Proto-Aesthetic Forms of Communication

Greg Urban
The Proto-Aesthetics of Imperatives .................................................. 223

Ruth Ayash
On the Genesis and the Destiny of Proverbs ..................................... 237

Susanne Günther
'Adding Jade and Pearls to One’s Speech': Aesthetic and Interactive
Functions of Proverbs in Chinese and German Interaction ................... 255

Michael Richter
The Aesthetic Dimension of Oral Performances
in the Early Middle Ages ................................................................. 273

Dirk vom Lehn, Christian Heath and Hubert Knoblauch
Configuring Exhibits. The Interactional Production
of Experience in Museums and Galleries ....................................... 281

Hubert Knoblauch and Helga Kotthoff

The Aesthetics and Proto-Aesthetics of Communication

Introduction

All contributors to this volume aim at highlighting a dimension of speech which is often overlooked: the artistic or aesthetic. This means to overcome a narrow view of the nature of communication as logocentric and information based in order to achieve a view which takes it to be more than information. Communication appeals to taste, to pleasure and to the senses, and it thus encompasses varied sensory channels (audition, vision, touch, taste, smell).

In acknowledging this dimension, the authors of this book diverge from current views of the aesthetic in the humanities in several ways: (1) they do not define aesthetic communication by drawing on a notion of art work or artistic intention; (2) instead of focussing on intrapsychic aesthetic experience, they rather analyse communicative processes, and (3) they do so by specifying empirical features of (proto)aesthetic communication.

Since verbal art is the focus of this volume, we have to ask – and we will do this already in the introduction – what it means to ground aesthetics in communicative processes. It means, for example, to pay particular attention to the forms by which actors create common culture. Verbal art has to do with forms and the experiences invited thereby, and this orientation to forms is accomplished in a communicative process. In this way, culture and artistry are closely linked.

With the subtitle of this book “The Aesthetics and Proto-Aesthetics of Communication”, we point to the assumption that aesthetics and proto-aesthetics are more than a subjective experience. We consider proto-aesthetics as the form underlying all types of communication. All communication involves selection from a set of possibilities. The peculiarity of aesthetics, however, is derived from the very use of certain forms which are culturally marked off as aesthetic. Aesthetic communication, in this sense, refers to an interactive semiotic process involving the objectivation of meaning, an accountable orientation of the interlocutors to the design of discourse and nonordinary reception. Institutionalised art (which carries its purpose in itself) and non-institutionalised

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1 We are very grateful to Elizabeth Couper-Kuhlen for valuable comments. We would also like to thank James Brice and Bernt Schnettler for their help.

2 All contributors presented the first drafts of their papers at a conference on “Aesthetic forms of communication”, held at university of Konstanz two years ago. The conference was financed by the German Science Foundation (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft). It was organised by Elizabeth Couper-Kuhlen, Helga Kotthoff, and Thomas Luckmann, in connection with a special research area on literature and anthropology (Sonderforschungsbereich 511).
forms of aesthetic communication (which also serve other pragmatic purposes) share the same basic structure of everyday communication. As distinct as this discourse sometimes appears, on the one hand, we would consider it mistaken to talk about the aesthetic only and exclusively by virtue of certain culturally highly specific conventions. To the contrary, the contributions to this book demonstrate that many culturally defined forms of artistic communication are grounded in everyday forms of communication.

Yet, on the other hand, we do not want to argue for an extended notion of art. We claim instead that most communicative activities in everyday life have proto-aesthetic dimensions which interlocutors may highlight and communicate as a goal in itself, thereby creating an artistic dimension. We argue that the forms and contents of aesthetic discourses rely upon, draw on and exploit features of everyday communication. We call this underlying dimension proto-aesthetics. This is not to say that all aesthetic communication relies upon proto-aesthetics exclusively. In the course of history various socially differentiated forms and aesthetic genres, settings and institutions have developed which manifest its uniqueness. Especially these elaborated forms of aesthetics ("high arts") are often seen as one of the major pillars of human culture.

The communicative turn in the study of culture

Studying aesthetic communication requires us to pay attention to the relation between communication and culture. Culture cannot be based only on contingent, moment to moment or spontaneous activities of single individuals. Is communication a subordinate element of culture, merely a way to express culture? Or should we regard culture as a sub-system of the communication system? Does culture lie at the heart of societies, linking a society's members by shared knowledge and mutual communicative action? Surprisingly enough, classical studies of culture have seldom posed these questions, since they have rarely been concerned with communication at all. Only in recent times has the importance of communication for culture been discovered: In the anthropology of culture there has been, on the one hand, a strong impact of Saussarian linguistics (which is epitomised in the works of Levi-Strauss, who compares culture to the linguistic structure of "parole"). On the other hand, a branch of anthropological and sociological linguistics has stressed the importance of paroles, the spoken language. In philosophy, there occurred what has been called a "linguistic turn" to a philosophy of language, inaugurated by Wittgenstein and Austin. Both developments have also influenced the sociological concept of culture, leading to what Habermas has labelled the "communicative paradigm". Whereas this notion refers mainly to a theoretical development, investigations of communicative action have also become a topic in the field of qualitative empirical research, resulting in different research traditions, such as "conversation analysis", "ethnography of communication" and "interpretive sociolinguistics". As opposed to the "ethical" approach put forward by Habermas, these empirical disciplines are based on traditions such as phenomenology and hermeneutics, and they share the view that human reality is first of all a social construction (as formulated by Berger and Luckmann), assuming that "language in use" is one of the principal means of this construction process.

Traditionally, the notion of culture has been based on bourgeois "representative culture", which pursued the bourgeois ideals of "Bildung". This notion of culture is restricted to what Scheler called the 'higher forms of knowledge', i.e. science, religion, art, etc. The connotations of this elitist notion had already been attacked by Vico and such "romantic" thinkers as Herder and the Grimms, who were looking for a "folk" culture in its own right, especially with respect to specific communicative forms (such as fairy tales). In sociology this broader notion of culture was only taken up by Georg Simmel, who considered phenomena such as prostitution, fashion and dining as elements of culture, and by Norbert Elias, who preferred the notion of civilisation to culture, in order to account for the styles of mundane actions, "folkways" and habits. The "discovery" of everyday life and its culture led to the insight that the systematic investigation of the relation between culture and society cannot be restricted to the reality of the fine arts but must find its place within reality called "everyday life".

