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[Johan Siebers, “Comments by a critical fellow-traveller”, in: Dorthe Duncker, Adrian Pablé \(Eds.\), *Signs in Activities* \(Routledge 2024\).](#)

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~~<ct>~~Comments by a critical fellow-traveller-

~~<au>~~Johan Siebers

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<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6030-9646>

~~<abs>~~Abstract

In a commentary on the contributions in this volume, I highlight integrationism's status as a cure against a particular kind of misguided theorization of language, its ethos and normative dimensions, and I discuss each chapter briefly, addressing how it points to new directions for the study of language. As the field is widening rapidly and leaving behind some of the entrenched theoretical positions of past decades, new opportunities for integrationism to come into its own as a way of doing linguistics (in a new understanding of this term) rather than only talking about linguistics, emerges.

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Keywords: (post-)structuralism; theoretical linguistics; philosophy of language; psychologism; logicism.

~~<text_fullout>~~Integrationists are not known for their openness to other viewpoints or other approaches to the study of language and communication. We are fortunate to have this volume, which marks something of a shift in this attitude. As integrationism and its unique perspective starts to engage more and more with other ways of doing linguistics, we can expect their ideas to gain in importance and influence, and vice versa.

~~<text>~~Perhaps the reason for the insistence on maintaining doctrinal purity that has characterized integrationism up until now has something to do with the climate in which it arose and in which almost all of linguistics was dominated by the language myth (in a way, we might equate the language myth with structuralism). -In order to preserve what integrationism had to say, it had to maintain its boundaries in a fierce, at times even

aggressive way. But with the waning of structuralism, the disintegration of any consensus about basic questions in the study of language and the fragmentation of the discipline of linguistics into a myriad of different research agendas, the situation has changed. In this new world, integrationism has an important role to play but needs to look for dialogue with other approaches or else it will scupper amid this huge variety, which is invested in rescinding foundational and theoretical questions, in a reaction perhaps not dissimilar to the 1866 ban on studies discussing the origin of language by the French Academy of Sciences. Now, like then, a kind of despair when it comes to the foundational questions seems to pervade the world of linguistics, and by extension that of communication studies. A hangover from the realization that the widespread elation over the fact that linguistics had finally become a science, felt during the second half of the ²⁰twentieth century, turned out to be little more than a case of paradigm dominance, facilitated by deliberate institutional politics.

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On the one hand, we can be happy with the current state of language studies, for it is once again as rich as language itself and as our lives with language. On the other hand, the question “what is language?” continues to vex us and it is more unclear than ever how we might even begin to answer this question. Here integrationism has a contribution to make, on the rebound if nothing else. Pablé (2023) remarked that today this question, *what do you understand by language?*, is the most important one to ask of anyone writing about language. The philosophy of language, once conceived as a way of privileging language in dealing with philosophical problems, is shifting from dealing with philosophical problems by looking at language to using philosophical reflection to gain a new understanding of the foundational questions in the study of language. One important trend in this development is to see language as a material, embodied practice, like many others, and not as occupying a special ontological realm. Integrationism is naturally at ease with an approach like this new materialism, to which it can bring a conceptual language that adds definition and precision regarding the nature of language as a sign-making activity next to many others.

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The proof of the pudding, however, is in the eating: what do we do differently when we use an integrationist perspective in studying language? What, beyond the critique of prevailing misconceptions about language, do we actually do when we become integrationist linguists? So far, the integrationist literature largely seems to deal with ~~myth-myth~~-busting, with gaining and articulating a view of language that is no longer plagued by the ghost of the language myth.

