

The Political Dimension of Language

Spring Symposium

As part of the symposium series *Gender and Equality in the Arts*

27 – 28 May 2026

Institute Art Gender Nature HGK Basel FHNW

On-site and online:

Auditorium D 1.04, Tower Building, Basel Academy of Art and Design FHNW

→ LIVESTREAM

With contributions by Sinzo Aanza, Skye Arundhati Thomas, Anchan/Anna Daučíková, Heike Geißler, Annelyse Gelman, Mayte Gómez Molina, Sophie Jung, Louis Lüthi, Ingo Niermann, Heather Phillipson, Mark Turner, and Simone White

Moderated by Chus Martínez and Quinn Latimer

Research: Marion Ritzmann

Press: Anna Francke

The symposium is open to the public and will be held in English.

Free admission

More information and program: dertank.ch

Language does not just give name to the world, it produces it. Should we want to make a new world—and we do—we will have to begin with language then. The spring symposium at Institute Art Gender Nature HGK Basel FHNW, on 27 and 28 May 2026, is devoted to language in all its ancient and nascent scenes and technologies. How does literature, in its countless ambient forms and practices, shape cognition? How do narrative, metaphor, and linguistic ambiguity allow us to think beyond hegemonic ideas of progress, to feel and imagine from manifold poetics and continuums? Finally, what does language do—spoken or sung, debased or in solidarity, incantation or confession, as book or subtitle, reportage or rhetoric, on or offscreen, human or non—to our bodies, to our communities, and to our societies? *The Political Dimension of Language* brings together poets, artists, scholars, novelists, performers, and filmmakers from various geographies and generations—writers all—whose own irradiating languages examine and embody such questions.

Here, in this symposium, language is both medium of study and its object. For as Edward Said once wrote, “Any worker in discursive language (novelist, philosopher, critic, or historian) must use language to delimit the linguistic object he studies and deals with.” That subject here is language itself and the discourse of struggle and power, the difficulty in naming it, in understanding how language determines and wields it. Or as Michel Foucault noted: “If designating the thresholds [of power], denouncing them, speaking of them publicly, is a struggle, it is not because no one has been aware of this, but rather because taking hold of language about this subject, challenging the network of institutional information, naming, saying who has done what, designating the target—all these make up a first turning back of power, a first step made for other struggles against power.”

Language can be the first step to asserting control and domination, yes, but it can also be the opening move into connection and liberation, artistic and social revelation. It is instructive to recall that apocalypse, in the original Greek, meant revelation; *apokalyp̄tō* was exactly this, to reveal some truth or knowledge. Thus what we most fear, those fires on the horizon, might also be the unveiling of what was previously hidden, revelatory and necessary both. The etymological resonance here with the autocratic surveillance conditions of our contemporary world notwithstanding, those technocratic visual regimes that would strip us all bare for the taking, in this symposium we will

attempt to understand language as both surface code and rich ground that reveals depths of knowledges and transmissions often passed over. Via our participants from various literary, academic, and visual art fields, we will concentrate on those languages—poetic and theoretical, nonnarrative and realist, fictional and scenographic, documentary and speculative—that do not deny the revelatory power of language in its more destructive registers but take them into account as they attempt the opposite. (“This is the oppressor’s language / yet I need it to talk to you,” per Adrienne Rich.)

Etel Adnan once wrote that “languages start at home,” but they do not end there. If we make our home in language, if they are how we feel our way into the world, they are also how the world makes its way into us. What word—real and true, revelatory or not—might articulate this? Moderated by Chus Martinez and Quinn Latimer, *The Political Dimension of Language* is part of the long-running biannual symposia series on issues of artistic practice and the social, held at Institute Art Gender Nature HGK Basel FHNW, since 2018.

The symposium is dedicated to the memory of Henrike Naumann.

Technical team

Emily Harries, Charlotte Horn, Katharina Kemmerling, Marco Mastrogiacomo, Daniele Praiano, Konrad Sigl

Following the first day of the symposium, on 27 May 2026, from 5.30 pm, a group exhibition curated by Sincerely will open at Atelier Mondial in Basel/Münchenstein. The exhibition is on view until 7 June 2026, and is a collaboration between Atelier Mondial and Institute Art Gender Nature HGK Basel FHNW. dertank.ch ateliermondial.com

Institute Art Gender Nature
Basel Academy of Art and Design FHNW
Freilager-Platz 1
CH-4142 Basel/Münchenstein
info.iagn.hgk@fhnw.ch
dertank.ch

Press contact:
Anna Francke
anna.francke@fhnw.ch
+41 61 228 43 25