Recently, the importance of discovering everyday culture has been stressed in "British Cultural Studies". But the investigation of everyday symbolic action as "common culture" is not as novel as the representatives of this approach seem to think. The culture of everyday life was studied long before by phenomenological sociology in order to explain the interpretive patterns which give meaning to actions throughout differing institutional spheres of reality. This notion of culture goes back to Alfred Schütz, who developed a theory of everyday life as early as the 1930s; moreover, Schütz stressed that the life-world in which we live and act is always a cultural one. Culture bestows the taken-for-granted character on the life world. Culture thus not only comprises the "mystery" of nature, but also people's knowledge, ideas and meanings. Culture involves typifications of objects, ideas and actions, and joint systems of relevance which guide preferences for objects, ideas and actions common to a certain

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1. We are drawing here on parts of another paper by Hubert Knoblauch, "Culture and Communication. The communicative construction of cultural content", in A. di Luzio, S. Günthner and F. Orletti (Hg.), Communication in Culture. Amsterdam: Benjamin (in print).
Communication and Aesthetics

Aesthetics has often been limited to art in a narrow sense (institutionalised forms of aesthetics). In fact, art is a very prominent form of aesthetic communication, and we may assume that it is a feature of any human culture.\(^{11}\) On the other hand, talking about the aesthetic in terms of art may easily be shown to ethnocentrically narrow the scope of aesthetic phenomena. Although aesthetics is a common feature of all cultures, few consider it as something peculiar which is semantically or socially differentiated from other forms of communication. In fact, the semantics of a separate sphere of aesthetics developed only in the 18th Century, when Baumgarten (1743) isolated “art” from other communicative phenomena in European societies. Even if he still retained a general notion of aesthetics as the science of the sensual perception and knowledge,\(^{16}\) the notion was rapidly redefined (particularly by Kant) to refer to beauty and the sublime in nature and art.\(^{17}\) A narrow notion of the aesthetic as art was further refined by succeeding discourses on art, be it by the romantics, by Hegel or by the impressionists.\(^{18}\) As the sociology of art shows, art developed into an autonomous social “system” or “field” with a specific function, specialised institutions and respective experts. As experts were concentrating on the arts, a communicative code developed not only for the objects, actions, and purposes of art; simultaneously a meta-communicative code developed addressing the very definition of the field, its functions, symbolic meaning and social task. (It is particularly modern art which depends on forms of identity, to conclude that the world of everyday life is essentially communicative. Communication is the very material of which culture is made (and in this respect Schütz also includes non-verbal communication).

Culture, of course, includes art, philosophy, religion etc. But these “symbolic systems” are basically “derivations” which are built on and depend upon everyday life and its symbolic - and communicative - potential.

Admittedly, the notion of communicative culture of everyday life is only hinted at by Schütz, yet it provides a theoretical foundation for corresponding concepts of culture. Thus, for example, Burke suggests that we investigate historical cultures in terms of their communicative forms.\(^{19}\) Wuthnow pushes this idea even further by introducing the notion of a “new sociology of culture” which considers culture to be mainly communicative, to consist of the discourses, texts, symbolic practices and communicative events that constitute the ongoing stream of social life.\(^{20}\) Anthropological linguists, studying ethnographies of performance, also come close to the approach of Schütz by regarding communicative action as a basic element of culture.

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\(^{17}\) In his early work, Kant held to the general notion of the aesthetic. The fundamental change occurred in his *Kritik der Urteilskraft*.
\(^{18}\) This autonomisation is vividly shown by Pierre Bourdieu, “The historical genesis of pure aesthetics”, in: The Field of Cultural Production, Cambridge 1993, 254-266.
\(^{19}\) Niklas Luhmann, Die Kunst der Gesellschaft, Frankfurt 1995, 70.
also depends on the ways in which experiences are rendered visible, i.e. are objectivated and communicated. An objectivation, however, does not presuppose anything like a “work of art”. In our view it simply has to be something significant which is observable in the everyday life world of actors. The very fact that the process of communication may be mediated (and thus separated into “production” and “reception”) and that the objectivation may acquire some meaning which is not identical with the producers’ intention does not challenge this assessment. To the contrary: objectivations are potential parts of any communication process, be it direct or, as Richard Bauman (in this book) demonstrates, mediated communication.

The forms of reflexivity

Placing artistry in the process of communication is a necessary, yet not a sufficient qualification. As Luhmann stresses, aesthetic communication differs from other communication by its appeal to form. We want to underline that it is formed (“gestaltet”) communication. By formed or form-oriented communication we mean that what is being communicated recognisably exceeds the pragmatic and syntactic demands of the communicative activity. However, forms are not generated by the communication ‘system’ itself (as Luhmann thinks). Rather, they are an expression of a subject and experience. Thus, experience and action are not external to aesthetic communication. To the contrary, experience and accountable activity are essential issues of aesthetic communication.

The point that aestheticisation is something to be made accountable leads us to the anthropological notion of reflexivity as coined by Victor Turner. Reflexivity in his sense refers to the fact that human beings do not just act; in acting they can direct their attention to the act itself. To Turner, this is particularly salient with respect to performances: the human being is a ‘homo performans’. Since performances are reflexive, in performing, “human beings reveal themselves for themselves”. This notion of reflexivity should not be restricted to aesthetic communication, for reflexivity relates to any kind of metacommunication, or, to use Turner’s words, “the ability to communicate about communication itself”. Babcock also stressed this general feature of reflexivity in communication: reflexivity is characterised by all the features which make communication a social process. Reflexivity manifests itself in shaping, working out or designing the material side of communication. It is a precondition of artistry.

