

Klima Biennale Wien 2026. Unspeakable Worlds



Immediate Matters. Speak We Must We Must Speak

Ten exhibitions curated by ten independent art spaces in Vienna: Echo Correspondance, eindorf, ENTRE, Kunstverein Kevin, Laurenz, new jörg, Pech, Schleuse, Size Matters and WAF

An invitation by Anne Faucheret



Speak We Must We Must Speak – inspired by Donna Haraway’s “Think We Must We Must Think”, inspired by Virginia Woolfe’s “Think We Must” – echoes as a necessity in a time when ecological devastation unfolds alongside the exhaustion of words. The ecological crisis reveals itself as a crisis of relationships, of sensitivity, of expression, of perception and as a crisis of language. To speak, across the ten exhibitions, is not to master or name the world from above, but to listen, to address, to respond, to take responsibilities and to forge alliances across human and non-human lives. To speak is not to universalize to resolve, not to frame to classify, but to situate and to tackle unpleasant entanglements. To speak is to contest the colonial-capitalist separation of nature and culture, to expose the gendered and racialized economies of extraction, to link colonial brutality, social injustice and technocratic ecology. To speak is to reclaim the complexity of worlds, to celebrate their words, and to conspire towards an ecology of differences that don’t separate.



Speak We Must We Must Speak

A framing text with **Sadiya Hartman, Aileen Moreton-Robinson, Val Plumwood, Yvonne Volkart, Maggie Nelson, Sylvia Wynter, Max Haiven, Isabelle Stengers, Angela Carter, Anne Simon, Robin Wall Kimmerer, Heather Davis**

by Anne Faucheret



The plot of her undoing begins with the man, the sovereign, the subject, the self-possessed, the able bodied, the reasonable, the gendered, the neurotypical, it begins with the vertical hierarchy of life, with the uneven distribution of death, with the announcement “I think” and “I am” and “I own” and “I will,” with the possessive my and mine, with therefore and hereafter, with future increase, with the sanctity of property, with the map of the territory, with the deed that says get the hell out and affirms that there is no place for her anywhere, with the court order that declares her a squatter and a trespasser, with the mortgage for mud people, with the eviction, with no human involved.

The plot of her undoing begins with she, her, his, him, mine; with the rape in the provision ground, with the legal fact that she belongs to him, with the promise that he will do right by her, with the things whispered in the night, with her name and those of her children registered in the farm book (along with the plow and spades, whips and harnesses), with the chart that lists her animal characteristics on one side and her human on the other.

- **Sadiya Hartman, *The Plot of Her Undoing, Notes on Feminisms, 2017***

White possession operated through a socio-discursive regime that ontologically shaped the formation of white subjectivity regulated through various discourses, such as the law.(...) At an ontological level, the structure of subjective possession occurs through the imposition of one’s will-to-be on the thing that is perceived on the thing that is perceived to lack will; thus it is open to being possessed. This enables the formally free subject to make the thing its own. Ascribing one’s own subjective will onto the thing is required to make it one’s property, as

'willful possession of what was previously a will-less thing constitutes our primary form of embodiment; it is invoked whenever we assert: this is mine.' To be able to assert 'this is mine' requires a subject to internalize the idea that one has proprietary rights that are part of normative behavior, rules of interaction and social engagement. Thus possession, which constitutes part of the ontological structure of white subjectivity, is also constituted socio-discursively.

- Aileen Moreton-Robinson, *White Possession*, in Kris Dittel and Clementine Edwards (eds.), *The Material Kinship Reader*, 2022

The reason/nature story has been the master story of western culture. It is a story which has spoken mainly of conquest and control, of capture and use, of destruction and incorporation. This story is now an [obstructive] story. Unless we can change it, some of those now young may know what it is to live amid the ruins of a civilization on a ruined planet. The power to direct, cast and script this ruling drama has been in the hands of only a tiny minority of the human race, and of human cultures. Much inspiration for new, less destructive guiding stories can be drawn from sources other than the master, from subordinated and ignored parts of western culture, such as women's stories of care. Those of us from the master culture who lack imagination can gain new ideas from a study, undertaken in humility and sympathy, of the sustaining stories of the cultures we have cast as outside reason. If we are to survive into a livable future, we must take into our own hands the power to create, restore and explore different stories, with new main characters, better plots, and at least the possibility of some happy endings.