This is a profound undertaking, for the language myth is not a coincidental mistake. It lies in wait, hidden in the very nature of sign-making activity and, as Harris thought, is triggered by script culture, which leads us to think of language as a system of decontextualized meaning, of signs removed from concrete instances. The tendency to mistake an abstraction for concrete fact: this might be one way of characterizing the basic operation that gives rise to the language myth. As sign-making, according to Harris, is an integration of activities and not “a separate form of activity carried out in addition to others” (Harris 1995:5), this “mistake” is as it were given with the very nature of integration. ~~And so~~ Thus a permanent critique of the “fallacy of misplaced concreteness” (Whitehead 1967:-51) seems to be a standing item in linguistic scholarship. As sign-making and sign-using creatures, we *want* the language myth, we long for it and to some extent it is our greatest creation; it is that by which we escape our fate as time-bound beings. Duncker and Pablé write in the Introduction:

~~<ex>~~“The integrationist assumes that human beings are “time-bound agents” (Harris 1996:154) with a “mental life” and that this “involves continuous engagement in a process of trying to make sense of present experience in the light of past experience and anticipated future experience.” ~~<source>~~(Harris 1996:x).”

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~~<text fullout>~~It sounds harmless and common-sensical enough and yet this is precisely what human beings of all times and all cultures have sought to escape. Harris teaches us to see that our basic assumptions about what we do when we speak and listen are misguided by this longing to escape the perpetual perishing of time. Like a grim existentialist philosopher, he shatters the illusion of permanence that pervades our will to meaning, which underpins linguistics as the scientific guardian of itself, and in doing so he reminds us that we are all responsible for our own sign-making.

~~<text>~~Language necessitates and enables this correction of itself, out of its own nature; what Harris called the “lay” perspective embodies this peculiar nature of language. But this vantage point ought then to inspire certain practices, scholarly and otherwise, that engage with actual language use or the actual study of language and languages. Harris and others have at times done this, with Harris’ later work on the language of science, art, and other institutional discourses springing to mind, but on the whole the stark meditation on the vicissitudes of the language myth has dominated the literature. This, I think, needs to change

if integrationism is to have a meaningful future. The present volume makes a start with that change. Integrationism is not relaxing its critique of the language myth in general and structuralism in particular. Rather, it is shifting its emphasis from a negative critique to a positive discourse that has room for empirical studies and for a mode of writing and speaking about language that reflects the actual role language plays in our lives.

Before I move to a discussion of the parameters that we can discern in this transition, as we can see them in the chapters of this book, I want to make two further remarks.

The first concerns the idea that in centralizing the notion of the sign, even though Harris is always at pains to point out that no definition of the sign can be given outside of concrete, individual, or even private language situations, imposes some kind of unified perspective on integrationism as a theory. Perhaps the upshot of the fundamental critique embodied in integrationism should be that no language theory is possible: that which we know as “theory”, and which arose around the same time as the language myth itself, at the dawn of philosophy in Greece, is inimical to the point integrationism is trying to make. To the extent that it presents itself as a theory, it becomes liable to a contradiction *in actu exercitu*, to a kind of cognitive dissonance. This may in part explain some of the difficulties integrationism has had in the field.

In order to clarify this a bit more, we might look at the following remark by Wittgenstein:

<ex>491. Not: “—without language we could not communicate with one another” —but for sure: without language we cannot influence other people in such-and-such ways; cannot build roads and machines, etc. — And also: without the use of speech and writing people could not communicate. (Philosophical Investigations Wittgenstein 1984: 491))

<text_fullout>In the first part of this aphorism, Wittgenstein points us back to the natural context of operation of the word “language”: it is how we influence others, how we collaborate, etc. In the second part, he does the same with the word “communicate”. It is what we do by speaking, listening, writing, and reading. It is as if he is saying, “don’t take those words out of that context and make them into contextless concepts which you then connect in

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an abstract and meaningless way by saying that without language we could not communicate". Such a statement looks like a thesis or claim, but does not tell us anything more than, indirectly, a fact about the usage of the words *language* and *communicate*. Here we see the birth of the language myth and Wittgenstein's critique of it (without addressing why the propensity to say things like "without language we could not communicate" is there in the first place, a question to which Harris provides at least the beginning of a possibility of an answer).

<text>Now consider what the editors of the present volume write in their Introduction: "The sign is basic to integrational theory. Without signs, there would be no communication" (page ref).