28 It is quite clear that we diverge at this point from Luhmann’s approach – a divergence we strongly underline.
30 Turner, op. cit., 76.
Reflexivity is expressed in the forms of communication, and, of course, only in this way it can be detected. The formedness of communication itself is a basic feature of culture. In this sense we already suggested employing the notion of proto-aesthetics to refer to the very formedness of any communication process. Proto-aesthetics – a term we will be explaining later in this chapter – should be distinguished from aesthetic communication in a narrower sense. To speak of aesthetic communication in a specific sense (as distinguished e.g. from religious, economic or political communication) presupposes, first, the sociohistorical processes by which various cultures develop specialized subsystems (politics, economy, art, religion etc.), professions (priests, poets, politicians) and their respective special knowledge and activity. Yet, more fundamentally, aesthetic communication, secondly, refers to formedness itself as reflexively intended. In other words, aesthetic communication is oriented to form as a value in itself; forms are foregrounded in the performance of aesthetic communication. By bringing design features to the centre of attention an attempt is made to make subjective experience accessible.  

There have been various ways in which analysts have tried to grasp this notion of forms. Thus Luhmann stresses that aesthetic communication exhibits “marks of difference” (Differenzmarkierungen) in contrast to what he calls “ordinary communication”.  

The question of how activities are differentiated in ordinary communication has been most pertinently addressed by the notion of frame by Gregory Bateson and Erving Goffman. Although their frame concept has seldom been discussed with respect to aesthetic communication, the notion offers a promising first step in order to differentiate between everyday and aesthetic communication. To Bateson and Goffman, every organisation of experience is constructed by framing procedures, such as a political or religious event in everyday life, play or the theatrical. Based on everyday forms of communication, experiences can be transformed from one such frame into another. Aesthetic communication, then, can be analysed as a special frame which has been developed in cultures to call attention to design and thereby show subjectivity.  

Various researchers have contributed to analysing frames. Gumperz relates frames to what he calls contextualisation cues, prosodic and stylistic features which govern conversational inferences beyond the level of the said.  

These subtle non- and paraverbal and stylistic cues play a role in creating an aesthetic quality of communication. Soeffner and others analyse political speeches and performances as rituals which are put on stage (Inszenierung) and thereby aesthetically framed.  

Kotthoff discusses conversational humor as resting on multimodal contextualisation cues, such as laughter or prosody. Speakers use mimics, gestures, tones of voice and many other cues to index the constantly changing contextual presuppositions on which situated interpretations in oral discourse depend. It is always important whether a message is meant to be serious (ordinary) or not (non-ordinary). She sees conversational joking as having an aesthetic dimension, inviting people to enjoy performance and creative sense-making. Conversational humour creates distance from the serious content and opens up a specific realm for reception.  

Performance analysis has in the Anglo Saxon tradition been a successful way to deal with the ways in which communication can be marked off from the ordinary. In addition, the notion of performance allows us to focus not only on linguistic activities but also on the multidimensionality of human communication in its local and social contexts. As Blackburn states, performance “is whatever happens to a text in context”.  

Thus, performance, but not only relates to the enactedness of everyday communication, it also refers to the multimodality which Finnegan regards as an essential part of communication. In addition to multimodality, the notion of performance also points to the interrelatedness of different modes of communication. This aspect is highlighted by Knut Finnegan, who stresses that the artful dimensions of communication have to do with many modalities. She illustrates it with a brief example from her own study of story-telling among the Limpá of Sierra Leone in West Africa. This scientifically transcribed text, the story-telling, no longer as convincing as they were in the multi-media process of telling. The communication was auditory, not just through words, but also through prosody, style features, songs and the expected sound patterning of its delivery. It was visual through gesture, facial expression, orientation, posture. Body, mood, mystery, humour and last but not least, the participation of the audience also informed the story-telling process. Story-telling was not a matter of the transfer of information, but more of artistry, enchantment and performance.

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33 This notion of aesthetic communication corresponds nicely to what Seel calls aesthetic rationality, which he locates in the ‘structure of perceptual activities with respect to objects of a certain kind’. Cf. Martin Seel, Die Kunst der Entzweigung. Zum Begriff der ästhetischen Rationalität, Frankfurt 1997, 34.


36 The notion of performance was first derived from Chomsky’s distinction between linguistic competence as knowledge of grammar and the ‘realisation’ of this knowledge in speaking. In referring to the latter as performance, he considered it to be a deficient application of the ideal rules of language. This assumption that the regularity of language is based only on its abstract structure was almost reversed by Dell Hymes, “Breakthrough into performance”, in: Dan Ben-Amos and Kenneth Goldstein (eds.), Folklore Communication and Performance. The Hague 1975, 3-7. In using a different notion of performance, Hymes wanted to stress that it is rather the situative use of language which exhibits a regular structure. On this basis, performances became subject to an approach which was chiefly developed in folklore and linguistic anthropology. For a detailed account cf. Marvin Carlson (1996), Performance. A Critical Introduction, London and New York.

Performance studies draw attention to how members manage to mark off these situations from the flow of ordinary communication. These markings off (which should be regarded as processual accomplishments rather than static signs) are partly due to the aesthetic features mentioned above. They suggest 'distancing.' Distancing seems to be an important pre-condition for aestheticisation. Genre performances provide paradigmatic examples for what may be viewed as aesthetic enclaves within everyday life, e.g., in combination with grief in the case of death, as is discussed in this volume by Helga Kotthoff. Her data from Georgian lamentation rituals also show how artistic features of the laments such as speaking in lines, partial song delivery, style features, special ways of accommodating dialogues with the deceased create a special space of experience for all participants. Lamentation is a distancing process for the lamenters themselves. Emotions cannot just 'flood out' but have to be shaped by high formal standards. As oral artists the lamenters become mediators who link the realm of the living with that of the dead.

Poetics

Although in everyday life most oral activities are of a transitory sort, they have already in various ways been related to verbal art. Kotthoff and other authors in this book use Roman Jakobson's concept of poetics to point to formal qualities of the artistic performance.

For quite some time anthropological linguists have been dealing with the poetics of oral texts. In various essays published since 1958, Jakobson developed his basic thesis that the poetic consists in a focus on a principle of equivalence of formal structures. Poetic language projects the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection onto the axis of combination. Syntactical parallelism, multiple levels of meaning, sound parallelism and analogies in accents, rhythms, pauses and lexical equivalents permit the classification of a text as poetic. Principles of repetition shift from the paradigmatic level to the syntagmatic level of sign combination. The recognition of the same evokes a sense of aesthetic pleasure. In this way, the text usually performs several functions together, artistic as well as practical.

