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Genres and the Aesthetics of Advertisement Spots

Overview

This paper presents an analysis of advertisement spots based on the theory of communicative genres. Following previous research on the generic and typological features of advertisement spots, we present the results of a genre analysis of some 300 advertisement spots shown on German television. First, the basic structural elements of this genre shall be presented. By means of these elements, we then distinguish five major empirical types of advertisement spots. Finally, we relate these types to the aesthetic habitus of social milieus in German society. As we show that only two of the five major types mentioned fit into the common thesis of an increasing aesthetisation of advertisement spots, we argue that the thesis of aesthetisation, first, one-sidedly builds on upper class concepts of aesthetics, while secondly, the apparently less aesthetic kinds of spots are not due to disappear at all. Thus the adaptation of high brow aesthetic forms by some types of spots can be understood as a kind of secondary aesthetisation which is nonetheless based upon the existence of a well established genre.

Advertisement, genres and typologies

Advertisement has been a topic for sociology since its earliest days. While acknowledging its importance for the development of capitalism, sociology, has been explicit in condemning advertisement as “disgusting” and “utterly immoral.” This criticism found its most explicit expression in Critical Theory, accusing advertisement of manipulating social consciousness and of suppressing the masses. However, by the 1960s a few authors were already stressing the more positive aspects of advertisements. Thus in 1965 René König attacked those “almost hysterical assumptions of the almighty advertisement” and the “myth of the hidden persuasers.” Advertisement, he stressed, should not be understood in terms of effects. Rather, sociology should ask how adver-

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2 Wolfgang F. Haug, Kritik der Werbewissenschaft, Frankfurt am Main 1971.
tisement became a permanent feature of modern everyday life. Since modern everyday life is dominated by consumption and products serve to represent life-styles, advertisement, he suggests, has become part of modern life-styles. And it is for this reason that advertisement interacts with art and fulfills a symbolic function in the self representation of individuals.

This thesis, already formulated in the sixties, has been resonated in recent years. Leiss, Kline and Jhally hold that “advertising is not just a business expenditure undertaken in the hope of moving some merchandise off the store shelves, but is rather an integral part of modern culture.” In the same vein Goldman and Papson consider advertisement to be an encompassing sociocultural phenomenon. Because of the market demand, producers of advertisement develop a specific communicative code drawing on the cultural capital of their particular target groups. Also, Gallissot argues that advertisement has become an autonomous area of the cultural system in its own right. However, to be studied as a cultural field it is not sufficient to focus upon the units effects of advertising. Since, as a result of the evolving autonomous cultural traits advertising would also develop particular communicative forms, or, to be more exact, genres. Thus, based upon this thesis, the analysis of communicative genres would appear to be of particular importance for delineating the cultural field of advertisement. The notion of genre, or media genre, has gained acceptance in the analysis of mass media products for quite some time. Genre categories, such as soap opera, news, political commercial, Western, talk show or feature have proven to be of good practical use in the media. Yet, while these media genre categories, or ‘technocategories’, are used in the practical work of the media, there have been divergent attempts to define what we mean by media genre in general. Quite frequently categories from literary criticism have been adapted in order to define media genres with respect to their content, e.g. typical characters (villain, hero, fairy), settings (Wild West, Space) or plots (resurrection of rest, outshining of aliens, catching the killer). Arguing against this approach Feuer stresses that genres do not only affect the content and the structure of media products but also guide the perception of the audience who may be considered as a community of interpretation. The same argument is put forward by Schmidt who has undertaken one of the most extensive attempts so far at defining genres in media communication. Starting from the general assumption that perception is guided by schemata, he takes genres to be cognitive schemata which are occasionally marked by specific genre names, with both producers, as well as audiences, orienting towards these schemata in their activities. Thus journalists orient themselves towards specific genres such as debunking in precision journalism, and audiences are definitely guided by differences as between news features or horror films or science. It is the recent development of interactive media genre which in particular indicates that the current notion of genre is too strongly oriented towards the mass media and their rather one-sided form of communication. The interactive media, however, demonstrate, how genres can also be generated within the context of the interaction of ‘producers’ and ‘recipients’. Even, as Alvarez-Cacacmo and Knoblauch have shown, communication by means of answering machines exhibit pattern like structures. Similar observations also hold for communication by email. In order to account for such mediated (and face-to-face) interactive features of genres, it seems promising to turn to a sociological notion of genre which has been developed by Luckmann.

Communicative genres are defined as historically and culturally specific, socially fixed and modelled solutions to communicative problems which serve to cope with, mediate and transmit intersubjective experiences of the lifeworld. They differ from more spontaneous communicative processes in that actors orientate their reciprocal actions by means of predictably typified patterns. The communicative work of the partners predictable the course of action becomes for those involved – speakers and listeners respectively. The structure of communicative genres may be determined with respect to various levels of analysis: The internal structure includes lexical, syntactic, rhetorical and stylistic elements; the level of situative realisation is comprised of interactive, conversational and situational elements; and the

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10 "The genre organized large number of individual works into a coherent system that could be recognized by the interpretive community", Jane Feuer, “Genre Study and Television”, in: Robert C. Allen (ed.), Channels of Discourse, Reassembled. London 1987, 139-159.
external structure, finally relates to the wider context of genres, such as social occasions, social milieu, institutional location etc. 16 The function of genre-like conventionalisations may be seen as relieving actors from the task of coping with subordinate action problems, such as the coordination of turn taking. Communicative genres are constituted in those situations where communicative actions have to cope with typical and recurring problems, particularly if these problems are of some relevance. Since they concern social actions between typical actors, communicative genres therefore reflect the current social action problems and the relevance systems of certain types of actors. In this sense they cannot be abstracted from the social structure. Rather, they can be seen as objectified links between subjective stocks of knowledge and social structures. They are, as it were, institutions of communication, i.e. obliging communicative patterns that are guiding the communicative actions of members of society independently of the fact of whether the communication is face-to-face or mediated by technology.