What have we gained by substituting "signs" for "language"? We tried to make a fundamental point, pointing the mind back to the actual language situation, by introducing the notion of the sign, but in doing so we inadvertently set up another theory, another pseudo-explanation, an idling cogwheel, language on holiday, to use Wittgenstein's metaphors. And yet, perhaps there is no other way to make that point. "I've gotta use words when I talk to you" (T.S. Eliot 1963: 135). If so, theory in linguistics would become an action, a gesture to get us out of a certain frame of mind that prevents us from seeing the facts clearly, rather than a definitive statement or explanation of fact itself.

My second remark: if this gesture has an effect, it would open us up to what Harris calls the lay perspective. At the end of the day, we all know what we do when we sign-make, and no one knows better than we do ourselves. The lay perspective, after swallowing the integrationist pill, is linguistic innocence regained. We no longer claim to know what we don't know, and this enables us to speak in a more truthful way about our life with words.

It seems to me that *the lay perspective is the love perspective*. I cannot understand an activity if I am indifferent ~~toward~~towards it, if I am not in some way engaged with it, care about it and therefore in some sense love it. The second-order integration of activities, this making sense of how they go together, is carried by an interest in these activities, at the very least. When it comes to language as a particular form of sign-making, the interest is not just in the integration of activities, but also in the means by which they are being integrated. The language-maker and -user is *a fortiori* a language lover. Human beings don't just use

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language, they love it. From the earliest stages of development, the brain exhibits an inclination ~~towards~~^{towards} languaging. We hardly feel better than when we are able to put something into words or hear someone putting something into words that we had no words for. We never get bored with the words we use, no matter how often we use them, and even when we are doing nothing else, we are happy to listen to a story. We long for words even when words fail, such as in the face of death or loss, or also of extreme happiness. On the basis of the connatural process of sign-making, we have created languages and linguistic practices and we have come to love them, like another human being, or an activity, or something we encounter or create. In other words, language exists paradoxically as partly outside of us, outside of our sign-making, as well as outside of our mental life, as something we made because we love it and we love its possibilities. Many of the conundrums in the ontology of language lose their sting and aporia once we allow this idea: that there are things about language, like there are things about human beings, that we can only know from the position of love, intimately because we are involved ourselves, humbly, because we are aware of our not-knowing and with a kind of careful shyness, quick to give space. Linguistics is, to some extent at least, a form of love's knowledge (Nussbaum 1990;¹ Katz 1980;² Vico 1744) because language is a product of love. Linguistics has no explicit place for this kind of knowledge other than its bare, abstracted form of linguistic creativity and speaker intuitions, as opposed perhaps to the older traditions of rhetoric, poetics and philology. Integrationism, by emphasizⁱng the lay perspective, can create room for it. The love-infused lay perspective does not seek to control or master language by getting to a comprehensive theory of it, rather it seeks to give space to language so it can become fully alive. It is aware of the fact that there is always more about language that has not yet emerged. It is more interested in speakers than in speech, in listeners than in listening, in writers than in writing, in readers than in reading.¹

To sum up: by reading integrationist "theory" as a Wittgensteinian operation to show the fly the way out of the fly-bottle, a shift in perspective that changes the nature of what it is we think we do when we do linguistics, we can pluck the fruits of the critical moment in integrationism. Second^{ly}, by allowing the full breadth of the lay perspective, including the dimension of things we can only know from a position of care, involvement or love, we can pluck the fruits of the potential positive, constructive moment in integrationism and begin to envisage a mode of studying language as a creative activity that would offer a new direction,

¹ Many thanks to Khawla Badwan for this expression.

not just for integrationism but for linguistics as a whole. The current situation in linguistics calls for approaches that can move beyond both psychologism (language is just the cognitive psychology of language) and logicism (language is just the structure of thought) and do justice to language itself as a part of human activity and as a human creation, a particular form of sign-making by which we create life worlds that otherwise would not exist.