Roman Jakobson's multifunctional approach to language incorporated poetics as a possible dimension of any communication. He showed a poetic function in many text types (among them advertisements), usually in conjunction with other functions, for example emotive or conative ones. Therefore the poetic function is found not only in poetry, but also in other sorts of text, even if they are dominated by some other function. His broad notion of poetics, however, causes problems if one tries to determine a hierarchy of functions for a certain performance, but it helps us to identify whether an artistic dimension

is staged or not. Since this dimension most often goes together with other dimensions (such as religious, memorialising and affective ones in Kotthoff's lamentation data), we may use it at least to outline the non-ordinary quality of a discourse. Jakobson's concept suggests that everyday communication is somehow more fundamental than artistic texts. In this vein, Blame argues that literary and other art forms are in a sense "derivations" or "playful forms of everyday communication." Also Pratt assumes that there are transformational rules by which ordinary discourse is transformed into (aesthetic) literary discourse. Harvey Sacks also employed a formal definition of the poetic. In a new book he referred with the designation "poetics" to "sound-rows" or "sound sequences" which he frequently encountered in everyday language. The poetic is by no means found only in canonical, written, literary texts, but rather is found wherever a conspicuous orientation to styling and wording is evident (for example, in humor). Ordinary conversation is often made up of linguistic strategies that have been thought of as quintessentially literary. Linguists such as Tannen, who are interested in orality, have in recent years studied artfully elaborated speaking and aesthetic orientations in quite varied everyday discourses produced in West-European or American cultures. They show poetic processes and the resulting joy in successful expression in the everyday social world of the speakers, where oral poetry fulfills functions in the context of sociability and community formation.

Linguistic anthropologists, as for example Blame, Bauman, Günther, Kallmeyer and Kotthoff, have studied the performance of narrative texts, their rhetorical structuring and such phenomena as polysynmy, which comes about through the complex manipulation of the "poetic mode." Other interesting phenomena are details and contrasts, the dramatisation of protagonists' voices in reported dialogue, the complex management of tempo and the emergence of fictional and playful elements.

Briggs and Bauman summarise developmental lines in anthropological linguistics which produced a shift in orientation from text to performance, with the latter term drawing researchers' attention to both social and poetic dimensions of the assumption of accountability to an audience for a display of virtuosity.

34 Roman Jakobson, "Linguistik und Poetik", in: Jens Ihwe (Hg.), Literaturwissenschaft und Linguistik, Frankfurt 1971, 142-178, 154.

Towards a Proto-Aesthetics of Everyday Communication

Frames, performances, genres and ethnocategories are among the important categories by which we may analyse verbal art. As Goffman already stressed, aesthetic communication differs from ordinary communication, but at the same time it is rooted in ordinary communication: “It is true, then, that the frameworks in which words are spoken pass far beyond ordinary conversation. But it is just as true that these frameworks are brought back into conversation, acted out in a setting which they initially transcended”. This has serious effects already on our understanding of framing. Framing does not just characterise transformations between different cultural modes and settings, such as those between ordinary conversation and theatrical performances (such as conversational joking). Framing occurs in everyday communication: we can frame verbal attacks or anecdotes (and most other activities) as humorous, depressing or serious (Kottöff in this volume), invitations as major or minor events, farewells as joyous or sad occasions. In his own analyses of everyday interactions, Goffman also referred to a sub-type of framing called footing. Footings concern our concrete roles as speakers and hearers, e.g., the degree of responsibility we take for what we say (cf. Bauman in this volume). Also, as Susanne Güntner (this volume) nicely shows, by uttering proverbs speakers not only demonstrate personal wisdom but also place themselves in a certain tradition “which comes out of their mouth”.

By proto-aesthetics we mean that already “aesthetically unmarked” forms of everyday communication exhibit certain features which the basis for more obviously marked aesthetic forms. Thus Volker Hoeschen (this volume) stresses that “ritualisation and aesthetical marking are matters of degree”, that is, many if not all ways of aesthetic marking are inherent in everyday discourse and wordplay, only later developing into refined and enlarged structures”. He sees roots of aesthetic communication in the phenomenon of “veiled” speech, roundabout ways of speaking which allow to exercise social criticism in a small community. Word play, special language, secret names – all involve distanced talk, distanced from emotion and interest. Aesthetisation involves moving from an object of primary interest to an object of secondary interest, accompanied by awareness. In the same vein Ruth Finnegan (this volume) also out-

lines in her article that aestheticisation lies along a continuum. There is seldom a sharp break between casual and artistic activities. Drawing on other ethnographers of communication such as Feld and Duranti, she concludes that all forms of communication are in a way aesthetic, but aesthetics can be foregrounded, heightened and intensified.

Another way of marking which is not necessarily aesthetic consists in bounding performances. Bounded performances exhibit temporal brackets and frames; they are organised in a communicative structure which may be described in terms of communicative patterns and genres. In the functional sense of the word, genres such as stories, jokes, arguments or lamentations constitute institutions of communication and thereby incorporate proto-aesthetic dimensions of communication culture. The social institutionalisation of such forms is, in a sense, also the subject matter of Richard Bauman’s analysis of medial performance. With his paper he brings transportability into the discussion as another central concept. In studying the ways in which communication processes are moved from one context to another, he tries to demonstrate how they acquire the character of tradition and authority. In accordance with the communicative notion of culture he considers tradition as discursive and interpretive achievement, and the authority of texts as something which is achieved by the communicative form (in fact by submission to the form, the utterance obtains its rhetorical power). Mediation, and along with it the enlargement and transformation of participant structures, provides a useful way of thinking about some of the devices encountered in Georgian laments and even in medieval Latin texts concerning oral culture (as presented by Richter). The role of mediation in the establishment and maintenance of authority and power becomes obvious not only with respect to the texts discussed by Bauman but also with respect to Irene Wall’s African linguistic treatises and with respect to Ruth Ayafo’s German proverbs. In a similar vein, Greg Urban and Susanne Güntner try to show how power in a culture is transmitted by certain forms of utterances (in Güntner’s case proverbs and in Urban’s case commands).

