

# 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](http://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; *apokalypṓ* 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](http://dertank.ch) [ateliermondial.com](http://ateliermondial.com)

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### PROGRAM (subject to alterations)

#### DAY I – 27 May 2026

##### Part 1

- 10.00 am Welcome by Chus Martínez and Quinn Latimer  
10.15 am Quinn Latimer, *The Offscreen Voice (Drones and Drones)*  
10.30 am Simone White, *ALL RED*  
11.15 am Mark Turner, *Causation, Agency, Time, and Space (CATS): How Cognitive and Linguistic Compression Make Politics Possible*  
Noon Lunch break

##### Part 2

- 2.00 pm Welcome  
2.05 pm Anchan/Anna Daučíková, *Interstice: What Remains Unpronounced*  
2.45 pm Sinzo Aanza, *Ngwaki: The Funeral Dance and the Poetic Project*  
3.20 pm Break  
3.35 pm Mayte Gómez Molina, *Beyond a Paper Body*  
4.15 pm Annelyse Gelman, *Vexations*  
5.00 pm Round-up of DAY I  
5.20 pm End of DAY I

#### DAY II – 28 May 2026

##### Part 3

- 10.00 am Welcome by Chus Martínez and Quinn Latimer  
10.15 am Quinn Latimer, *The Offscreen Voice (Drones and Drones)*  
10.30 am Heather Phillipson, *My Literary Origin Story*  
11.20 am Louis Lüthi, *The Work of Composition*  
Noon Lunch break

##### Part 4

- 2.00 pm Heike Geißler, *Mitschrift* (online)  
2.25 pm Sophie Jung, *To Snare a Sensibility in Words*  
3.05 pm Ingo Niermann, *Hieroglyphs of the Monadic Age*  
3.40 pm Break  
3.55 pm Skye Arundhati Thomas, *Writing History* (online)  
4.30 pm Round-up of DAY II  
5.00 pm End of DAY II

Following the first day of the symposium, on 27 May, from 5.30 pm, the group exhibition *Unfortunate Grammar* will open at Atelier Mondial in Basel/Münchenstein. Curated by Sincerely, the exhibition is on view until 7 June, and is a collaboration between Atelier Mondial and Institute Art Gender Nature HGK Basel FHNW.

## BIOGRAPHIES OF PARTICIPANTS

**Sinzo Aanza** is a Congolese writer and artist working among literature, the performing arts, and installation. His practice examines discourse, power, and the poetics and politics of fiction as a radical tool, contributing to a critically engaged, transdisciplinary redefinition of contemporary Congolese art. The author of *Généalogie d'une banalité* (Vents d'ailleurs, 2015), Aanza develops research-based, text-driven works that circulate across international exhibitions, residencies, and literary platforms.

**Skye Arundhati Thomas** is a writer from India. They are currently Associate Curator and Editor at TBA21. They are editor of *Palestine is Everywhere* (Silver Press/TBA21, 2025), an anthology of writing and art from and on Gaza. Their latest book, cowritten with Izabella Scott, is *Pleasure Gardens: Blackouts and the Logic of Crisis in Kashmir* (MACK Books, 2024).

**Anchan/Anna Daučíková**, born in Bratislava, lives and works in Prague. Their artistic practice includes painting and drawing, photography, performance, installation, and moving images. They explore the potentials of queering, desire, and non-normative sexuality as well as poverty, post-Soviet trauma, and memory. Multichannel video works of recent years transport queer statements, whereby the artist's own body and body movements are accompanied by texts and voiceover narrative.

**Heike Geißler**, born in Riesa, is a writer who often works in cross-disciplinary contexts and in various formations. She is the author of *Verzweiflungen* (Suhrkamp, 2025) and *Arbeiten* (Hanser Berlin, 2025), among other books. The recipient of the Klopstock Prize for New Literature, the Bavarian Book Prize, and the Heinrich Böll Prize of the city of Cologne, she was recently the Dorothea Schlegel Artist-in-Residence at FU Berlin. Her novel *Michaela Kohlhaas* will be published in May 2026. She lives in Leipzig.

**Annelyse Gelman** is writer and artist whose work spans poetry, sound, and performance. She is the author of *Vexations* (University of Chicago Press, 2023), winner of the James Laughlin Award and longlisted for the National Book Award, as well as *Everyone I Love Is a Stranger to Someone* (Write Bloody, 2014). Her album *Repulsion* (Fonograf Editions, 2019), a collaboration with programmer Jason Grier, is a suite of six songs exploring intimacy, power, and vulnerability.

**Mayte Gómez Molina** is a writer, new media artist and researcher from Granada, Spain. Her practice mixes writing and digital tools to create expanded formats of literature. She works with 3D, VR, and video games, as well as with the normative book format. Her films have been exhibited internationally at institutions and festivals, and her first poem book, *Los Trabajos Sin Hércules* (Ediciones Hiperión, 2022) won the National Young Poetry Award of Spain. Her first novel, *La boca llena de trigo* (Anagrama, 2026) was published this spring.