While the notion of communicative genre has already proven useful in the empirical study of face-to-face communication, there are also indications as to its usefulness for the study of technologically mediated communication. Thus Kepler has investigated political news magazines on television with respect to their genre structure, laying particular stress on the relation between acoustic and visual features. In another study she investigates the oral genres of communicating about the media in family conversations. 17 Drawing on the structure of narratives identified by Labov, Montgomery takes radio broadcast shows as "discourse genres" exhibiting determined structures: Their opening consists of a frame, the central part of situating, complicating, closure, orientation and evaluation, leading to the coda. The conclusion consists of a resumption, the formulation of the moral outcome and the final frame. 18 Based on Luckmann's concept of communicative genres, Ayaß highlights the structure of television gospels, and analysed the genre feature of radio telephone call in shows. 19

Even today, the argument that advertisement spots constitute a genre is not commonly accepted. In his overview of some hundred names for media genre, Hauptmeier does not even mention advertisement spots. 20 On the other hand, Heller holds the view that mass mediated forms of communicative action need to be understood with respect to the context which, so to say, frames their meaning. 21 The context, i.e. the genre by which the message is communicated, allows the decoding of the meaning of the communicative action and the framework of the intentions communicated. Because of their genre features, recipients of advertisement spots are therefore well aware of their intentions. Since the features of the genre provide a frame for the understanding of the act, advertisement is, in Heller's view, a genre which is quite strongly fixed: determined by the technical media of its transmission, by its topics and its style. Since advertisement is communicated and understood by people with respect to the various genre, also its effect should, therefore, be studied with respect to the various generic features. 22

In their treatise on the "Aesthetics of Advertisement", Kloepfer and Landbeck introduce the notion of genre as a necessity. Due to their intention to delineate the historical transformation of advertisement, they are in need of a concept which allows to address the permanent features of advertisement. Genres, to them, are "habitualised ensembles of expectations, rules and accomplishments realised in each singular communicative act". 23 This definition, however, is neither deduced nor theoretically backed, and many of the criteria they mention remain unsatisfactory since they may also apply to other phenomena, e.g. music video clips. 24

Although other researchers too seem to use the notion of genre with respect to advertisement, almost in a taken for granted matter, this is rarely supported by empirical data or theoretical arguments. Thus Gallisot backs his argument that advertisement is organised in terms of genres as "organisations of expressive means" only by relating to the increasingly complex social organisation of advertisement. 25 And Noth, who also claims advertisement to be a genre, evades a definition of the genre and turns to the semantic frames of the audience without even specifying the medium he is referring to. 26 In the same vein, the attempts to define advertisement as "discourse type" have so far have yielded only very vague results, e.g. that ads consist of mixtures between private and public discourses. 27

As ambiguous and unsatisfactory as the analysis of advertisement spots in terms of genre analysis turns out, as difficult appears any attempt to define their structure. This becomes particularly obvious when comparing the various advertisement spots typologies and other attempts of grasp the structural

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22 Hel dotted 1984, 231.
24 The criteria they mention include parasitic, short, distractive, expensive, repetitive, syncretic, rhetorical etc. Kloepfer and Landbeck op. cit. 1991, 224-234.
As in the empirical demonstration of these features, we relate our analysis to the major components of this genre analysis. The empirical data on which this analysis is based consist of some 300 advertisement spots recorded on German speaking television stations in the years 1992-1994. (One has to be well aware that the aesthetics of advertisement spots have been changing in the meantime. This is particularly the case in Germany (to which this study is restricted), where the rapid expansion of private television has favoured the introduction of various spots from other cultures. Further, the heavy regulatory load on state television has also led to the creation of some new forms, such as the sponsor’s announcements at the beginning and the end of popular shows, and serial spots for the same product in one advertisement block etc.)

The function of advertisement spots

The general problem in defining the advertisement spot as a communicative genre may be caused by the fact that structurally they take on a multitude of forms, even to the extent that they are sometimes even called “parasitical”, i.e. exploiting various already existing forms and genres, such as Western, detective stories, television shows, sport events etc. In this way the advertisement spot uses other genres - be it in quoting them ironically, playfully changing them, mixing them or filling them with other content. For this reason it seems quite reasonable to look for a basic function performed by this genre, i.e. the “communicative problem” solved by the spot, as genre theoretical states. In fact, one has to assume that the advertisement spot has to accomplish a peculiar basic task since it has to present something that is to be sold commercially. That is: the spot has to cope with a basic communicative problem: to express the (advertisement agencies’) client’s intent to sell the product, and: to make it visible as purchasable to potential buyers. Advertisement spots are thus characterised by a basic persuasive intent as they aim at motivating others to perform an act – be it in thinking or acting. Since advertisements typically pursue the task of persuasion by way of (mass) mediated action, it is pushed to design whatever it does in an aesthetically pleasing way, i.e. any way which attracts the attention of a non present audience (irritation, stimulation etc.). It is for this reason that the presentation is forced to take on a recognisable form, or ‘gestalt’, which keeps the audience sticking with it from the beginning through to the end. Finally, the advertisement should be memorable too, i.e. audiences should be able to recall pictures, melodies, persons, forms, colours and, most of all, product names. To be sure, the most pertinent rhetorical device designed


31 As to the differences between face-to-face and mediate action cf. Schütz and Luckmann op. cit. 1984.
to achieve this task is repetition, and it is for this reason that we find all elements of seriality mentioned by Eco also in advertisement spots: the "retake" is a continuous story including the same heroes; the "remake" repeats a spot already shown; the series, and at times, even the 'saga'.