Actors do not merely coordinate their communicative action and synchronise their understandings in generic ways. Genres are also the most important ways of framing communication: e.g. religious communication is best identified by its specific genres (prayer, sermon, chant, lament, hymn etc.). Political or, for that matter, aesthetic communication is also culturally marked by certain forms (even if these aesthetic genres, as well as aesthetic performances, often serve other social purposes, such as religious, medical, therapeutic, or political functions). Most prominent among these are the genres of oral poetry, such as genealogical recitations, epic stories, myths, magic, lamentations, etc. (Finnegan, Hoeschen, and Kottöff in this volume). Of course, these forms vary between cultures, and they are subject to serious social struggles within cultures and between structures.

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49 See the references of Finnegan’s article.

Moreover, as Hanks stresses, generic events have fuzzy boundaries: "The idea of objectivist rules is replaced by schemes and strategies, leading one to view genre as a set of focal and prototypical elements which actors use variously and which never become fixed in a unitary structure." This is most pertinently demonstrated in the analysis of advertisement spots by Knoblauch and Raab since this genre is essentially "parasitic": it exploits features of a series of neighbouring genres, such as films, soap operas, Westerns, music video clips. For this reason, advertisement spots take on a number of different forms or "types". Nevertheless, by reason of their functional orientation towards persuasion, they still remain identifiable to viewers.

Whereas the aesthetic quality of genres may often remain implicit and ambivalent, many cultures develop explicit notions as to what they consider to be aesthetic. These explicit notions are referred to by the term ethnocategory. Ethnocategories can provide explicit interpretive schemes for the aesthetic as used by the actors themselves. The investigation of Chinese proverbs by Günther provides one pertinent example for such ethnocategories and their corresponding ethnotheories. Based on a comparison between Germans and Chinese she demonstrates that the aesthetic quality of communicative processes also depends on the cultural evaluation of the proverbs. Thus, whereas in Germany proverbs are considered low brow forms of communication, Chinese regard them as elements of sophisticated rhetoric and high verbal art. Günther makes it clear that such ethnocategories are more than personal matters of taste. In fact, the importance of proverbs in China is based on a long (and with respect to Confucianism) quite unique cultural tradition. Even today the knowledge of proverbs is transmitted by major cultural institutions, such as schools and universities.

From a methodological point of view, ethnocategories are of major importance since they constitute explicit emic or, to use Schütz' phrase, 'first order constructs' of the aesthetic. We should, however, be aware that such categories need not be rendered explicit, but often remain implicit in the communication process. For example, most cultures differentiate many genres of conversational joking, such as personal anecdotes, standardised jokes, teasing, banter, mocking etc. The implicit aesthetic dimension may be identified by scientific observers, given that their ways of identifying are based on the knowledge of society's members.

Our notion of proto-aesthetics runs parallel to what Willis calls grounded aesthetics. By grounded aesthetics he refers to the everyday application of symbolic creativity to symbolic materials and resources in context, whereby new meanings are attributed to or associated with them. However, the symbolic creativity and thus grounded aesthetics he refers to is exclusively linked to the use of manufactured, mass culture items (by adolescents). For example, repeated listening to records and tapes, writing words down, and memorising them helps to make them personal and meaningful possessions. He presents shopping as an example of an increasingly symbolic activity of selecting, combining and recombining different clothing articles. Style and fashion are about experimenting with identity and making personal statements. This he thinks of as a vertical creativity functioning along the axes of providing things and sites. Although it may be true that there are new forms of aesthetics involved in this, the notion of proto-aesthetics is not restricted to the prefabrication of material mass products. It also and most importantly includes verbal and visual forms of communication. In fact, language and paralinguistic means figure prominently in the studies we are presenting in this volume. Aydy, Günther, Heidemann, Koethe, and Urban (in this volume) exemplify the use of such means, i.e. special registers (Classical Chinese), the use of nouns (Eipo), figurative language (metaphors, metonymy, formulaic language in Georgian), formal stylistic features (rhythm, alliteration, parallelism, contrast pairs) and specific prosodical features. Claiming that these elements point to artistic qualities of communication is not to proclaim all communication to be only aesthetic, i.e. arguing for an extended notion of aesthetics. In fact, the very reason to use the notion of proto-aesthetics is to be able to distinguish between the resources of aesthetics and what is culturally conceived to be a recognisable form of aesthetic communication.

We do not intend to consider proto-aesthetics as genetically or evolutionarily prior to aesthetics. What we say is that certain forms, such proverbs, formulae, line structures of speech delivery, stylised prosody) are present in everyday speech and appear pleasant without being considered non-ordinary. On the other hand, we assume that, in most societies, there are special aesthetic forms of communication, marked off as certain genres which demand competence, especially designed situations, skilled persons and institutions (such as lamentation). Since we do assume a certain independence of proto-aesthetic forms and specialised aesthetic (or literary) discourses, we may conclude that they proto-aesthetic forms resources used by aesthetic communication (which, however, cannot be reduced to these forms only).

There were two reasons not to begin the preface by discussing notions of institutionalised art in the Western sense of the word when trying to come to grips with aesthetic communication in general. We present them in finishing the preface: First, the notion of art in Western society is subject to fundamental changes. More specifically, its meaning is extended in various ways: (a) within the art system itself, a variety of tendencies support a notion of art not restricted to the system, its product and its communication; (b) there is a salient tendency of "aestheticisation" in various social institutions and groups outside of the arts system itself, and some claim that (c) the current (so called "postmodern") general world-view is becoming more and more aesthetic. Moreover, institutionally specialised art is restricted to a small number of societies. If one attempts a comparative anthropological analysis of aesthetics across different cultures, it is, therefore, rather unwise to start from the particular and peculiar features of the Western form of aesthetics which developed in the last two hundred years.

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52 Koethe 1998, op. cit.
The contributions to this volume

The studies in this book offer a broad variety of theoretical and empirical approaches by scholars of a number of disciplines. Contributors include ethnologists, folklorists, sociologists and anthropological linguists. The studies in this volume deal with a wide range of different areas including investigations of African, British, Chinese, Oceanian, Georgian, German, American, Irish and Amerindian Brazilian cultures. Finally, some of the studies address theoretical issues, whereas most of them also analyse empirical data.

