

Open Letter: A very important question kept closed based on widespread careerism

For 44 years in books and other artworks, I've explored a geometric transliteration of the spelling of words that visually reveals an unexpectedly meaningful patterning in the alphabetic sequencing. In recent years, my project has attracted a small following in a variety of fields who are convinced the imagery of the orthographic patterning challenges the accepted idea in linguistics and philosophy that the signs of language are arbitrary. In addition to my imagery, their belief is based on new research showing the original assumption of arbitrariness was based on an incorrect view of how the signs are perceived and mentally processed.

However, reopening the question of the nature of the signs of language will adversely impact the published research of a large number of academics. For example, it could mean that all research concerning the unknown Indo-European predecessor of many of our modern languages could be misguided. The similarity in the signs of all the so-called descendant languages could actually result from innate aspects of human perception and language-creation (that caused the independent choices to have relational similarities), rather than being descended from an unknown language of a purely hypothesized culture that existed at least 6,000 years ago.

Consequently, there have been attempts in linguistics and philosophy to block the reopening of the discussion of the nature of the signs. But because I'm an artist with a committed following in both art and literature, I have access to publishing venues outside the academic context. I wrote a chapter in my 2021 memoir that is now being used to foster discussion in the literary and art departments of some major universities, and in a few philosophy departments by a younger generation of professors. That chapter is now freely accessible online at: <https://philpapers.org/archive/WINFTI-2.pdf>

I'm not a language expert, and I don't claim the imagery I produce is proof of anything (I believe art should foster a sense of wonder and lead to questions, not answer them). But the discussion of the nature of the signs of language should not be closed based purely on an assumption made over a century ago that has now lost the logic of its foundation. If my work helps to reopen that discussion, it's more important than any other accomplishment I could achieve as an artist. The more people who know about this issue, the harder it will be for powerful academics to prevent the question from being reopened.

Thanks so much for reading. I'm hoping you will share this open letter or make others aware of the issue if an opportunity arises (a copy can also be downloaded at MichaelWinklerArt.com/publications).

Michael Winkler