see Shepherdson, 1999: 19).

42 Lacan points out in 'The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious' that, as far as the Other is concerned, 'the problems are of an order the heteronomy of which is completely misconstrued if reduced to an "awareness of others," or whatever we choose to call it' (1977: 173/525).

43 Žižek's creative explanation of the differences between boundary and limit sheds important light on the role of the 'limit' in Lacanian psychoanalysis as well as in some other post-structuralist thinkers (Žižek's disagreement with 'post-structuralism' notwithstanding):

> *boundary* is the external limitation of an object, its qualitative confines which confer upon it its identity (an object is 'itself' only within these confines, in so far as it fulfils a set of qualitative conditions); whereas *limit* results from a 'reflection-into-itself' of the boundary: it emerges when the determinatedness which defines the identity of an object is reflected into this object itself and assumes the shape of its own unattainable limit, of what the object can never fully become, of what it can only approach into (bad) infinity. (1991: 109–10)

'Reverse without return': see pp. 92–3 of this chapter for an explanation of the politics of an exile without return, or, to appropriate Derrida's expression, a politics of 'expenditure without reserve' – that is, an 'irreversible usage of energy' (1982: 19).

My idea of the reversal of 'the identity of the other into the Other of identity' is inspired by Levinas's reversal of Heidegger's possibility of impossibility into the impossibility of possibility.

Note that the reversal of the identity of the other into the Other of identity would entail that the boundaries circumscribing '*das Eigene*' and '*das Fremde*' each be folded back into itself, thereby revealing their internal splits or lacks.

44 It is interesting to compare Adorno's vision to Lacan's little piece of the Real which also 'sticks out' from the symbolic order.

45 The 'hard, artificial, unyielding' quality of foreign words can also be compared to Benjamin's '*Wörtlichkeit*'. There is a certain materiality to the words themselves which is destructive of sense – a destruction which de Man in his interpretation of Benjamin refers to as 'disarticulation' (1986: 84). Foreign words '[should] not mean, but be'. Which is to say, foreign words as the radically Other do not perform for sense; rather, to appropriate a Benjaminian expression again, they are performative of the 'interruption' of sense.

It is also interesting to note the compatibility between Lacanian and Benjaminian thought: they can be jointly used here to radicalize Adorno's politics of foreign words. Lacan's theory of '*Das Ding*' and Benjamin's notion of '*Wörtlichkeit*' are remarkably close in spirit. Both thinkers recommend a 'word for word' translation. For Lacan, such a practice is 'madly instructive' of the 'insistence' of the signifier; for Benjamin, it illuminates the 'destructive', non-sensical character of words. Benjamin explicitly invokes Hölderlin on this point (1955: 78, 81–2). It is possible that Lacan has in mind the same 'mad poet' when he suggests an interlinear translation of Sophocles's text.

46 By ' "little piece" of subjectivity' I am alluding to the 'little piece of the Real' in Lacanian psychoanalysis.

47 'Insist' is a term used by Lacan in his discussion of the 'female logic' in the *Encore Seminar* (1998).

48 Lacan even states at the end of the *Ethics Seminar* (1992) that the only thing one can be truly guilty of is to have '*cédé sur son désir*'.

49 Theorists of radical democracy such as Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe have proposed *dis*-placing contradiction (external) with antagonism (internal), determination with overdetermination. Other scholars who share this political stance include Renata Salecl, Slavoj Žižek, Joan Copjec, and Juliet Flower MacCannell (all influenced by Lacanian psychoanalysis).

50 Even though Adorno refers to Benjamin to make his point about suffering 'in language' and 'in reality', Benjamin's ideas are very much domesticated by Adorno in the course of the latter's appropriation. For Benjamin, 'suffering' is by no means a product of social conditions only. In 'The Task of the Translator', Benjamin talks about '*die Wehen des Eigenen*' – the suffering of what one thinks as one's own – that is, the suffering of the original language. Foreignness, disparateness and disjunction are not confined to the 'foreign' language. Rather, our 'own' language is always already alienated from us and from itself. De Man is right in his interpretation of Benjamin: 'What the translation reveals is that this alienation is at its strongest in our

relation to our own original language, that the original language within which we are engaged is disarticulated in a way which imposes upon us a particular suffering' (1986: 84). Unlike Adorno, who sees foreignness as a reflection of social contradictions awaiting resolution, Benjamin aims at 'letting the language be violently overtaken by the foreign' (Benjamin, 1955: 81/1972: 20; translation modified).

51 Adorno's yearning for the 'resurrection' of foreign words 'in a better order of things' (1991b: 192) reminds one of Derrida's description of restricted economy – namely, the economic detour which, 'in the element of the same, always aims at coming back to the pleasure or the presence that have been differed by (conscious or unconscious) calculation' (1982: 19).

52 This is to say, in order to live up to his aspirations of 'untiring vigilance' (1985: 130), Adorno would need to rethink '*das Fremde*' and '*das Eigene*' in such a manner that, to use Derrida's language, they would 'no longer [be] identical to themselves, hence no longer simply identifiable and to that extent no longer determinable' (Derrida, 1993: 7).

53 And of course, Adorno does return to his 'home(-land)' after a long period of exile.

54 The Sadean excess, as Lacan points out, also overlaps structurally with the Kantian unconditional obligation 'to which it is impossible to give determinate, hence recognizable, form' (Weber, 1993: 144).

55 The 'exile from exile' is also referred to in the present chapter as the 'exile-of-excess' or 'exile-without-reserve'.

As Lacan points out, the term 'outrage' 'bears within it the structure of the crossing of some invisible line' (1992: 143).

56 In other words, the politics of exile still reveres 'homeland' as its big Other.

57 'The master of signification' is appropriated from one of Lacan's formulations in the 1950s.

58 See Lacan's 'Subversion of the Subject and Dialectic of Desire' in *Écrits* (1977).

59 This experience is translated by Žižek into Hegelian language as 'the loss of loss'. This takes place when the subject 'becomes aware that what a moment ago she was so afraid to lose is now totally null, i.e., is already in itself a kind of a loss' (1990: 33).

60 The terms 'possibility' and 'impossibility' are modelled after Levinas's usage.

61 I borrow the expressions 'camp on the limit' and 'camp out on the breach' from Samuel Weber in his discussion of Antigone as interpreted by Lacan (Weber, 1993: 152).

The statement 'Love outside the limits of the law' is appropriated from Lacan, *Seminar XI* (1978: 276); see also Juliet Flower MacCannell's highly creative use of Lacan's idea in her article of the same title (1994).

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