



PROF. ADAM SPANOS

COLT 448:
MULTILINGUAL
ENCOUNTERS

SPEAKING IN
TONGUES

This course is about what happens when communication breaks down and, conversely, when we say something more or other than we mean.

We will begin by looking at some key selections from the philosophy of language and the literary and religious traditions on which it draws. We will study Freudian slips, vows of silence, shibboleths, glossolalia (speaking in tongues), mistranslations and untranslatables.

Our attention will then shift to the contemporary era of intercultural contacts engendered by imperialism, settler colonialism, the international slave trade, and the globalization of capital and migrant flows. How is globalization lived in language? What is the significance of creolization—the mixing of languages—in the cultures of formerly slave-holding societies in the Americas? Why was Ireland, the first English colony, a key site of the literary avant-garde? Do peoples have a right to opacity—to not being ‘understood’ by others? What claims to justice do endangered languages, and the peoples who speak them, have against the dominance of global English? Can the current rise of the global Right be explained in terms of feelings of language loss? Readings include Ngũgĩ, Glissant, Ishmael Reed, Amitav Ghosh, Anzaldúa, Khatibi, Kilito, Beckett, Freud, Benjamin, Derrida