Now that the scene has been set for a consideration of new directions for integrationism, we can look at how the individual chapter authors go about it. The opening chapter, by Chris Hutton, places Harris' thought in the context of wider intellectual developments in the 20th century and shows the parallels between integrationism and a wide range of other schools of thought. He mentions for example surrealism, cubism, general semantics, deconstruction² and also the Western reception of Zen Buddhism, which seems to me to be quite important. As I have argued, the point of the fundamental critique of the language myth is not so much that of proposing an alternative theory but is rather that of a cure against disease of the mind (we are reminded of Wittgenstein's view of philosophy as a battle against the *bewitchment* of the mind by language), even if Harris himself wavers on this point. Just like the Zen master, the integrationist seeks not so much to induce the right understanding in the mind of the student but rather to stop the student from trying to conceptually comprehend what can only be encountered in an instantaneous, non-conceptual intuition or enlightenment (the contextualized, individual, momentary act of sign-making). Hutton points out how writing, not just for Harris but also for McLuhan and others in the Toronto School of media theory, his main focus in this chapter, in a similar way induced or foregrounded misconceptions about language that need to be dispelled rather than replaced by other ones. He also notes that for McLuhan as well as for Harris, the diversification of media, starting with writing and entering a rapid development since the 19th century, provides the opportunity for humanity to become aware of the influence of different media (forms of sign-making) on the way we think, feel, and perceive. During the 20th century, we might say, a communication enlightenment started to take place which is still in full swing. Seen in this way, the discipline of "linguistics" appears even more ill-conceived than it already did when looking just at Harris' critique of it. Not only do its implicit assumptions about what language is turn out to be local distortions generated by applying age-old attitudes pertaining to speech to the

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² In my opinion deconstruction and other forms of post-structuralism remain far too indebted to structuralist assumptions to qualify as allies of integrationism and the other intellectual and artistic currents Hutton mentions. See Fredric Jameson (1991).

medium of writing (scriptism), the very notion of language itself turns out to be part of a much wider semiological universe. We can understand in an even deeper way how misguided the current organization of the field of language studies is, but we can also gain a new understanding of the various modes of sign-making (speech, writing, electronic communication, recording, image-making, etc.), of their particular make-up and even of the various ways in which they can be studied, ranging from the first-person lay perspective of integrationism to the objectifying naturalism of cognitive psychology. What appeared initially as incompatible perspectives turn out to be merely different approaches that can all co-exist together, as long as we understand them all against the background of the irreducible, concrete reality of the sign-making act. Integrationism in this way becomes a philosophy of language, more precisely a philosophy of the sign-making act as an original given we can elucidate and creatively develop endlessly but which we cannot reduce to something that is not itself again an act of sign-making. Can we ever understand the nature of sign-making, can we ever understand how it is possible in the first place? Maybe not. Integrationism may tend ~~towardstowards~~ agreeing with Colin McGinn's remark "whoever said that the nature of the mind should be fully accessible to those with a mind?" (1991:43). Needless to say, the person who said that was Aristotle (1956, De Anima III.8): "the soul is in a way all existing things", but we must leave the vagaries of the metaphysics of totalization, and its impact on general semiology, for another occasion. Hutton provides new directions that can lead to a better understanding of the depth of the integrationist perspective and at the same time can make integrationism a powerful voice amid wider trends in cultural and media theory.

The fact that integrationism can become a voice in the critique of psychologism and logicism in language studies, does not mean that, for integrationism, there could be no psychology of language, or indeed no psychology of sign-making. Charlotte Conrad addresses the question of what the psychology of sign-making looks like and what integrationism can contribute to it, in the context of a discussion of the nature of texts and of textual understanding. She begins by rehearsing some basic Harrisian tenets, among which the delightful observation that traditional linguistics "reduces the individual speaker or hearer to a linguistic automaton" (Harris 1996:147). We can indeed wonder if the ultimate goal of linguistics conceived of as a science would be to be able to predict what someone is going to say next. If this is not the case, as I think everyone would agree, Conrad's aim "to find a psychology which allows us to place the authority of sign-making squarely with the individual agent in the local moment of perception" (ref) acquires a lot of validity. Linguistic creativity turtles all the way down.