The major theoretical contributions concern what we labelled the communicative turn in the study of culture and aesthetics. Thus the contributions of Finnegan, Irvine, and Bauman address the importance of a richer notion of communication, the relation of genre and culture and the traditionalisation of culture by means of mediated communication. The second set of contributions by Roughley, Hesseh, Kothoff, Raab and Knoblauch – starts from empirical studies of the aesthetics of various forms of performances, and the final set of authors - Gantmacher, Ayasse, Urban, Richter and Heath, Knoblauch and von Lehmk – addresses communicative forms which, although not markedly aesthetic, exhibit the features of what we defined as proto-aesthetic.

Ruth Finnegan reminds us that we need to temper our attention to cognitive definitions of "the message" by a much greater awareness of a variety of possible communicative media. She criticises the "engineering-inspired framework" of communication as efficient information transfer from one social group to another. Going through a vast array of examples in the work of authors such as Wittgenstein, sociology of language, models of communication leave us with the impression that communication particularly consists of words leaving out paralinguistic, affective and non-verbal performative strategies. As a basic tenor of many evolutionary analyses she considers the view as limited which emphasises the "rational" and "propositional" nature of language instead of, for instance, its aesthetic and emotive qualities. Ruth Finnegan calls attention to the many communicative dimensions besides the verbal: audition, vision, movement and spatial, olfaction, and touch - thereby reminding us that interpersonal communication almost always more is happening than just linguistic interchange. Artful dimensions of communication have to do with all these modalities. Story-telling, for example, is auditory not just through words but also through prosody, style features and the expected sound patterning of its delivery. It is visual through gesture, facial expression, orientation, posture. Body, mood, mystery, humour and last but not least, the participation of the audience also forms the story telling process. Story-telling is not limited to transfer of information but includes artistry and performance.

To gain a richer view of communication she suggests shifting metaphors in discussing communication. Instead of talking about "codes" and "information" we could bring into play terms like "enchanted" and "magicality". Images of this kind would appreciate expressiveness, creativity and emotive forces. To capture these processes we need a richer standard model of communication.

Judith Irvine traces the increasing detachment of linguistics from literary concerns in an earlier period of linguistics' history - the nineteenth century - and in a particular body of work, the representation of African languages by Europeans and European-educated Africans. It was the period in which European powers penetrated into the interior of Africa and assimilated almost the entire continent into their imperial systems. Of particular interest for reconstructing processes of language standardisation is the question of genres. What were the genres of discourse in African languages which linguists took as source materials? In what genres did the linguists themselves write? Irvine suggests that we answer these questions by taking ideologies of language and the political context of the imperial expansion into consideration. The connection of linguistic analysis with the establishment of standards, and with intellectual and moral improvement of the Africans was widespread. By "cultivating" (fixing, standardising) African languages, missionaries and other colonisers wanted to "cultivate" the people. Since written literature was missing they struggled to find criteria of "best usage" of language, such as translations of Bible stories.

The texts themselves fall into various types: dictionaries, grammars, collections of folktales, etc. This typology is crosscut by another, consisting of genre types such as poetry, novel, essay, scripture and liturgy. We have to do with a complex network of intertextual relations. Irvine looks at the networks in terms of the author's concerns and goals: in particular, the relationship between literary or aesthetic concerns, and analytic or scientific ones. She calls attention to the idea of authorship and authority. Is there a creator of the text? A translator? Transmitter? It is her idea that relations among genres are patterned in social relations. In the 19th century, social structures of communication in Europe and between Europe and Africa grew increasingly complex and hierarchical, mediated by growing structures of colonial authority deriving from the metropolises and displacing Africans downward in the chains of communication and command. At the same time, the professionalisation of academic linguistics in Europe depersonalised the European author's relationship to his/her work, disparaging social involvement with a language's actual speakers. In this process aesthetic concerns disappeared as well.

Richard Bauman calls into question the speaker-hearer dyad, a foundational conception of linguistics and communication theory. He takes mediated communication as the starting point, the relaying of spoken messages through intermediaries. In analysing various texts from an Irish-Celtic background, Fiji narratives and a Mexican festival drama, he focuses on speech routines organised around the relay by a mediator of at least one utterance from a source to an ultimate targeted receiver, with the relayed message framed and understood by the participants as a replication of the original. The routinisation of mediation in performance highlights and exploits some essential properties and capacities of the process in an illuminating way. The mediational forms that are the focus of this investigation are conventionalised performances, programmed to include mediational routines. Mediation renders the participant structure of communicative exchanges far more complex than dyadic speaker-hearer mod-
els can accommodate. Performances built upon structures of mediation represent in their various ways participants' manipulations of participent roles to various functional ends. Mediational routines decompose among others addresssee and target as well as source and actual sender.

The philosopher Neil Roughley asks in his paper whether the traditional philosophical concept of aesthetics, as the "theory of the senses", can be salvaged today given the differentiation of the disciplines dealing with perception, sensation and the arts. He argues that from Baumgarten's original conception of the discipline we can salvage the central distinction between showing ("clear", but "confused") and saying ("clear and distinct"). This approach to the aesthetic is complemented by its conceptualisation as that domain of experience in which the subject of an experience is irrepressible. Understood in either way, the aesthetic sphere is broader than that of the fine arts. Further, Roughley argues that the aesthetic is best understood as a value-sphere, i.e. a sphere in which questions of relative goodness or badness can arise within human experience. Understood as a form of showing, aesthetic value would appear to be (quasi) cognitive in character; understood as grounded in the value of being an individual centre of perception and feeling, it also contains an emotive, (proto) practical component. The second conceptualisation allows for both elements.

According to this analysis, "aesthetic" is primarily a predicate applying to forms of qualitative experience. Secondly, it can apply to a particular attitude: a way of attending to elements of a situation which enables the subject to experience them aesthetically. Such an attitude can at times be adopted at will. However, it is generally triggered by cultural cues or frames which instigate the norms of attention. Such cues may also function directly by simply causing the experience, without attitudinal mediation. Finally, the predicate "aesthetic" can also be applied to qualities: characteristics of objects worth focussing on in order to experience them aesthetically. On the basis of this argumentation, Roughley claims that poetic language-use, in Jakobson's sense, which focuses the attention of the recipient on the medium of language, is aesthetic to the extent that it is conducive to an experience which is necessarily first-hand. In standardised or ritualised social communication contexts, what makes that first-person experience matter may very well include, but will almost always exceed, the effects of language-use.

