

STUTS 69 + TACOS 2021

POSTHUMANIST APPROACHES TO LANGUAGE IN DIGITALISED SOCIETIES

Uncovering Ideologies of Voice Assistant Users

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ISSUES AND QUESTIONS

- What do the users think about their interactions with their voice assistants?
- How do they perceive Siri or Alexa - a person, a computer or something in between?
- Does our perception change when we carry the gadgets with us rather than giving them a fixed place at home?

**AND HOW DO THESE AFFECT THE
LANGUAGE NORMS?**



AGENDA

Theoretical Framework

1

**Language Ideology
Research**

2

**Posthumanist Applied
Linguistics**

3

Methodology

4

Findings (so far)

Empirical Study in Practice

RESEARCH FIELD: LANGUAGE IDEOLOGY

- studied since the late 20th century
- field of linguistic-anthropological study
- linguistic ethnography + social-scientific study of ideology
- has influences on sociolinguistics, linguistic anthropology and discourse analysis

Blommaert (2006)

“MEDIATING LINK BETWEEN SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND FORMS OF TALK”

“Linguistic/language ideologies have been defined as ‘sets of beliefs about language articulated by users as a rationalisation or justification of perceived language structure and use’”

Woolard & Schieffelin (1994, 57)

“In the simplest formulation, language ideologies are cultural conceptions of the nature, form and purpose of language, and of communicative behaviour as an enactment of a collective order.”

Gal & Woolard (1995, 130)

SOME EXAMPLES FOR IDEOLOGIES

- Language as a **countable entity/object**
- **Monolingualism** - reducing language to one entity with the hegemony of the homogeneous (Derrida 2008)
- Speaking of **right and wrong language use**
- The relationship between language and political territories as a “natural” given
 - **Attributing legitimacy** of the authenticity and authority of speakers (Stevenson 2008)
 - Example: Kurdish as a political language (from my earlier paper)

DEFINING LANGUAGE - IS IT POSSIBLE?

- Linguistic expressions are bound to “a complex set of social, historical and political conditions of formation” (Bourdieu 2009, 5)
- Language in discourse: “the process of linguistic creation of reality” (Ulrich 2008, 22) which “systematically form the objects of which they speak” (Foucault 1972, 49)

FROM LANGUAGE TO REPERTOIRE

- Instead of language as a countable and fixed object —>
 - languages, linguistic varieties, linguistic practices... (Stevenson 2008)
 - ... and **linguistic repertoire** (Gumperz 1964)
- Individual linguistic packages that “contain all the accepted ways of formulating messages [...] [by providing] the weapons of everyday communication” (Gumperz 1964, 137)
- Language biographical research (Busch 2012)

POSTHUMANIST APPROACHES TO LANGUAGE

- Individual repertoires focus on the competence of speakers and takes human factor as its centre
- Humanist conception indices that cognition is centred around humans (“in here”) and is separated from a world (“out there”) - (Latour 1999)



Speaking circuit
(Saussure 2016, original 1916)