**Sophie Jung** works across text, sculpture, and performance. Her sculptures believe in agnostic alliances, cross-material solidarity, and assemblages that defy resolution. Her writing exists in the tradition of *écriture féminine* and lives as polyvocal collage, often materialized and extended collaboratively. Upcoming shows include a solo show at Kunsthalle Bern, in 2026, and MUDAM, in 2027, Luxemburg. She is currently working on her first monograph with Mousse Publishing. In 2018 she was the recipient of the Manor Kunstpreis.

**Quinn Latimer** is a writer, editor, curator, and Head of the MA at the Institute Art Gender Nature HGK Basel FHNW. She is the author of *Like a Woman: Essays, Readings, Poems* (Sternberg Press, 2017), *Sarah Lucas: Describe This Distance* (Mousse, 2013), *Film as a Form of Writing* (WIELS, 2013), and *Rumored Animals* (Dream Horse Press, 2012). She recently curated *SIREN (some poetics)*, at Amant, New York, and *Perpetual Language: Patricia L. Boyd and Na Mira*, made under the signs and spirits of Roland Barthes and Teresa Hak Kyung Cha, at Croy Nielsen, Vienna. She was editor-in-chief of publications for documenta 14 in Athens and Kassel.

**Louis Lüthi** is the author of *Infant A* (Paraguay Press, 2012), *A Die with Twenty-Six Faces* (LAPS/Roma Publications, 2019), and *On the Self-Reflexive Page II* (Roma, 2021). A recipient of the Swiss Design Award in 2015, he has designed books in close collaboration with artists including Rossella Biscotti, Katinka Bock, Gerald Domenig, Ellen Gallagher, gerlach en koop, and Shirin Sabahi. As an editor at the Geopolitical Open Atlas of the Polity of Literature, or GOAT PoL, he works with displaced, incarcerated, and disenfranchised writers. He teaches at the Gerrit Rietveld Academie in Amsterdam.

**Chus Martínez** is a writer and curator, and Head of Institute Art Gender Nature HGK Basel FHNW. She is curator of Ocean Space, in Venice, for TBA21–Academy, and curatorial director of der TANK, in Basel. Previously, she was Artistic Director of the 36th Ljubljana Biennale (2025), and curator of KölnSkulptur #9. Her books include *Like This: Natural Intelligence as Seen by Art* (Hatje Cantz, 2022), *Corona Tales: Let Life Happen to You* (Sternberg Press, 2020), and *Club Univers* (Sternberg Press, 2017). She was Head of the Department of Artistic Direction for DOCUMENTA (13), in Kassel.

**Ingo Niermann** is a writer, artist, and the editor of the speculative book series *Solution* (Sternberg Press). Recently published projects include *The Monadic Age: Notes on the Coming Social Order* (Sternberg Press, 2024), and the podcast series *Ocean Wants* (2021). Niermann initiated the Army of Love, a collective that tests and promotes a need-oriented redistribution of sensual love. Niermann is a lecturer at Institute Art Gender Nature HGK Basel FNHW, where he also edits the digital publishing project *Wild Papers*.

**Heather Phillipson** is an artist, filmmaker, and poet who was nominated for the Turner Prize in 2022. Phillipson's sculpture *THE END* was selected for the Fourth Plinth commission, Trafalgar Square, UK, from 2020 to 2022. Recent solo projects include *SPRITZ!*, a permanent outdoor sculpture for Hospital Rooms, UK (2025) and *Extra Time* at Kunsthalle St Annen, Lübeck (2024). Phillipson received the Film London Jarman Award, in 2016, and the European Short Film Festival selection from the International Film Festival Rotterdam, in 2018.

**Mark Turner** is Institute Professor and Professor of Cognitive Science at Case Western Reserve University, in Cleveland, Ohio. He is the author of *The Origin of Ideas: Blending, Creativity, and the Human Spark* (Oxford University Press, 2015). The founding director of the Cognitive Science Network, and codirector of the Red Hen Lab™, Turner is a recipient of the Anneliese Maier Research Award from the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, and a laureate of the Prix du Rayonnement de la langue et de la littérature françaises from the Académie Française.

**Simone White** is a poet and critic based in New York. She is the author of *Dear Angel of Death* (Ugly Duckling Presse, 2018), *or, on being the other woman* (Duke University Press, 2022), and the forthcoming books *Warring*, a book-length essay on rap music, and *New Poems for Museums*. A graduate of Wesleyan University, she holds a JD from Harvard Law School, an MFA from the New School, and a PhD in English from CUNY Graduate Center. She is Associate Professor of English at the University of Pennsylvania where she also directs the Kelly Writers House. She is the recipient of the 2017 Whiting Award in Poetry, a 2020 Creative Capital Award, and the 2024 Dorothea Tanning Award from Foundation for Contemporary Art.