Typifications of (anonymous) recipients are of particular importance, especially for persuasive genres of mediated communication. Akin to the rhetoric of public speeches, advertisement professionals create auxiliary constructions of their audiences, as expressed in psychological profiles, target group characteristics or everyday typifications. In the analysis of face-to-face conversations such patterns of addressing an audience have been called "recipient design".

As part of our thesis we assume that such concepts of recipients are also guiding the design of advertisement spots. Taking into consideration explicit knowledge of the recipients which might have been collected by market or media research, and include detailed features of the addressees in terms of target groups, life-styles or habits, advertisement spots are designed in order to address the individuals which have been conceived according to such categories. It is for this reason that we refer to recipient design as the anticipated (and in a very socio-technical sense pre-conceived) addressee which is implicit in the advertisement spot. It is worth mentioning that the notion of recipient design draws on the theory of aesthetic reception as developed by Jauss and Iser.

Yet, advertisement spots do not primarily aim at aesthetic functions, rather, they are orientated to the more 'mundane' rhetorical function of persuasion.

The recipient design can be already affected by the choice of the station since, particularly private stations, allow the addressing of very specific target groups, e.g. stations for sport, high culture, pop music videos etc. But selecting a specific program may also be to address a certain group of recipients, e.g. advertisement for breakfast meal products during morning television, and actors of neighbouring series may be used to advertise for respective products, i.e. "narrow-casting".

This orientation towards target groups results in structural similarities between various spots which become particularly obvious when the general program addresses a special audience: for example, when a young male audience is targeted during the transmission of big sport events, e.g. Premier League Football; when a female target group is addressed during certain soap operas and television shows; or when children are addressed in the context of animated cartoons during afternoon television time. Of course, there are always some spots which do not fit into the pattern, nevertheless, target group orientated spots are common at the fringes of advertisement blocks.

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37 Schütz and Luckmann op. cit. 1984.
38 Clain Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca, Traite de l'argumentation, Bruxelles 1983.
39 Eco 1987 (fn. 36).

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The structure of television advertisement spots

Considering advertisement spots as communicative genres yields a specific analytical perspective. On the one hand, the analysis of communicative genres attempts to take into account the social context of communication, as well as the processual character which is based upon the fact that communication depends on social action and activities. As a result, we address the outer structure of communicative genres as well as their internal features. Since genre analysis focuses on fixed patterns and genres of communication, it has, on the other hand, the task of indicating those features of communicative processes which are recurrent and constitute the backbone of the genre. It is for the latter reason that we use the notion of structure. Structure, in this sense, is not considered as anything like a hidden 'pattern', but a second order construct by which the analyst tries to grasp the first order forms and patterns of communication which are guiding actors. A more comprehensive picture of the spots will then be developed in the following chapter.

The outer structure

The outer structure of advertisement spots is characterised by a sharp division of labour since manufacturers hardly ever do the advertisement themselves. Rather, specialised departments of television stations or large advertisement agencies are appointed to make the costly and time intensive productions for advertisement spots. The production of the spots is certainly decisive for an understanding of their genre structure. However, in this essay we cannot highlight the major components of the outer structure. Television stations are of major importance as the transmitters of advertisement spots. At the same time, advertisement spots account for the most important financial source of private, as well as public, television stations. Yet public as well as private television stations (in Germany) are subject to legal regulations as to the amount of advertisement they are allowed to show, the times when they are supposed to do so, and the ways in which this is to be done. Regulations also relate to the proportion of advertisement and other programs, the ways in which advertisement should be segregated from other forms of programs, the form of advertisement and so on. Moreover, television stations impose certain self-regulations on themselves which may vary strongly from one station to another. These regulations may concern the exact air times of spots and their respective tariffs. In this respect, the varying reach of the stations, which de-
pend on the one hand on their economic and legal situation as well as the orientation towards certain programs and target groups are of some importance. The regulations surrounding advertisement spots do leave a visible imprint on the spot itself. The very fact that regulations prescribe formal features which mark off advertisement spots from neighbouring programs, as well as the legal prescription to announce the beginning of advertisement spots (in Germany) is, of course, one reason for the logos framing the beginning and the end of advertisement blocks. The logo does not only serve as a kind of demarcation, but also supports the self-image of the station. One further consequence may be seen in the fact that advertisement is the only television genre without a fixed place in the program’s time-schedule. It is as if advertisement were travelling with other programs – one of the reasons for its ‘parastatical’ character. This holds even more for advertisement aired by private stations in which the beginning, the length and the end of advertisement is not known by the viewer and the spots follow one another, whereas public stations prefer to “fill” the gaps by mini cartoons, computer tricks or caleidoscopes. A final attribute of spots, which depends on the outer structure, is their obvious shortness. Typically it lasts about 25 seconds. As a consequence, spots often exhibit rapid sequences of cuts – a feature they share with videoclips. The shortness of spots is of course not only due to financial considerations but also to the competition for attractive slots in popular programmes.