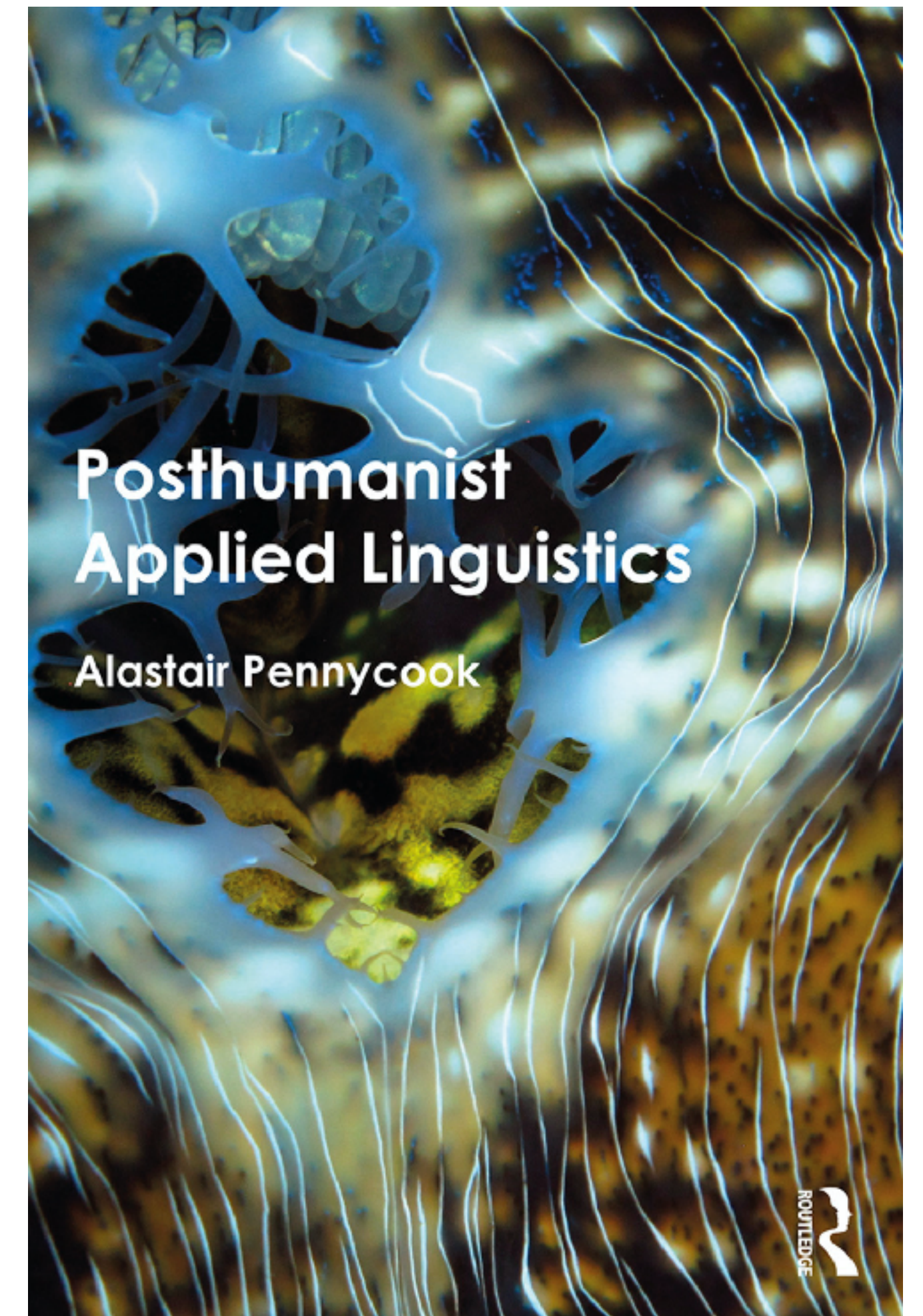
Missing in this model (Pennycook 2008):

