

Editorial

The Dao of communication

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On 2 and 3 February 2018 the symposium *Philosophies of Communication East and West* took place at Hong Kong University (hosted by the School of English), in cooperation with the Philosophy of Communication Section of the European Communication Research and Education Association (ECREA) and the International Association for the Integrational Study of Language and Communication (IAISLC). The aim of the symposium was to bring together communication scholars, emphatically also young scholars, from the East and the West to compare research paradigms and theoretical approaches, and to learn from perspectives opened up by empirical research. In this special issue of *Empedocles* some of the papers that were presented, all by Chinese and European (emerging) scholars, appear in print. In the years to come, communication philosophy and communication scholarship will undoubtedly intensify the kind of dialogue that the symposium embodied. Different scholarly and intellectual cultures have a lot to learn from each other; the fact that the integrationist perspective on language and communication, as outlined by Oxford Professor Roy Harris (1931–2015), was so strongly represented at the symposium informed many conversations and invited participants to overcome models of communication that are based on learning to share codes or segregating the forms and the content of communication, and instead think about communication as an ever new and individual, holistic encounter and localized process of integrated sense-making. While strongly emphasizing the individual's macrosocial proficiency against which contextualization takes place, Harrisian integrationism, grounded in a semiology that acknowledges the radical

indeterminacy of all signs, could be construed as a truly general theory of human communication made possible by adopting the first-person perspective of one's personal communicational experience. In this way, the communication theorist will be engaged in a quest for self-understanding, which is the basis for understanding others, motivated by the question of what is common to all human communicational experience. In other words, an integrationist 'lay-oriented' philosophy of communication seeks to uncover what unifies, rather than separates us. Given this particular configuration that characterized the symposium, the future of global communication scholarship appeared as a happy and creative chaos rather than a process of slow, insidious, ideologizing colonization, which it has sadly so often been in the past. There is much to learn from the confluence of forces of which the symposium was a brief instantiation; the Philosophy of Communication Section of ECREA and the Integrationists' Association are looking forward to continuing cooperating in future.

Charlotte Conrad explores the process of intercultural communication from an integrationist perspective, highlighting a view of communication or sense-making that focuses on the interaction potential in a communicative encounter. In this way a conception of intercultural communication emerges that both allows us to understand the difficulties that are often involved in this type of interaction but that also provides an original perspective on how they might be overcome.

In his contribution, Shicha Luo engages with the media theory of Régis Debray and applies it to the Chinese context, showing how this particular approach to media diversity allow us to open up the contours of a 're-understanding' of the history and reality of Chinese media in the context of globalization.

Jasper Wu Zhao Zhen provides a semiotic analysis of the use of signs and the process of collective enunciation during the Occupy protests in Hong Kong in 2014. Collective

enunciation and de-subjectivization stand in a dialectical relation to each other, not in a simple relation of contradiction or aggregation. The complex picture that results from this analysis can help us to understand human collective agency in new ways.

The metaphors, discursive practices and implicit ideologies present in the Chinese animation film *Na nian na tu na xie shi er* (*Year Hare Affair* [2011]; video game [2015]) are examined by XuanXuan Tan. The animation on the one hand reproduces a constant historical narrative about Chinese cultural identity and on the other re-imagines this narrative as both endogenous and heterogeneous, addressing contemporary Chinese young people.

Gianluigi Sassu starts from the consideration that, if communication is not merely linguistic but covers all interactions and is not based on code-sharing but on individual and local acts of interpretation or integration, power must be a central feature of communicative practice. Using Gramsci's Marxist theory of cultural production, he investigates the potential for communicative emancipation or liberation that a combination of Marxist and integrationist perspective allows. What becomes of the Machiavellian creative semiosis, the making of new meanings, when linguistic emancipation and political emancipation are shown in their interdependence?

The 'embeddedness' of language and communication in sociocultural practice and performativity is further addressed by Feifei Zhou and Xiyin Zhou, in the form of a comparison of speech act theory with Confucian accounts of the place of speaking in inner cultivation and external action. The perspective of a Confucian ethics of communication that incorporates and learns from, but also moves beyond, speech act theory is sketched. The creative potential of the dialogue between East and West in the philosophy of communication becomes clearly visible here.

Finally, David Eisenschitz discusses the sceptical dimensions of Harrisian integrationism. The paradigm has been known for its critique of fundamental features of contemporary linguistics, and this has resulted in the charge of being anti-theoretical or even anti-scientific. Eisenschitz interprets the central claims of integrationism as forms of sceptical practice, aimed at dispelling myths about language that close off communicative potentials rather than increase them. Integrationism, like the ancient sceptical tradition, thus becomes an ethical attitude that can help to put, and keep, us in touch with the humanity, creativity and novelty of the practice of sign-making with what is alive in it.

This fundamental argument aligns well with some of the things that a world philosophy of communication is to learn from eastern philosophy, especially Daoism, which has often been aligned with scepticism. One of the most conspicuous aspects of the *Dao De Jing* is its negative view of common-sense views of language. Language is unable to express the full nature of being, the *Dao*, which is, rather, open only to an intuitive, direct, spontaneous and creative awareness, which is always individual and which has a transformative influence on the lives of those who reach it. Implicit in this text is a philosophy of language that explores how, on the basis of this intuitive access to the *Dao*, we can come to understand language itself as one of the *Dao*'s manifestations and dispel the myth of language as the 'constancy of names'. Insofar as language and communication, like many human experiences, initially produce their own mythical self-understanding of fixed finality, which we then might learn to overcome to regain the openness of freedom of interpretation that lies at the heart of all communication and encounter, both scepticism and Daoism provide important resources for dispelling communication myths, even if this means acknowledging that there will always be a place for philosophies of communication in distinction from sciences of communication.

An attitude of a certain renunciation and letting go, which we find in the sceptic's arguments as much as in the Daoist practice of unlearning, lies at the heart of becoming aware of what it means to be a communicator in an ever-renewing and flowing interaction with others, in which togetherness does not mean identity. Without the cultivation of this attitude our work as communication or language scholars remains incomplete. It is a cultivation of a communicative ethics of learning to become like water – a central sign post both for western and for eastern philosophy, which each discovered in their very early stages. It still provides a point of orientation for the emerging global communicative cultures, understandings and practices of our times. 'The best things are like water', the *Dao De Jing* tell us. 'It benefits all things and does not compete'. It is an image of the strength of the gentle, of the openness of listening without which communication is merely delayed violence. But communication can also be the path by which we can overcome violence. The dialogue between East and West can lead, in our time, to new forms of understanding communication that can help us along that path.

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