

International Conference
11–12 May 2016
In English

The conference **Untying the Mother Tongue** intends to re-think affective and cognitive attachments to language by deconstructing their metaphysical and colonialist presuppositions. If traditional constructions of a monolingual speaker, a pure “mother tongue” reveal the ideology of the European nation-state, then today’s celebration of multilingual competencies simply reflects the rise of global capitalism and its demand for transnational labor markets. French poststructuralist thought has problematized the notion of a “mother tongue” by dividing it into two discrete elements—the “maternal” and the “linguistic”—and by exposing their ideological presuppositions. Can something be salvaged of the notion of a mother tongue? What are the remains, traces, or vestiges of a language no longer directly tied to the mother yet resounding with a maternal echo and at the same time manifesting itself as a primary idiom with respect to its affective and aesthetic dimensions? This “residual notion” of a mother tongue supposes that language is indeed a basic human need (like food, shelter, or clothing), since it provides an indispensable access to a symbolic dimension shaping affectivity and knowledge.

**Keynotes by Daniel Boyarin and
Hélène Cixous**

Untying the Mother Tongue:

**On Language, Affect,
and the Unconscious**

**Organized by Federico Dal Bo and
Antonio Castore**