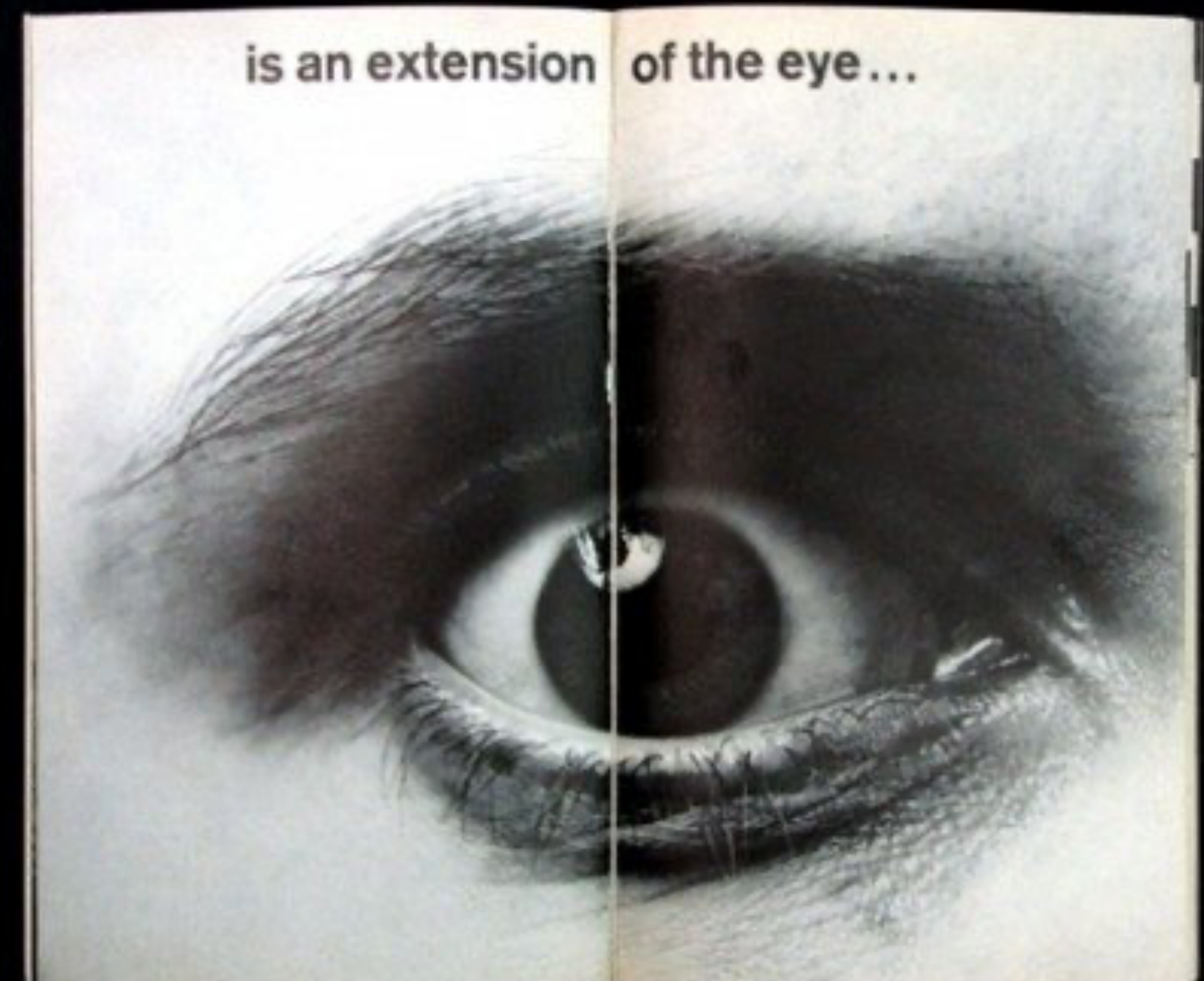
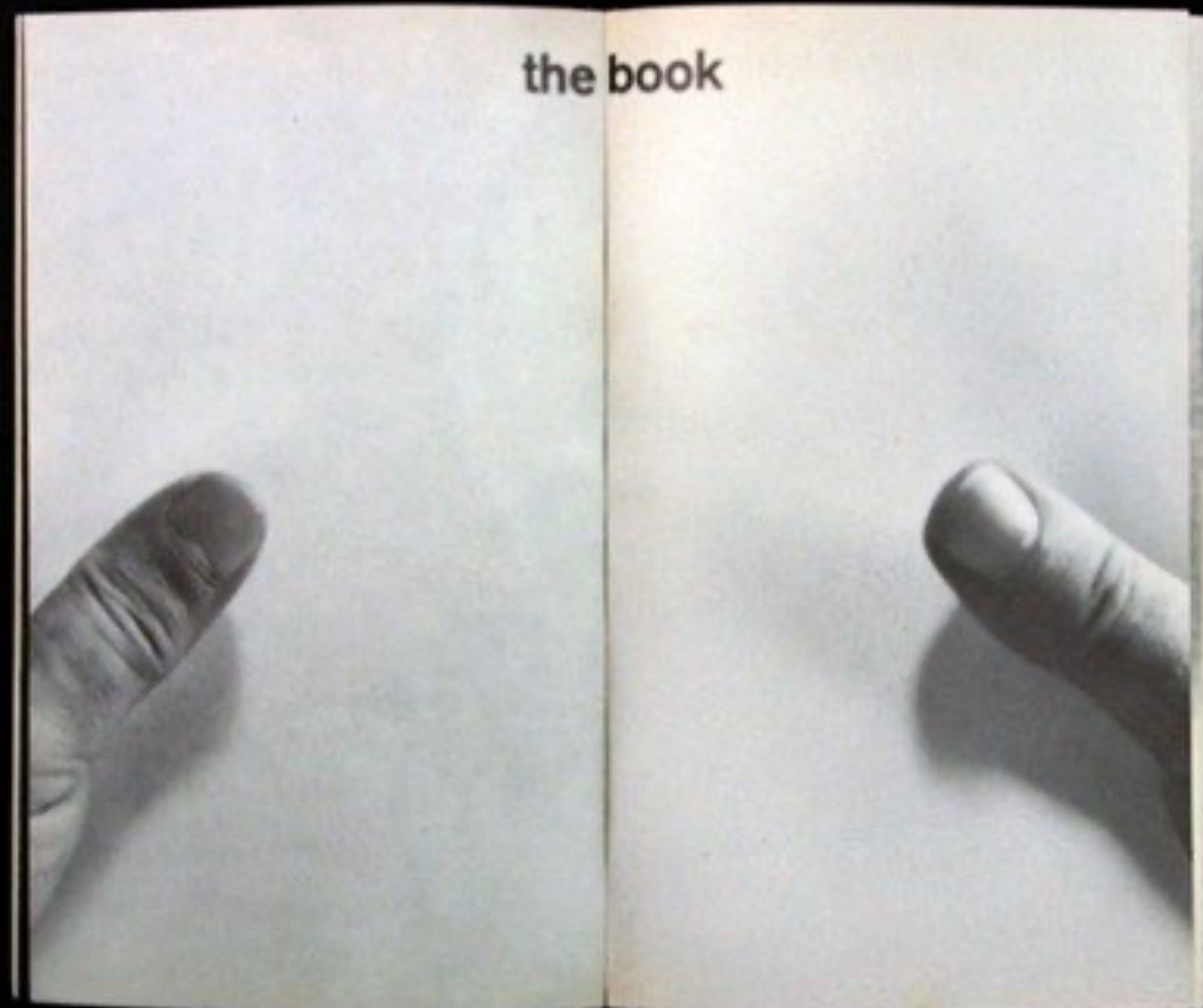
- The messiness of communication
- The conflict, ambiguity, uncertainty
- The role of social and political relations, gender, race, class...
- The role of bodies, places, artefacts, clothes, feelings, smells...