Fixed genre features

As opposed to the variable elements of advertisement spots we refer to the fixed features as those which are constitutive for advertisement spots. That is to say, it is due to these features that we can identify spots. On the other hand, while variable elements may be part of advertisement spots, they may also be part of other genres. With reference to the fixed genre features we state at least the following: The message of the product. All advertisement spots refer in some way or another to a product or a service. It is the product or the service that answers the question: what is the advertisement spot about? (This also holds for cases in which the message is only alluded to, is part of an innuendo or is referred to elliptically). The message of the product has to be formulated on the visual channel, that is to say that at any a time during the spot, the product, or a symbol representing the product, is made visible. The message can also be acoustically conveyed by someone mentioning the name of the product or the company. The message of description. This message contains the portrayal of the product or service advertised, its parts, features, characteristics or functions. The description of the message may be made directly, i.e. by way of statements which refer to the product or service (quality, evaluation, price). Or the message of description may be accomplished by portraying persons, objects or situations to which the product or service may be related. At any rate, the message of description is contained in the visual message by which the product or service is depicted. At minimum this may take the form of the so-called packshot: the display of the product, the packing or the company’s signet. Whether descriptions of the product or service occur verbally or not, it is quite likely that a further fixed feature of advertisement spot is added: the advertisement slogan. It is by way of the slogan that a minimal statement about the product or service is being made. Therefore the slogan is a constitutive part of advertisement spots, but one which also features in newspaper ads, radio advertisement etc. Often the slogan forms part of the end of the spot; it may be linked to the packshot, be displayed by text, be spoken verbally or even sung as a ‘jingle’. The slogan may be considered the shortest possible advertisement message. It may include statements specific to the product, or it may come without any specific reference to the product or service, but to, for example, the mythological meaning of a product name, such as in “committed to myth.”

Variable genre features

After having delineated the basic fixed features of advertisement spots as communicative genres, we can now turn to the much more numerous variable genre features. It is the number and the variability of these features that accounts for the huge spectrum advertisement spots cover. In fact, it is not possible to list here all of the formal design and content elements of advertisement spots. Rather, we shall indicate a selected number of genre features pertinent to the medium and then turn to the combinations which are specific to advertisement spots. For the sake of clarity we shall distinguish between (a) visual design features and (b) acoustic design features.

(a) The setting may be considered a part of the visual design features. In many cases, it is not possible to identify the settings because there is no clear relation to the real world but rather an artificial studio is depicted. Realistic renderings of settings consist of product presentations at locations which are related to the everyday life of the viewers (supermarket, office, kitchen, garden, beach etc.). In other cases settings are depicted that relate to other media genres, such as Wild West saloons, meetings rooms of large corporations, festival halls in castles etc.

With respect to the depiction of characters, first the way how they are set in the visual arrangements of the spots is important. Some spots may even do without agents by focusing on various details of human bodies, such as hair,
face, hands, legs. Characters may also only be depicted in short cuts without saying anything. Finally, they may be at the centre of the visual display and play a role which includes them talking. Secondly, in addition to the ways they are set in the visual arrangement, secondly, the relation of characters to the products is of importance. In this respect they can figure as representatives (manufacturer, company representative, sales person, convinced consumer, celebrity using the product), who are visually placed in close proximity to the product and make statements about the it. Characters may also be portrayed as using the other products than those they are advertising, all of them being taken to represent their lifestyle. In these types of spots, the kinds of representatives mentioned are only cast in the background (e.g. as commentators or animators of the slogan), or they may even be excluded from the spot (in extreme cases, this may even happen to the product itself).

Another aspect of advertisement spots concerns its dramaturgy of product presentation. The dramaturgical structure of spots is decisively determined by the ways in which the product is being presented and when it is shown. If the product is shown through the whole spot, that is, the product dominates the spot visually and temporally, various versions may be distinguished. First, spots may be characterised as pure product presentations which depict and boost the product. Secondly, spots may depict two opposite situations: one situation before the introduction of the product which is riddled with problems, unpleasant or embarrassing; and another, resolved, relaxed and normalised situation which includes the product. Thirdly, the spot may visualise a test situation in which a character, initially sceptical of the product, submits it to a test, possibly comparing it to another competing product. This situation may be even extended to a competition between the persons who are using the different products or, to an extreme test in which the product is tested on the limits of its qualities.

If the product is moved into the background or appears late within the spot, the dramaturgy is quite different. In these cases, the portrayal of a style of life linked to the use of the product moves into the foreground. In such spots, the product is only seen during short cuts or at the end of the spot. In addition, various situations of the use of the product will be depicted, or the product may even figure as part of a short story in which it is involved in the action line. In this way, it takes on the role of an accessory. The scenes which are shown au lieu of the product seem not necessarily be linked to it, and the evolving story built up by seemingly incoherent scenes may lead viewers to ask themselves what it is that is being advertised.

In addition to the setting, formal visual features include specific photographic and cinematographic techniques, such as the styles of cuts. In this respect, the advertisement spot exhibits some similarity to music videos. Whereas the latter, however, tend to be cut into bits of equal length, the shots in advertisement spot are of varying length. Even if at times cuts succeed each other in high frequency, at least the final shot including the display of the product – the packshot (is usually devoted the most time). Another typical variant are those spots in which the product is throughout only one major cut. This version characterises the first ever advertisement spots produced, those prior to the cinematographic techniques developed in the 1920s when cuts became possible and the introduction of collages was becoming a convention.48

Finally, there are styles of cuts which address certain social target groups, however, we shall turn to these styles later.

Camera work also exhibits some specific features with respect to advertisement. Thus zooms of the camera approaching the product and then moving away are typical, and are even executed in spots without cuts. In principle all camera perspectives are to be found in spots. Yet the most common form is the intensive close-up of the products, parts of the product or of its uses (including the human body parts involved). The deliberate use of colours and light effects is an additional feature of spots which is seemed to support the message, draw attention and create atmosphere. Quite frequently the product colours dominate the spots to the extent that they are present at every stage of the spot. Dark colours are often used to signify professionalism, danger, dynamics, technology, high quality and exclusivity of products. Light colours, on the other hand, indicating playfulness, safety, cosiness, relaxation and joy.