- Val Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, 1993

I am not only right in the middle of it, in the networked and virtualized era of cyberpunk, which at the time, when we read "Neuromancer" or "He, She and It," I did not imagine to be so ordinary; rather, what is more is that I also belong to that reprehensible species (the "human" species) that takes control of, pollutes, and eradicates everything. But I am also a mother, cyborg, art theorist, bacteria, water, plant, subjectified "in the belly of the monster;" I am a feeling, moving, sensing being, an earthling with and among others. I exist, I am open, I am ...

- Yvonne Volkart, *Techno-Öko-Feminismus. Unmenschliche Empfindungen in technoplanetarischen Schichten*, in: Cornelia Sollfrank (ed.), *Die Schönen Kriegerinnen*, 2018

For better or worse, the question of what we tell each other - and what we tell ourselves - has become a staple in the discourse on global warming. The field is teeming with narrative concerns, be they about genre (Are we living an apocalypse? a horror story? a tragedy? a fable? a farce? a typology?), origin stories ("It was April 1784, when James Watt patented the steam engine"), the problem of not knowing how the story ends or develops (climate scientists do not disagree on warming, but they do debate questions of "tempo and mode"), even the value of storytelling itself (Are stories still worth telling or recording if the likelihood of a future human audience for them is diminishing? What can the stories of much earlier humans tell us about the current crisis? What is the relationship between storytelling and adaptation, or storytelling and evolution?), and so on.

- Maggie Nelson, *On Freedom*, 2021

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The "climate crisis" is a global and multifaceted devastation of living beings, of ecosystems, of forms of knowledge and subjectivity, which seem to be the symptoms of a new geological epoch since Industrialization, the Anthropocene. This crisis is also a crisis of relationships, of sensitivity, of expression, of perception and a crisis of language. The expression "climate crisis" fails to convey the breadth, transversality and multiplicity of the devastation underway. The term "Anthropocene" ignores that the "Species Man does not make history" and includes the whole anthropos in the responsibility for the dramatic anthropogenic changes instead of naming those truly responsible. As the outcome of a centuries-long white supremacist patriarchal project of domination

and extraction, this devastation affects the whole world – from bodies to land, from human beings to more-than-human lives, from relationships to cosmologies. Some far more than others: the ones deemed as others, as resources, or as obstacles to profit (or “progress”) have been looted, commodified, decimated. With them, entire material and immaterial worlds disappear. Multiple technologies have been used to establish, legitimize and consolidate imperialist domination. Among them, language. As a tool for categorizing and disseminating knowledge, for choosing what is worth looking at, for norming behaviors, for performing reality, and for creating worlds, language has contributed to the imposition of a rationalist, dualist and extractivist mind – especially in the realms of law, media, science, academia, and politics.

Words, vocabulary, grammar, syntax, narratives and stories have been forced into a liberal colonial and then neo-liberal framework, fostering objectivation and abstraction, inverting or obliterating meanings and affects, banishing stories and worldviews. Modern “scientific” language rationalized, renamed, appropriated, evaluated, manipulated, hierarchized, erased and ignored many forms of indigenous knowledge and languages. It diminished the capacities to articulate one’s connections to the world. Linguistic imperialism supported spiritual subjugation. Its normalization, today, signals a domination, a thrive for hegemony – but it has never succeeded in erasing ways of saying, perceiving and understanding the world in interdependence and interconnectedness. Language can also cherish relationality, distribute subjectivity, challenge separation, and acknowledge bonds between beings, as many indigenous languages do. Language can prevent from forgetting. Language can travel in time. Language can haunt. Language can celebrate. Language can speculate and fabulate. Language can repair.

How to counter today’s neoliberal language and the destruction of the world it allows?

How to create common grounds with language and to envisage language as a commons?

How to acknowledge language away from the anthropocentric exceptionalism – what about alternative algorithmic languages, what about more-than-human languages?

What kind of thinking, speaking and storying can help struggle, create and live together in a warming world of increasing inequalities?



We are, after all, a storytelling species, *homo narrans* as Sylvia Wynter dubs it. In her works, the human species appears as uniquely capable of transforming itself alchemically through stories: the narratives we spin, collectively, shape how we reproduce ourselves individually and collectively. Unlike seemingly other animals, we can radically adjust the values that govern kin selection, the transformation of the material world, and social relationships based on how we narrate our existence to ourselves.