FROM INDIVIDUAL TO SPATIAL REPERTOIRES

POSTHUMANIST APPROACHES TO LANGUAGE

- Language is “**embodied, embedded, extended and enacted**” (Pennycook 2018, 48)
- Spatial repertoire: “the idea that linguistic and other semiotic resources are not contained in someone’s head, nor just choices available within a speech community, but are **spatially distributed**” (ibid., 51)
- Media as extension of ourselves (McLuhan 2008, original in 1964)





Understanding Media: Extensions of Man
McLuhan (1964)

„Alexa, ruf Oma an.“

Distributed Cognition
Distributed Language

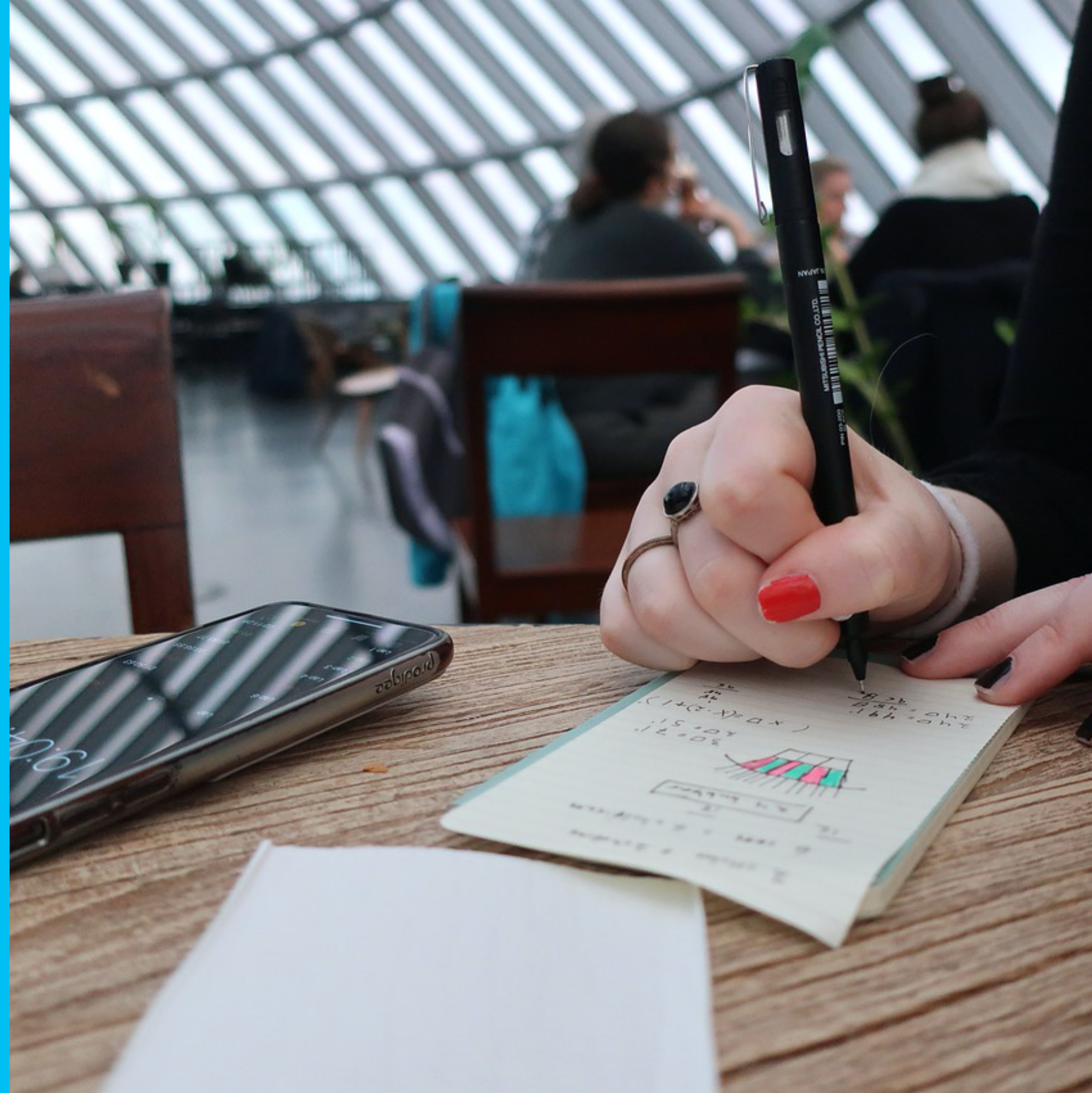
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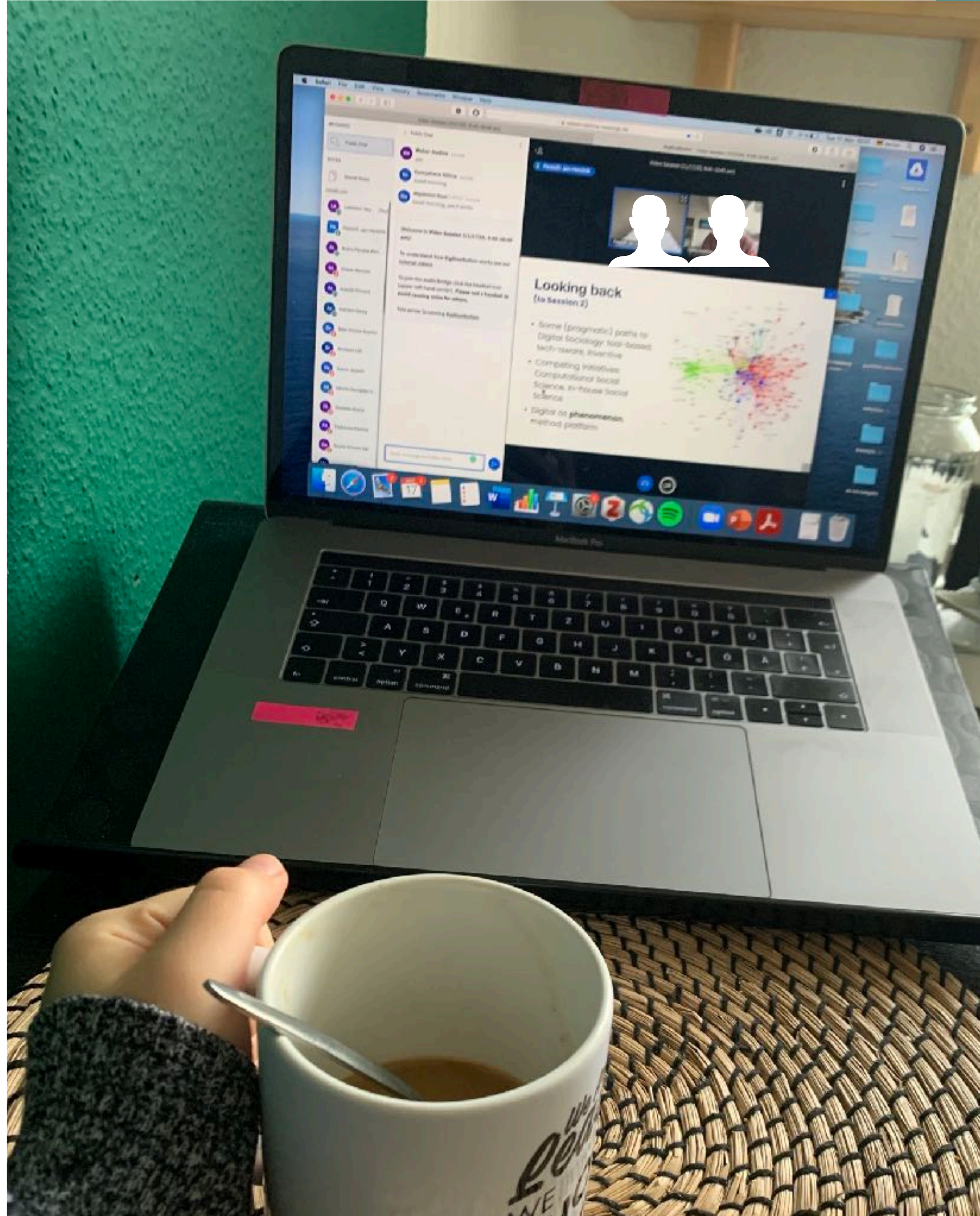
METHODOLOGY