Finally, spots are realised in various – pure or mixed cinematographic forms. In addition to real film which is predominant in the majority of spots, computer animation is also deployed. Animated pictures often serve to clarify causal processes and to generate illustrations of events which are hard to visualise in other ways. In this respect, computer animation is increasingly substituting animated cartoons which today are often additional elements of real film, or as allusions to, or quotes of, other genres (comic strips, animated cartoon films).

(b) In addition to the visual form features of genre spots we have to mention their acoustic features. In this respect we can only mention noises, speech and paralinguistic phenomena which deserve a more detailed analysis.49 However, to address “on-texts” and “off-texts.” “On-texts” refer to utterances (comments, product descriptions, dialogues) made by individual persons or groups who are simultaneously shown visually. Dialogues allow for the possibility of introducing the product step by step whereas, comments and product descriptions always remain tightly connected to the visual display of the product. “Off-texts” are, on the other hand, refer to utterances by speakers who are not visible. They often take the form of an inner monologue of a person shown visually or contain product descriptions.50

Musical elements are of particular relevance to advertisement spots. Music in such spots is functional, i.e. serves to draw attention to the spot, support its message, create an atmosphere, increase the entertaining quality of the spot, support the identification of the product and the differentiation to other spots.51 Quite frequently there are musical quotes in which already existing tunes

50 As to the difference between male and female off-voices cf. Jutta Brecht-Schädel, Analyse der Fernsehwerbung in der DDR, Marburg 1972, 191.
and their original artists are replayed, or in which cover versions are created which are adapted to the requirements of the spot. (The use of already existing music is regarded as an easy way of addressing certain target groups.) In the majority of the cases, however, music is especially composed for the spots. The tunes may last for the whole spot and be played in the foreground, thus resembling video-clips, or they may be heard in the background, or the music may be heard only in parts of the spot, being clearly subordinated to the text. In these latter cases it may start only when the plot is being approached, the product being shown etc. Finally, there is the so-called jingle which is often independent of the rest of the music. The jingle may be heard several times during the spot, but as a rule it turns up at the end of the spot and forms part of the packshot supporting, or even substituting for, the slogan.

A typology of advertisement spots

Admittedly, the features mentioned here are presented in such an abstract and isolated way that it is hard to conceive of the spots they refer to. In order to render the analysis more comprehensive and holistic, we shall therefore try to suggest a typology of the spots, drawing on the elements mentioned above. In doing so, we would like to stress that these elements cannot be combined arbitrarily. Instead, we discern a kind of standardisation of spots which tend towards certain types of spots. Although these types have been constructed on the basis of the spots only, it is interesting that the types reflect some aesthetic preferences of social milieus. We shall turn to this later, first we need to indicate the types of spots which are based on an increasing condensation of this genre.

As already Goffman has shown, advertisement is characterised by an intense semiotic coding. Studying gender displays of ads, he identified what he called "hyperrealisation", i.e. the standardisation, exaggeration and simplification of social ideals and the omission of all processes and signs in which these ideals are not present. Intense semiotic coding is thus not creating new codes, instead it exploits the already existing codes of everyday communication, selecting and exaggerating the ritual elements which are already formally marked. Standardisations of this kind can be seen in the ways in which characters are presented, e.g. when the dynamic, open and rational user of the product meets with a prejudiced user of antiquated and useless products of competitors. Also, the performance of communication is portrayed in a simplified manner, since dialogues in advertisement spots almost exclusively focus on the product (or service), turning to its features and advantages in such a way as is usually only granted to matters of 'human interest'. Stereotypes of this kind are also dominant in the way in which social groups are portrayed. Thus families are shown in almost idealised way, and couples of males and females are framed in an appealing way denoting romanticism. Intense coding, finally, concerns the ways in which the settings are presented. These are not real places, but action scenes with idealised features: huge bathrooms, pompous flats with designer furniture, castles, festival halls and locations which are known from other visual fiction genres. Taken together, these features indicate the advertisement spots are not only parasitical with respect form, but actually exploit other genres. Spots allude to television shows, operas, feature films, soap operas, they draw on scenes, characters, motives or music from other well known events, quote them seriously, playfully or distortingly. Quotes, allusion, variations and ironisations of this kind as well as bricolages result in recompositions which create surprising intertextual references. Whereas such references had long been used rather thinly, in recent years they have come increasingly into common use, e.g. when successful films are quoted, ironically commented on or gender roles reversed. One should be aware that it is not only genres of other mass media which are referred to intertextually, but also genres which are common in face-to-face communication, e.g. the telling of jokes, gossiping, arguing etc.

The variety of intertextual references indicates that producers try to pick up on attitudes, contents, communicative habits and genres of viewers. That is, they are assuming a common stock of knowledge on various communicative forms, and that the allusions to this shared knowledge may delight the viewers or at least please them. Abstracting from the differing milieus addressed by the various types of spot delineated below, the general recipient design is thus not orientated towards a "judgemental dope" or an organism responding almost mechanically to stimuli. It is rather the smart recipient who is addressed in these spots, a recipient who knowingly identifies with the references made, and a recipient who can recognise the genres exploited by the spot.