- Max Haiven, *Palm Oil. The Grease of Empire*, 2022

Learning to compose will need many names, not a global one, the voices of many peoples, knowledges, and earthly practices. It belongs to a process of multifold creation, the terrible difficulty of which would be foolish and dangerous to underestimate but which it would be suicidal to think of as impossible.

- Isabelle Stengers, *In Catastrophic Times: Resisting the Coming Barbarism*, 2015

We must plead, harangue, protest, demand—all kinds of things! [...] make (oh, horrors! oh, embarrassment!) a fuss, then a bigger fuss; then a bigger fuss again.

- Angela Carter, *Anger in a Black Landscape*, in Dorothy Thomson (ed.) *Over Our Dead Bodies: Women Against the Bomb*, 1983

One way of multiplying approaches to the world and the living would be to try to break out of our usual perception, lexicon and syntax.

- Anne Simon, *Une bête entre les lignes : essai de zoo-poétique*, 2021

Singing whales, talking trees, dancing bees, birds who make art, fish who navigate, plants who learn and remember. We are surrounded by intelligences other than our own, by feathered

people and people with leaves. But we've forgotten. There are many forces arrayed to help us forget - even the language we speak. (...)

Colonisation, we know, attempts to replace Indigenous cultures with the culture of the settler. One of its tools is linguistic imperialism, or the overwriting of language and names. Among the many examples of linguistic imperialism, perhaps none is more pernicious than the replacement of the language of nature as subject with the language of nature as object. We can see the consequences all around us as we enter an age of extinction precipitated by how we think and how we live.

Let me make a modest proposal for the transformation of the English language, a kind of reverse linguistic imperialism, a shift in a worldview through the humble work of the pronoun. Might the path to sustainability be marked by grammar?

Language has always been changeable and adaptive. We lose words we don't need any more, and invent the ones we need. We don't need a worldview of Earth beings as objects anymore. That thinking has led us to the precipice of climate chaos and mass extinction. We need a new language that reflects the life-affirming world we want. A new language, with its roots in an ancient way of thinking. (...)

English is a secular language, to which words are added at will. But Anishinaabe is different. Fluent speaker and spiritual teacher Stewart King reminds us that the language is sacred, a gift to the People to care for one another and for the creation. It grows and adapts too, but through a careful protocol that respects the sanctity of the language.

He suggested that the proper Anishinaabe word for beings of the living Earth would be Bemaadiziiaki. I wanted to run through the woods calling it out, so grateful that this word exists. But I also recognized that this beautiful word would not easily find its way to take the place of 'it'. We need a simple new English word to carry the meaning offered by the Indigenous one. Inspired by the grammar of animacy and with full recognition of its Anishinaabe roots, might we hear the new pronoun at the end of Bemaadiziiaki, nestled in the part of the word that means land?

'Ki' to signify a being of the living Earth. Not 'he' or 'she', but 'ki'. So that when we speak of Sugar Maple, we say, 'Oh that beautiful tree, ki is giving us sap again this spring.' And we'll need a plural pronoun too, for those Earth beings. Let's make that new pronoun 'kin'. So we can now refer to birds and trees not as things, but as our earthy relatives. On a crisp October morning we can look up at the geese and say, 'Look, kin are flying south for the winter. Come back soon.'

Language can be a tool for cultural transformation. Make no mistake: 'Ki' and 'kin' are revolutionary pronouns. Words have power to shape our thoughts and our actions. On behalf of the living world, let us learn the grammar of animacy. We can keep 'it' to speak of bulldozers and paperclips, but every time we say 'ki', let our words reaffirm our respect and kinship with the more-than-human world. Let us speak of the beings of Earth as the 'kin' they are.

- Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Nature Needs a New Pronoun: To Stop the Age of Extinction*, 2015

Art is a polyarchic site of experimentation for living in a damaged world, offering a range of discursive, visual, and sensual strategies that are not confined by the regimes of scientific objectivity, political moralism or psychological depression. Art can provide a space for dealing with the affective and emotional trauma of climate change, dams and environmental pollution as it can hold together contradictions. We need modes of expression for the collective loss we are suffering through and venues to express the emotional toll of living in a diminished world. This sense of multiplicity that is contained within art provides a way to sift through the numerous contradictions of our everyday lives, to deal with divergent and discontinuous scales of time, place and action. Art practice can also provide a space of propositions and future imaginaries.

- Heather Davis, *Art in the Anthropocene*, in Rosi Braidotti & Maria Hlavajova, *Posthuman Glossary*, 2018