Volkert Heeschm analyses everyday talk among the Mek and the Eipo who live in the mountains of West New Guinea, focussing particularly on ritualised and aesthetically marked forms of communication. Yet, as Heeschm stresses, already unmarked everyday talk involves aesthetic features. This is due to the function of communication in face-to-face societies which tends towards indirection in order to avoid conflict. 34 For this reason social criticism is typically

bound in ritualised speech, song, fairy tale and dancing-song. It is distanced from the original event and expressed in artistic genres which demand hearers to listen carefully in order to understand all the allusions, irony, and ambiguities. Everyday talk, as he shows by examples, is pervaded by wordplay, quotations or allusions to songs, or is developed into para-oratory or para-song. For small communities based on orality, such as those in the West Guinea mountains where practically everything is known to everybody, oral skills focus more on arousing interest anew in what has often been talked about. For example, real occurrences are transformed into fairy tales to make them more interesting. There is a social hierarchy in practising certain genres. Oratory is, for example, reserved to important men. Women compose love songs. People remember the exact wording and admire creators of idioms. Aesthetic strategies are said by the author to create an atmosphere in which the interest is turned away from the original events and turned to joy of discovering social meanings in enigmatic forms. This movement away from an object of primary interest toward an object of secondary interest is what characterises play: aesthetics and ritualisation increase the importance of the meta-message "this is play." After having delineated the aesthetic features of myths, Heeschm "playfully" argues for a general human tendency to use aesthetic forms of communication - the indirectness typical of aesthetic communication allows humans to manage distance to others and to themselves.

Helga Kothoff's article deals with the relationship between aesthetics, emotion, and religious practice in Georgian mourning rituals, especially in lamentations. The article focuses on the poetic performance and social meaning of the genre as religious activity. Poetry here fulfills a function in affect management for both the lamenters and the audience. The lamenting woman carries out emotion work for the whole community. Instead of regarding ritual wailing as a form of losing control of oneself the high standard of performative art shows that wailers must be in good control of their affects. Aesthetised speech, demanding bodily control of the mourners during the performance of "being beside oneself," involves the audience in grieving and thus makes possible a consensual coming to terms with the loss and the creation of a shared cultural memory.

Lamentation is a ritual of shared grieving which celebrates social bonding among village people, and is staged to intensify relations to the deceased in the hereafter. Kothoff shows how words of various deceased persons are staged in direct citations. In these ritual dialogues the loss of a person is symbolically communalized, and by aestheticisation the grief is quasi therapeutically worked out. By involving others with their moving words and gestures the loss is symbolically shared, whereby the social network is reaffirmed. The ceremonial genre of lamentation refers to moral standards of the village world which are recreated and linked with emotional and religious expression. Kothoff presents transcripts from a lamentation and analyses the form and func-

34 It may be interesting to note that Bergmann and Luckmann have made a similar observation with respect to morality, assuming, however, that this be a peculiar feature of modern society. Jörg Bergmann and Thomas Luckmann (eds.): Die kommunikative Konstruktion von Moral, Opladen 1999.
tion of the genre within a theory of emotion work, thereby linking artistic expression with body politics, power, and social structure. The article focuses on interrelated dimensions of Georgian death rituals and on the creation of an extraordinary space in which the living can experience contact with the deceased.

Hubert Knoblauch and Jürgen Raab analyse the aesthetic and generic features of advertisement spots. Against the background of previous research on the generic and typological features of advertisement spots, they present the results of a genre analysis of some 300 advertisement spots shown on German television. First, they address the basic structural elements of this genre based on a theory of communicative genres they describe. By means of these elements, they then distinguish five major empirical types of advertisement spots. Finally, they try to relate these types to the aesthetic habitus of five major social milieus in German society. Since they thereby show that only two of the five types mentioned fit into the common thesis of an increasing aestheticisation of advertisement spots. Their argument challenges the common thesis of the increasing aestheticisation of advertisement spots: first, they conclude, this thesis one-sidedly builds on upper class concepts of aesthetics. Yet, the apparently less aesthetic kinds of spots are not likely to disappear at all. The adaptation of high brow aesthetic forms by some types of spots can be understood as a kind of secondary aestheticisation which, however, is based on the existence of a well established genre.

Susanne Günther investigates the use of Chinese and German proverbs. Stressing the importance of studying the use of language in its natural context, she focuses on proverb usage in conversations between Chinese speakers and German speakers, as well as in intercultural communication between Chinese and Germans. Particularly Chinese speakers seem to be appreciative of proverbs, marking off the flow of speech by a series of very clear-cut features: rhythmical patterns and voice volume are modulated, the register of Classical Chinese is selected, and various poetic elements are deployed which indicate the switch into what may be called verbal art rather than ordinary speech. In fact, as Günther shows, Chinese speakers appreciate the aesthetic quality of proverbs explicitly by means of what she very succinctly calls an ethnotheory, and in doing so, they hark back to a long Chinese tradition of the verbal art of proverbs which is still being transmitted in educational settings. In her comparison to the German attitudes towards and traditions of proverb use, she detects, however, crucial differences. Although sometimes exhibiting similar poetic features, proverbs are in low esteem among German speakers. This different appreciation of proverbs is not only a very common source of misunderstanding between Chinese and Germans. (Thus, in conversations with Germans, Chinese may use German proverbs to support arguments, whereas Germans consider this as a poor style.) It also demonstrates the importance of ethnotheory for the understanding of aesthetic communication, i.e. the culturally specific stylistic and aesthetic evaluation of a genre.