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Along these lines, she proposes to demythologize the text and see texts as contexts for sign-making at an individual level, like everything else in our environment. This applies to the perspective of the reader. We may ask ourselves if we could make use of Conrad's perspective as well for a psychology of the writer of a text. I can imagine that between a traditional author-intention view of text writing and a postmodern, Barthian view of the fully decentralized text whose author is "dead", integrationism can develop a theory of text writing that thinks of it as consisting of many acts of authorial sign-making, linked up in various ways, that leave their trace in writing, to be contextualized again by other agents. We are thus beginning to see the contours of a thoroughly activist approach to the text, from the point of view of the reader as well as the writer. Indeed, Conrad emphasizes the ethical dimension of contextualized sign-making, the freedom of choice that accompanies each act of sign-making and by extension also the responsibility we have in the face of our own and others' sign-making. The mythical notion of the text, which despite (or perhaps thanks to) deconstructivism is still with us, turns out to be morally objectionable as well as cognitively unsupported and largely functioning as an instrument of social control. A critique of the ideology of the text is implicitly being outlined here and once again we begin to see the contours here of what a fully developed lay approach to the sign can show us.

Conrad poses the question of what a psychology of sign-making might look like that would help us to articulate text reading as localized sign-making in action. She finds the integrationist literature lacking anything concrete enough to provide a handle with which to articulate the reality of reading, if I can put it like that, and seeks inspiration in Peircean semiotics. To be sure, as noted in the Introduction, the Peircean sign and the Harrisian sign are very different animals. To Harris, Peirce maintains a surrogationalist conception of the sign. However, as Conrad shows, what appears as surrogationalism when looked at through the aims and goals of integrationism, appears as a perspective linking thought to action when viewed on Peirce's own terms. The distance vis-à-vis immediacy that the sign introduces (the function of mind) allows free agentive purpose to be ~~moulded~~^{deed}; the space of the sign has more to do with imagination, time, memory, and projection than with surrogationalism: "Peirce discards the notion that thought represents the world as is and replaces it with the understanding that thought, in sophisticated ways, reaches into sensation and operationalizes the world as signs — entities pragmatically relative to an agentive purpose" (ref). Conrad's approach offers many points of connection to contemporary work on reading and reading pedagogy in embodied cognition (Trasmundi, Toro and Mangen -et al.- 2022) as well as to

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work on the ethics of textual and literary communication (Sell, [Borch and Lindgren et al.](#) 2013).

The question is how the hyper-individualized notion of sign-making in Harris, almost a Wittgensteinian private language, which carries overtones of an extreme nominalism in epistemology and perhaps even of a Stirner-like egocentric, liberalist voluntarism in social thought (Stirner 1844), can be linked to understanding the social context in which we live and in which we use language, is explored by Nina Fang. In a complex chapter she uses Schulz's social phenomenology to provide an underpinning of an integrationist account of social communication. Harris himself had room for larger, shared cultural constructs and social institutions, bearing in mind that these are always epiphenomenal upon individual acts of sign-making. Fang seeks to extend this conception somewhat by referring to Schulz's s reading of the I-Thou relationship, the intersubjective relationship. Schulz argues that the subject positions its self-understanding in the context of a "Thou", an instance of another who could understand what I think, feel, say. As an inherent feature of the construction of the self at the phenomenological level, the Thou guarantees sociality and other-orientedness. It is easy to see how we could build this idea of the "Thou in the I and the I in the Thou" into the act of sign-making in order to account for sociality. For Harris, we have to collaborate at all points in our lives, and so a factor of other-awareness if not other-orientedness seems to be intrinsic to integration. In a way, the word itself already says it.

As an example of a fruitful dialogue between two theoretical approaches, Fang's chapter succeeds in addressing some of the gaps in the integrationist framework. It seems to me that a further development, which could be explored in future, also presents itself. For phenomenology, as for the standard version of integrationism, the subject is the ultimate reference point. All else is construction by the subject, including the Thou. The phenomenological universe, like the integrationist universe, is carried by a subjective constitution. Yet for the originator of the I-Thou philosophy, Martin Buber, nothing could be further from the truth. The I-Thou relation there is not a subjective construction, with the Thou being located with the I, but rather a real relation, not characterized by the preposition "in", but by the preposition "between". The act of dialogue is not one of interpretation (a word emphasized by Fang as well as by Harris) but of real relation, of listening to what someone has to say, or failing to do so. It seems to me that "integration" could easily and naturally be extended to cover real relations rather than interpretations. It might even be the