THE ROLE OF THE RESEARCHER

“Language ideological approaches resist the temptation to assume that “linguists know the best” or that there is a “view from nowhere” that would allow investigators to determine what are the important variables extent in a population. It forces analysts to **listen to the valuations of the speakers**. By the same token, it presumes that **all speakers, including linguists, orient to others with the help of ideological presumptions, metacommunication.**”

(Gal 2016, 131)





METHODOLOGY

INTERVIEW PROCEDURE

- In-Depth interviews with users of voice assistants
 - For an earlier paper: A couple (m+f) from Turkey
 - Current thesis: 6 (Turkish-speaking) interviewees from different cities of Germany
- Questions about...
 - Why and where they use their devices
 - Communication problems
 - Language preference
 - Privacy issues
 - Agency

Table 1: Siri as a person (Category 1)

Codes
Siri as an active subject
Siri as female
Asking Siri for advice
Asking Siri how she/he is doing
Referring to memories
Apologizing
Thanking
Greeting/Valediction

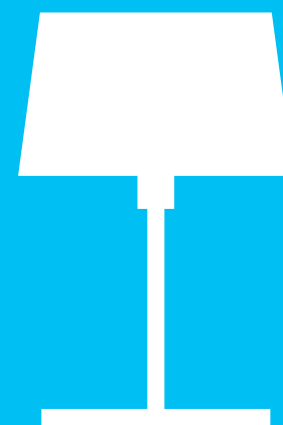
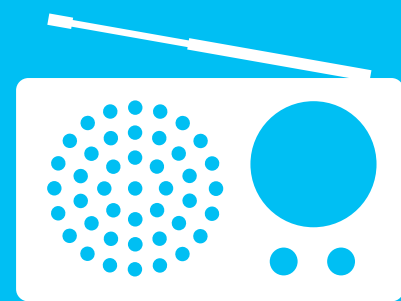
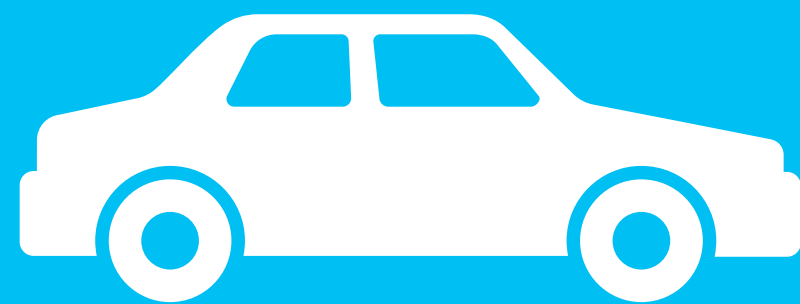
METHODOLOGY