Ruth Ayaßen discusses what she calls categorial formulations, e.g. “he who keeps this a secret is acting with malicious intention”, in comparison to proverbs. Categorical formulations share most of the features of proverbs – except for the characteristic of being known and, as is shown in the course of the article, in a different degree of stability in formulation and moral charge. She found many more categorial formulations than proverbs in many everyday situations in Germany. Proverbs were nearly absent from the large corpus of spoken discourse she examined. One genre, mass media sermons, turned out to be full of categorial formulations. Although Ayaßen does not address the aesthetic aspects of these forms explicitly, she identifies a number of forms of categorial formulations: They always exhibit a condensing quality; techniques of phonetic assonance, of symmetrical organisation, syntactic and semantic parallelisms and even metaphorical features give them a poetic character; they are sentences which have a caesura in the middle. By these formal means they gain a formulaic quality. A very strong connection between the two actions referred to in the two parts is suggested. It is Ayaßen’s thesis that formulations which are packaged in such formulaic sentences have a better chance to survive their original context. The more compact they are, the more they make sense apart from their original context, and the more they have poetic or metaphorical qualities, – the better is their chance of being picked up by other speakers. It is Ayaßen’s thesis that these categorial formulation are proverbs in statu nascendi. And whereas proverbs, apparently, have lost moral weight at least in Germany (as Günther has shown convincingly), categorial formulations seem to take over the moral function of proverbs, i.e. indirect communication which, to Ayaßen, is a specific feature of modern society.

Greg Urban focuses on a very special communicative pattern: He detects an explicit command/conflicted resistance pattern in typical American films. This model exhibits a peculiar artful patterning which lends a certain aesthetic appeal. In fact, Urban argues that the explicit formulation of commands and the subsequent response of refusing to comply with the command is a highly cultural-specific pattern. This pattern can be found not only in the films he analyses, it is common in American culture. This makes the pattern easily understandable and almost trivial at first glance. More provocatively, he argues that the very triviality and taken-for-grantedness is due to the fact that patterns like this enter into the rhetorical unconscious of a culture. By being part of the cultural unconscious it represents and reproduces a cultural model of authority and power implicit to the model. In order to demonstrate the cultural specificity of the model, he compares it with examples from Native Brazilian myths. To be sure, of course, commands can be found; however, the commands do not yield a similar pattern, since they do not follow the principle of individual will implicit in the command/conflicted response pattern. Instead, they follow a pattern he calls fateful compliance, which does not involve internal conflicts. The models represented by these patterns do not exist independently of these patterns. In fact, he argues that it is by the very circulation of these patterns in discourse that they become effective in a culture, being part of the rhetorical
unconscious. And, finally, their very aesthetic design facilitates the entry of such patterns into this rhetorical unconscious.

Michael Richter discusses aesthetic dimensions of oral performances in the early Middle Ages from the perspective of a historian. He stresses how difficult it is to gain access to the verbal contents of an oral culture such as the one between the sixth and ninth century. Richter then discusses four case studies; the first is a report about personal experiences of the author Gregory (Bishop of Tours, d. 594). In this written text we meet certain expectations as to manners of speaking in the mass. Another episode Richter discusses stems from Vita sanctae Radegundis, where a nun tells the abbess that a group of voices outside is singing a song which she claims to have composed. The nun enjoyed hearing the song. She had aesthetic expectations which she brought to the appropriate performance of secular songs, and these expectations were apparently met. We learn from this example that this manifestation of oral culture was performed, sung, and danced with instrumental music by a group of people. The important information about an oral culture is mostly incidental. The third study concerns a story about an English layman in the monastery of Staneshalch in the seventh century, the fourth is about Otfrid von Weissenburg. From the examples, Richter concludes that oral culture took hold of the entire personality and its emotions. Therefore writing was little used in those centuries, although it was available.

Christian Heath, Hubert Knoblauch and Dirk vom Lehcn explore conduct and interaction in museums and galleries and in particular the ways in which people, both alone and with others, examine, consider, and interact to manipulate exhibits. The materials, field observations and video-recordings, are drawn from different types of exhibition, and include exhibits such as pictures, puzzles, and scientific displays. With respect to the conventional forms of aesthetics in museums and galleries, their analyses show clearly the degree to which the notion of a solitary aesthetic experience is misconstrued. The encounter with the aesthetic object is always embedded in the context of interaction with other people, and even the activity of watching is shown to be closely tied to and coordinated with the activities of other people. The paper examines generally what one looks at and does in museums and galleries, emerges in and through the interaction between people within the domain, not just those who are together, partners, families and the like, but others who happen to be in the ‘same space’, within the “perceptual range of the event”. By examining a series of incidents, examples of people looking at, seeing, and inspecting exhibits in museums and galleries, they try to reveal how the experience of exhibits and exhibitions rests upon a complex social and interactional organisation, which largely remains unexplored in current studies of visitor behaviour.

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Contents

Introduction

Hubert Knoblauch and Helga Kotthoff
The Aesthetics and Proto-Aesthetics of Communication ........................................... 7

Communication, Genres and Culture

Ruth Finnegan
'Not the Message': Media, Meanings and Magicality ..................................................... 33

Judith T. Irvine
Genres of Conquest: From Literature to Science in Colonial African Linguistics .............. 63

Richard Bauman
Mediational Performance, Traditionalization, and the Authorization of Discourse ............. 91

Aesthetics in Everyday Life

Neil Roughley
Of Dentistry and Artistry. The Concept and some Contexts of the Aesthetic .................. 121

Volker Heeschen
The Narration 'Instinct': Everyday Talk and Aesthetic Forms of Communication (in Communities of the New Guinea Mountains) .............................. 137

Helga Kotthoff
Aesthetic Dimensions of Georgian Grief Rituals: On the Artful Display of Emotions in Lamentation ................................................................. 167

Hubert Knoblauch and Jürgen Raab
Genres and the Aesthetics of Advertisement Spots ...................................................... 195
his collection deals with everyday (para)linguistic and
visual communication processes and highlights their art-
ful dimension. Aesthetically, communication is not limited to
artworks and the institutional art domains; nor is it sought
in inner processes of consciousness or intentions, but
instead on various levels of symbolic expression, above
all, in oral communication. The majority of the studies
making up the collection are empirical and deal with
various semiotic phenomena in a wide range of different
cultures. They include video-analytic museum studies,
conversation analyses of artistic oral genres and perfor-
ance analyses in the domain of linguistic anthropology.
All the contributing authors see verbal art as a meaningful
process which can use all interactional modalities,
from prosody and body language to wording.