case that the emphasis on interpretation betrays a lingering surrogationalism within integrationism itself. Conrad emphasizes the actuality and reality of integration in her chapter as well. Within the current of new materialism and embodied cognition, we might find occasion to leave behind the phenomenological perspective as tied to a representationalist epistemology and regain a sense of the reality of integration as relation. This would open up an entirely different way of thinking about sociality in sign-making; it would point in the direction of a Buberian reading of the I–Thou relationship rather than a Schulzian one. We would then also be able to remove the aura of individualism without having to take recourse to a shared structure to guarantee community or sociality and while retaining the individual act of sign-making as the vehicle or relationality.

Lars Taxén's extremely useful chapter moves in a related territory. He identifies structuralism as the great opponent of integrationism. Yet the question we posed above, why the language myth exists in the first place, is answered here by a sophisticated account of the feedback relations between different levels of the reification of meaning in macrosocial structures and institutions. Languages and the institutions they carry are indeed abstractions, reifications if we take them for a concrete fact, yet it is the capacity for creating these abstractions and assigning efficacy to them that makes the human world possible. Integrationism is reinterpreted in a dialectical fashion as the process by which we come to realize the nature of the webs of significance we weave ourselves and by which we can sublate them, rather than dismantle them. They become elements in ever higher-order acts of integration, which allow for transformation, tradition, revolution, morality, freedom, recognition, and, I hope, poetry. It seems to me that Taxén makes a significant contribution to integrationist theory here, one that we feel is implicit in almost everything Harris writes, but which is never made explicit.

However, I think that the attention given to communication in philosophy and linguistic theory can also provide us with a correction to the dialectical perspective. The communicative relation is not a dialectical relation. Communication always involves the paradox of togetherness and separateness at the same time and in the same respect. This is why there is no conception of philosophical rationality in the tradition that is adequate ~~to~~-for theorizing communication, including the dialectical one. For when we are in communication, even if we reach shared meaning, there is no sublation of the partners in communication into a higher unity; that would destroy the communication. In fact, the communicative relation as constitutive of meaning safeguards us for an all-too-easy dialectical totalization of the situation of people existing in

relation to each other and to the rest of the world. Communication remains a free gift or else it is not communication. Integrationism is therefore a personalism. The dialectical transcendence of structuralism will have a place in a fully developed integrationist theory of communication, but as it moves itself into the realm of abstraction, it has to be referred back constantly to the concrete, paradoxical, open communicative situation.

The integration of more standard versions of rationality and natural logic, such as syllogistic reasoning, into concrete contexts of practical activity provides the starting point for Mark Stott's chapter, which explores the compatibility of Southern theory with integrationism. As in some of the other chapters, Stott approaches the heritage of the Greeks, in this case logical reasoning, as an abstraction that has been given the status of concrete fact in European philosophy and linguistics. He critiques contemporary proponents of unreformed European thinking, such as Pinker and Chomsky, and uses a wide range of anthropological data, starting with Luria's investigations into reasoning and encompassing contemporary work on indigenous epistemologies. Although integrationism has its origins in European or Northern theory, Stott shows that the radical nature of contextualization of sign-making in practical contexts of collaboration offers the opportunity, as Harris himself identified, of developing a conception of plural rationalities without the need to privilege syllogistic reasoning as somehow universal or underlying other modes of rationality. Southern theory's emphasis on localized, artisanal contexts of meaning making and drawing relevant distinctions, its resistance to abstract universalization precisely in the name of truth is seen as deeply congruent with the integrationist's ethos. The exploration of these connections may come to constitute one of the most important and interesting avenues for the future of integrationism because without the integrationist approach, no meaningful dialogue between cultures is possible that is not in one way or another a unilateral attempt at equalization of epistemic and ontological orientations. The point here is not so much that syllogistic reasoning is a "Western" thing, but rather that, in the order of explanation, logic as conceived since the Greeks, occupies no primary position. Stott's chapter gives hands and feet to the anti-logicist stance implicit in integrationism and links it to decolonization. It will be fascinating to see this approach extended to the theory of truth because it is to be expected that a richer notion of truth might become available in this way, one that allows us to move beyond correspondence, coherence and pragmatic conceptions to accommodate a plurality that nevertheless is not the same as post-truth. The application of such a conception to theories of the public sphere in global society could have a revolutionary impact on global social epistemics.