The mentions made are not only subject to an increasing standardisation, moreover, one can actually detect a tendency towards generic typification. We have already referred to the immense scope and variety of the spots, as well as to the huge number of available elements they are drawing on. We have also mentioned the various typologies of advertisement spots which attempt to come to grips with this diversity. However, most of them fail because they are not distinctive enough or are incomplete. We have tried to avoid these deficiencies in our typology by grounding it in the generic features mentioned above, as well as by taking into account earlier attempts of such typifications. In order to get a clearer picture we shall highlight several crucial features: first, the recipient design as referred to above; second, the communicator's self-presentation, that is the ways in which producers and manufacturers (or other clients) portray themselves in the process of communication; and finally, the forms of product presentation. The highlighting of these three aspects is based on our genre theory consideration that advertisement spots are essentially solutions to the communicative problem of presenting and offering the product of one party and making it attractive to another. This function is best expressed in the visual and acoustic forms of the product presentation. In fact,
the forms of product presentation can be distinguished with respect to two
two extreme forms which, so to speak, constitute the span of advertisement spot
types. On the one hand the continuous product presentation which is also sup-
bored by a continuous verbal argument, and on the other hand the visual as-
well as acoustic "avoidance" of product presentation, i.e., advertisement spots in
which the product is hardly, sometimes not even at all to be seen, and arguments
are reduced to the minimal form of the slogan (and thus put forward by
the visual plot). In between these extreme cases there is a broad scope of potential
variants. However, the diverse variety of generic elements is, in fact, combined
into only a small number of real variants. The following descriptions may not
cover all of these variants, but they indicate the major patterns within the scope.
Product spots constitute one type of spot since they are characterised by a con-
tinuous presentation of products and a continuous verbal argument. This way,
they resemble the type which has been labelled 'product is hero' in previous
research. Where visually, the product as well as its colours dominate the spot
while other characters are not present or remain marginal. As a result, there is no
situation shown in which the product may be used or tested. With respect to the
setting, television studio atmosphere is predominant, and the camera position
remains fixed and immobile, similar to printed adverts in newspapers, magazines
and on posters. Acoustically, off-speakers describe the product and via direct ad-
dress to the viewer highlight what is to be focused on, these spoken texts often
resemble those of a prospectus. Instead of music noises and sounds announce
the appearance of the product. With respect to self presentation, the comment-
ong speaker, even if visually not present, takes the part of the manufacturer or
company representative. He or she is presenting himself or herself as a serious
supplier of products or services by which obvious consumer demands are to be
satisfied. In order to achieve this goal conventional and reliable methods are
applied which, however, do not seem to be tailored to the specifics of the me-
dium. Rather, they appear redundant: the voice tells what the viewer sees any-
how, and hardly any narrative, cinematographic or acoustic designs are added by
which the statements would be supported or intensified. As a result, all the
viewer can see is related to the product, and the viewer is addressed as if being
lectured to. Thus the recipient design does not demand any active participation
from the viewer except attending to product information.

There are of course a number of variations of this. In one version the prod-
ject is shown in action with the scene embellished visually: various camera
perspectives are used, and short cuts follow one another in quick succession, so
that the product can be seen in motion, jumping, dancing, or fighting against
harsh conditions under extreme circumstances, e.g. tires under various
weather conditions or competing with other products. Animals may be also
shown moving around the product or playing with it. Motion may also be
added by verbal comments that deviate with respect to content or prosody
from the style typically found in this type of spot.

Another version shows the product in use. Here people who are part of the
picture are shown only in part, and only those are needed to demonstrate
the product's attributes ('tastes well', 'sound nice' etc.). In general, product
spots are quite common since they are the shortest type of spot, consequently
demanding less air time with lower production costs.
The second type, presenter spots, are characterised by continuous presentation
of product and arguments which focus on the qualities, features and uses of
these products. However, they differ from product spots insofar as characters
are depicted which are strongly connected to the products. Temporally, visu-
ally and acoustically, these characters, i.e. representatives, and the products are
displayed in such a way as to be of equal importance. Sometimes the represen-
tant is even predominant. As with product spots the settings are often kept
neutral, sometimes tending towards 'serious settings' in which presenters act
like experts. Settings, showing medical consulting rooms, kitchens, forests etc.,
are usually directly connected to the products' applications and features. Thus,
scenarios often resemble to sales talks, expert statements or news reports. Ex-
cept for a few zooms and pan shots, the camera tends to remain fixed, and
shots are rarely cut or occur in very low frequencies, switching between prod-
and presenter. As before, the colours of the product rule the scenes, and
lighting focuses on all details of the product. As a rule, presenter spots are real
films, although computer animated sequences may be added in order to visual-
ise interior mechanisms, functional relations and causal effects connected to
the product. In their acoustical aspects, presenter spots appeal directly to the
audience. Music being used only to dramatise the presentation of the product
or as part of the jingle by which the spot terminates.
The characters appearing in the spot stand for and represent the product as
they offer the product, defend it, use it or give warranty for it. Thus, the
communicator's self presentation resembles the competent, serious and solid
person who personally guarantees and stands for the product, its quality, and
its temperatures. In allusion to the first "product is hero" type one could call this
type "the hero and his product". The activities demanded by the viewer are
restricted to an association of the qualities of the representative to the qualities
of the product. Thus, the communicator seems to address a recipient who is
prepared to learn on the basis of his or her belief in role models and authority.
If product and manufacturers or company representatives are identical,
they are referred to by the name of presenter spots. Quite frequently celebri-
ties take the part of presenters with the hope of achieving what is called
"matching", i.e. a close overlapping between the image of the celebrity and the
features of the product. This type of spot is sometimes referred to as
"testimonial". Testimonials of this kind often resemble to interviews with the
celebrities interacting with an interviewer who are themselves rarely
shown. In another version, the part of the representative may be played by
the manufacturer or a representant of the company himself who may read
the product description from the off while a "speechless" actor may take the
visual part. Here the product is presented in a typical situation of use
allowing a display of its advantages and its connection to an idealised user.
As different as all these version may be, they all are characterised by the
fact that the product presentation is linked to a presenter who identifies
with the product.
The third type is best described as the everyday spot. In cases of this type, product presentation and product argument are discontinuous, and the product does not necessarily occupy the most dominant position anymore. Spots of this kind often portray a continuous line of action which tends towards the introduction, display and use of the product. The visual discourses depict several persons who do not relate to or represent the manufacturing or service company. Rather, they are cliché everyday persons, i.e. ‘people from the Clapham omnibus’, ‘Mr. and Mrs. Jones’s’. Since the settings are also only slightly idealised remaining overwhelmingly realistic, these spots have also been referred to as “slice of life”-spots, with locations selected where the products would be used in everyday life, such as offices, homes, gardens, streets. The camera work, on the other hand, tends to be cinematographic, although quick movements of the camera and extreme perspectives are avoided. The spots are cut in a low frequency, and long shots are prevalent so that they resemble to documentaries, a resemblance which is supported by the selection of colours, brightness and the realisation of the film. On the acoustic side, often intense and exaggerated forms of communication between users, the product and its features occur as if social interaction would have not been possible without the product. Although the spot focuses on the product and all statements are related to it, the characters hardly address the viewers directly. It is only by way of an off-text at the end of the spots that the viewers are directly appealed to. Music is continuous and dramatising, yet it remains in the background except of the concluding jingle.