CODING WITH GROUNDED THEORY

(GLASER & STRAUSS 2009, ORIGINAL IN 1967)

- The goal is to discover “**theory from data**” (2)
- obtain the codes and categories from the systematically collected empirical data

SPATIAL DISTRIBUTION OF ATTRIBUTIONS



#1 Tool
#2 Anthromorphizing
#3 Private Sphere



Excerpt 1, Recording 2

	Speaker	Original Transcription	English Translation
1	Int-1	<u>Google Maps ile anneanneye git</u>	<u>Go to the grandmother with Google Maps</u>
2	Siri	Anneannenin adi ne?	What is the name of the grandmother?
3	Int-1	<u>Anneannnenin evi</u>	<u>Grandmother's house</u>



Excerpt 2, Interview 1

135	Int-1	Simdi söyleyeyim bakayım acilsin <u>hey siri, nasilsin iyi misin?</u>	Let me say something so that it opens. <u>Hey Siri, how are you, are you doing well?</u>
136	Siri	Tire esitlik isareti tire esitlik isareti hat kendimi iyi hissediyorum sordugun icin tesekkür ederim	Hyphen equals hyphen equals I feel good, thank you for asking.



#1 - SIRI AS A TOOL AND AN EXTENSION OF HAND



- Siri as a tool in the car
 - This finding was only relevant for the male participant who drives a car
 - The role of spatial repertoire
 - (Potentially) the role of gender

Excerpt 1, Recording 2

	Speaker	Original Transcription	English Translation
1	Int-1	<u>Google Maps ile anneanneye git</u>	<u>Go to the grandmother with Google Maps</u>
2	Siri	Anneannenin adi ne?	What is the name of the grandmother?
3	Int-1	<u>Anneannnenin evi</u>	<u>Grandmother's house</u>

#2 - SIRI AS A (FEMALE) FRIEND



- The role of sound in attributing humanlike characteristics, agency and emotional relationship building
- Anthromorphizing depending on the location
 - Referring to memories
 - Apologising / Thanking / Greeting

Excerpt 6, Interview 1

175	Int-1	[...] <u>hey Siri, (.) nasilsin iyi misin</u>	[...] <u>hey Siri, (.) how are you, are you doing well?</u>
176	Siri	Iyiyim sordugun icin tesekkür ederim	I am fine, thank you for asking.
177	Int-1	Uzaya gitmiyorsun artık @	You are not going into space anymore @

#3 - PRIVACY ISSUES

- Users are not comfortable with using their voice-controlled devices in public
- Interactions with the gadgets as something private and personal
- Privacy of the data seems to not play a role for the participants of my study — in contrast to the studies conducted in Europe and the USA (e.g., Easwara Moorthy & Vu 2015; Lopatovska & Oropeza 2018; Siegert 2020)

Excerpt 9, Interview 2a

89	R	Peki bana seyi gösterebilir misin nasıl kullandigini mesela örnek	Well can you show me how you use it as an example?
90	Int-2	Bak öyle deyince çok utandım	See, I am a little embarrassed when you ask me like this.

WHERE TO GO FROM HERE....

- What is the role of the public and medial discourses the speakers are exposed to in developing certain ideologies?
- Can we speak of a universal role of sound in attribution of agency?

Gender

- How does the pre-given female sound of voice assistants influence our perception?
- Does the gender of the users play a role in their interactions with the gadgets?

Linguistic Diversity

- How do the speakers of more than one language variant perceive their gadgets?
- What happens with the minority language practices? (e.g., Kurdish)

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