After these fundamental and far-reaching theoretical investigations or preparations, the final three chapters of this book begin to explore new ways of actually doing integrationist language study. As integrationism has emerged from the preceding chapters as an anti-theory, an anti-positivism and an ethos of individual sign-making activity, which I have interpreted moreover as an ethos of love of language, the application to concrete examples of language study seems to me to be where the claims for integrationism have to be made good. David Bade explores human–animal communication in a case study of accounts of interspecies communication between humans, horses and bonobos. Bettina Perregaard describes how a young child integrates over time and across situations a practice of social play, while Sinead Kwok aligns integrationism with a new materialist account of textual scholarship, by treating text meaning and the text as artefact as equal elements in the integration and creation of meaning. All three case studies have an element of ethnography or lived experience as they write about actual practices, people and encounters and show how the language of integrationism allows them to articulate what is going on in these practices. It might well be that Harris could not have envisaged such a way of writing about what language does and means in the lives of people. Yet here, in these examples of a practice of linguistic ethnography that is untrammelled by the language myth, we see the lay perspective in action.

Bade takes from Talbot Taylor the idea that language is inherently normative, and not merely a biological or psychological reality. Language is a human creation, something we need to be introduced to by others; it is a form of life: “the essence of language does not reside in the linguistic product which is the focus of modern linguistic investigations but in the activity of language production and in the forces, normative and other, which help to shape that activity” (Taylor 1990:130). He points out that the individual responsibility for the sign-making process is the other side ~~to~~^{of} the coin of normativity. We might say that sign-making is free. For language to evolve as a practice that can socially connect or bind us, we need to have trust in the sign-making of others, and vice versa. Language is the outcome of the attempt to communicate with each other. Bade applies this to interspecies communication. Monty Roberts, who wrote about the language used by horses, showed that human beings and horses can communicate just as well, with just as much trust, as human beings can among themselves. Understanding the language of horses, Roberts called it Equus, on the model of human normative communication is not an instance of anthropomorphism but the adequate

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response to the normative situation in which, in this case, horse and person interact. [Bade concludes that we](#)

[“come to understand language and communication as being a matter of freedom, trust and responsibility for all those involved rather than simply a matter of biological machinery. With language we move in a world of politics and morality, and, in the etymological sense of the word, of religion \(as I understand it\): our obligations towards, bonds with, and reverence for the world around us. And linguistics —the study of language —should be pursued in that same world.”](#) [\(ref\)](#).

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[If language is inherently normative, so is linguistics. Bade does not advocate a return to prescriptivist grammar, of course. But it is instructive to note that we have already seen that Harris’ theory is not neutral when it comes to questions of normativity and that the critique of the language myth has a moral motivation: the language myth unmasks “mythical” accounts of meaning as attempts to control the sign-making of others with a master narrative or prescribed form, most strongly so insofar as it sets up bifurcation between word and thing, in which the word is the fixed carrier of meaning.](#)

[Does Equus, or its Bonobo counterpart, have a normative dimension as well? Bade thinks so, but he says that the reflexive capacity that comes with normativity can’t be actualized by horses or apes, just as people can’t do that if they have not been taught how to do it, i.e. have not been enculturated in the practice of reflexive language use. But that practice is, at least potentially, an intrinsic part of communication and language. Linguistics is thus something we all engage in \(the lay perspective!\), only some make more of it than others.](#)

As an example of the kind of sensibility, attentiveness, circumspection, and carefulness we develop, or ought to develop, if we start to speak and write about language in this way, Bade’s chapter will continue to inspire. We encounter here what will be one of the main conclusions of the book as a whole: integrationism is a way of studying language that allows us to do justice to language as a great unknown, something we need to discover again and again for ourselves as we go along and as we engage with different practices of sign-making. This way of going about the study of language is incompatible with the positivism that still underlies most of linguistics but rather points the way to a form of language study that is

aligned more with methods of the humanities and philosophy than of the human sciences (Seuren 2023).