The commentator presents himself as marginal to the spot, yet at the same time allowing the viewer to see the successful application of the product in an everyday situation that seems not to be manipulated by the producers. Recipients are given, as Goffman states, access backstage where the product appears ‘genuine’ use and characters appear to act and testify in a truthful manner. Viewers thus find themselves cast in the role of observers. They are watching action the form and course of which may remind them of other television genres, particularly those addressing a predominantly female audience. The recipient design draws on previously gathered media experiences, yet not only mimicking them but changing them in a creative, ironical or burlesque way. In comparison to the spot types above, there is not much more activity demanded from the viewer since they are only to recognise and identify those elements which they already know.

In one version of this type, a satisfactory and successful use of product situation followed by a commendation of the product or the user by other characters presented in the spot. In another version products may be compared directly so that the competing product is shown to fail. It may, finally, even happen that characters representing various products are competing. With the competing product being run-up, a defeat which is underlined both visually and acoustically.

Products are of even less importance to the fourth type, life-style spots. These spots highlight certain styles of life which are depicted in a strongly idealised way. They try to present multiple life-styles in which the product may appear to be rather accidentally present, and used in an almost inconspicuous way as a means to achieve the life-style portrayed. The visual discourse shows that the characters are not directly related to the product and its producers. They may be momentarily users of the product which seems the most apt thing in the situations shown, but it is quite obvious that they are also using other products which are part and parcel of the life-style they are embodying. As a consequence the product only features briefly and almost casually in the scenes and action-line of the spot. The settings are of a realistic sort, even if strongly exaggerated, e.g. huge, modern and exceptional houses. Quick cuts and consequentially short shots, as well as a cinematographic camera moving rapidly and using unusual perspectives are quite frequent. The whole spots tend to be dominated by few colours which are sometimes adapted from well known films. Whereas the other types presented so far are orientated towards presenting “information”, this type exploits the potential of the medium to a much stronger degree. Although real film prevails, quite frequently additional techniques are applied, such as black and white shots, filters etc. Since the characters rarely speaking themselves, on the acoustic channel recipients are addressed directly. Only at the end a short off-text serves as a slogan. One of the main features of this type is the continuous music. It is the music which keeps the various, and sometimes rather incoherent parts together, particularly since the text mentions or describes the product. The tune may not be compared to the off-text or on-text as to its appealing function since it primarily serves to create an atmosphere. This can be easily seen in that the music is attractive on its own without looking at the pictures. Yet the specific combination of sound and picture is one reason why this type of spot most closely resembles to the music video clip.

The communicator presents an idealised situation of use which demonstrates how appealing and exemplary the contexts are in which his product is embedded. Yet he does not restrict himself to just portraying the user with whom the viewers may identify, but presents overarching schemes of a life-style. In this kind of presentation the product is no longer defined by its primary features (taste, effects, looks) but by its social function which indicates and helps to construct social status. Similarly to artistic productions the message is communicated by the creation of a pertinent atmosphere which is based on music and the structural elements of music video clips.

The corresponding recipient design demands quite big stocks of knowledge of the media on the side of the viewer. Superficially, the viewers are to enjoy the visual exclusivity and the delightful music, yet implicitly they are intended to associate the atmosphere, the scenes and the life-style portrayed to the product. Further, the viewers have to identify the features of the product by themselves, and compare the life-style to the one they are hoping to have.

In one version of this type, the product is being used in various incoherent short action contexts. In another, the settings in which the product can be seen are alternating with scenes in which the product cannot be seen. There may not even be observable relations between the scenes, yet they could also add up to a story line. Both versions are sometimes referred to as “life action” type.