Bettina Perregaard explores an instance of a young child's play, in which the child, who was two-and-a-half years old when the observations were made, imitates a setting from morning assembly at her nursery after she has returned home, representing the event by endowing objects with new meaning and using language to switch roles between herself and the social educator leading the assembly. Deferred imitation, event representation, and language making all work together to create or integrate a complex play scenario, leading Perregaard to the conclusion that the "constitution and organization of play activities reveal children's true creativity and originality in making the language they need for present purposes and future conquests" (ref). She uses this small example to show how language operates in the creative activity of the child, a way that is incompatible with the tenets of the language myth but which can be described with the language of integrationism. Perregaard speculates that a fully developed longitudinal integrationist ethnography (which would become a linguistic biography of an individual person) can show us how language can function in our lives. Linguistics would take on the character of witnessing in a research practice like that, perhaps reminiscent of Klemperer's linguistic diaries about the rise of fascist language during the Third Reich (a dismal object of study, of course, compared to the language growth of a child). Perregaard shows how such an ethnographic practice is not at odds with, say, developmental psychological research but can add definition and context to it. This chapter gives us a real sense of how language and sign-making are part of day-to-day activities and imagination, not segregated from them in a special realm of symbolic representation. Symbolic activity rehearses and repeats but does not stand in for the reality that is rehearsed or repeated. A doll in a chair at home is a child in a classroom chair at school because the doll does not stand in for the child, other than in a purely abstract way; rather the use of the doll as sign allows the reenactment of the scene in play to take place and is thus a sign made for and in that occasion. Should someone say "yes but that surely means the doll stands for the child", we would say that this is not so much wrong, as not the point.

Finally, Sinead Kwok addresses the production side of texts, showing integrationism's compatibility with contemporary attention in the humanities for the materiality of textual artefacts. In integrationism, "writing is treated as the creation of textualized objects" (Harris 2000:213). Writing occurs in physical space, and on a surface. The act of writing involves

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language but also a whole range of other sign-making practices, in such a way that an ontological divide between the (type) text and the (token) material realization of it falls away. Kwok shows how the integrationist perspective adds this crucial insight to material textual scholarship, allowing a view of textual production as sign-making across all its modalities:

<ex>“A comprehensive, lay, illuminating theory of the text and the artifact is not one limited to the preoccupation with a print culture (traditional philology), a pre-print culture (new philology), or even the digitalized culture where facsimiles of manuscripts can be mass-produced. It is a theory which reflects an awareness of the human textualizers’ interactions with all kinds of textual cultures in dealing with texts and artifacts.” <source>(ref)-

<text fullout>By identifying and addressing segregationist tendencies in textualization scholarship, Kwok is able to, on one hand, ensure the notion of text is not generalized to the point of meaninglessness (as in the postmoderns’ cry “nothing outside of the text”) and, on the other, to see the text as an integrated sign-making practice. The interest in material culture is stronger than ever in the humanities, but often assumptions about materiality and objects prevail that see the process of endowing them with meaning against the backdrop of language as code, or as in explicit opposition to linguistic and symbolic meaning. Integrationism can enrich the study of material culture by dispelling the myth of the separation of body and spirit.

<text>These three chapters give a rich insight into what is possible when we adopt the integrationist way of thinking about language. As new directions for integrationist linguistics, they point the way for others to take up similar projects in other areas, an endlessly wide field of scholarship and research and the future of integrationism.

I want to conclude with a brief remark: the shift in perspective Harris set about to formulate may well have its best moment waiting for it yet. As the study of language is changing, diversifying, and opening up to alternative approaches at a rapid pace, we can, to use Hutton’s phrase, safely discard the “negative nostalgia” for the time when the integrationist lamentation, its cry in the desert, was its mainstay. Now, the opportunity for new, creative work, celebrating humanity’s love of language and joy in language making and language use can motivate new ways of writing about, speaking of and understanding signs in activities.

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