The final type may be called 	extit{art film spot}. Products are hardly present anymore in these spots, so that at the end of the spot viewers sometimes have to guess what is being advertised. The argument is reduced to a minimal acoustic statement, a slogan, or may even have to be deduced from the visual allusions. Thus, neither the content nor the intention of the spots seems to address products and features of products. Instead, pretentious communication is produced, designed to entertain the viewer. In principle, the visual discourse at the beginning of the spot may depict almost everything, even to the extreme of showing nothing but an 'empty' screen. Pictures and series of pictures may be connected to the product or they may not, they may be related to one another or they may not so that by means of strong intertextual features the visual communication takes on the form of a dialogue with the recipient, a conundrum or a parody. Scenes may become meaningful by a funny plot, a surprising twist at the end, or by the presentation of the product at the very end which debunks the film as a spot. For this reason, there are no limitations on the formal visual elements. All photographic and cinematographic techniques available are deployed, and also the acoustic channel uses all forms which are common to the medium. The spot may be tightly covered by music, or it may be dominated by silence. As a rule there is hardly any on-text, and a short off-text is only introduced at the very end of the spot. Thus, the pictures and scenes depicted turn out to be of more importance that the information delivered on the acoustic channel. This makes obvious the fact that, as opposed to life-style spots, music may be continuous, yet secondary to the visual parts.

In this way, the communicators are presenting themselves as creative, competent and witty entertainers wanting the viewer to enjoy the spot. Aside from signets from agencies, they keep in the background. To recipients, these spots are very demanding. They are treated as responsible, knowledgeable and competent actors who are able to actively decode the textual structures, appreciate the visual presentation and recognise the allusions, quotations and references built in the spot. Recipients are also assumed to comprehend complex messages in a very short time. Instead of naive recipients, they are conceived of as active participants in the spot.

In one version of the spot one or two scenes are shown, visualising 'something' before the product is shown. This form resembles riddles or jokes since there does not seem any obvious connection between the visualisations and the product, and recipients may even wonder if they are still watching advertisement and what product is advertised. Consequently the 'solution' appears to be surprising and amusing. One version of this is sometimes referred to as story type where viewers are confronted with a situation, this time taking the story. The way the characters, settings, action, colours and the lightning are shown reflect feature films which are sometimes alluded to, but adapted to the requirements of the spot rather than copied.

The aesthetics of advertisement spots and social milieu

This paper aimed at delineating the features of advertisement spots as a communicative genre and sketching the variety of types within this genre. Having indicated the connection between such spots and the targeted audiences via the recipient design of these spots, we want, finally, embark on an attempt of relating the aesthetics of the spots to certain milieus and the habitus. We have to concede that this is but an attempt which waits further support. Yet, in another study on olfactory products, one of the authors has found strong statistical support for the thesis that the olfactory aesthetics and the social milieu we identified are very closely connected.\textsuperscript{56}

Recent attempts to appreciate the cultural role of the advertisement spots, often based on studies of their historical development, regularly discern a continuous process of aesthetisation, particularly accelerated by the social changes in the 1960.\textsuperscript{57} According to these claims, which are often based on sociological theories of modernisation\textsuperscript{58}, social changes not only affected patterns of consumption. They also affected mass media communication and advertisement in such a way that the product is gradually marginalised, and finally omitted from the process of communication. Advertisement spots, therefore, would tend to be dominated by "life-style advertisement"\textsuperscript{59}, i.e. those types of spots we have been sketching at the end of our typology. These types are considered to be the most innovative and ground-breaking creations which are deemed to substitute for the more traditional, old-fashioned product-orientated spots.

In our view, the thesis of aesthetisation of spots is based on a short term and one-sided observation. In fact, their aesthetically innovatory potential has been already ascribed to the advertisement short films of the 1920s.\textsuperscript{60} Moreover, the typology we have been outlining shows quite clearly that the aesthetised advertisement spot types are complimenting rather than substituting the product oriented spots.\textsuperscript{61} There are obvious reasons for the perseverance of product

\textsuperscript{56} This study by Jürgen Raab will soon be published.


\textsuperscript{60} Cf. Schmidt and Spiek op. cit. 1994. One should be aware of the fact that the first animated cartoon, the first combinatory film and the first colour film in Germany had been advertisement short films. Cf. Reinhard ot. cit. 1993.

\textsuperscript{61} Herbert Willems und Martin Jurga, "Inszenierungsaspekte der Werbung. Empirische Ergebnisse der Erforschung von Glaubwürdigkeitsgenerierungen", in: Michael Jäckel (ed.),
orientated spots. In fact, the very persuasive function defining this genre, demands that there be some relation to the product or service advertised. Therefore one could argue that the aesthetisation of spots by marginalising or even eliminating the product depends upon the product presentation of typical spots to which they can be seen to refer to elliptically. Aesthetisation is therefore to be seen as a secondary function which is based on the primary function of persuasion. It is on these grounds that we can talk of secondary aesthetisation when communication serving definitive economical (or, in other cases, social, religious, scientific etc.) purposes is formed and designed in ways which cannot be seen to be subjected to these primary functions, sometimes apparently even counter-acting these functions (as e.g., in cases of the omission of the product in economical advertisement spots for certain products).

However, as opposed to the view which regards the aesthetisation of advertisement spots as a process which contradicts persuasion, it seems to us rather embedded in a social context of advertisement which is intimately linked to persuasion. The very fact that advertisement spots as genre are characterised by a recipient design guarantees a basic persuasive orientation. This orientation can be best demonstrated with respect to the appeal of aesthetisation to certain social groups. In fact, the aesthetic style of advertisement spots can be seen as expression of (and recipient designated orientation towards) social groups, their tastes and habits. The relation between media genres and social milieus has already been indicated by Berger who shows the "elective affinities" between moral-political milieus in the American society and certain media genres. In Germany, Schulze has developed an approach which allows the relation of social milieus to communicative forms. He starts from the assumption that, because of their differences in age and education, social milieus generate certain "everyday aesthetical schemata" which also cover various media genres.

If we take the advertisement spot to be one expression of such schemata, we can easily discern the proximity of the two extreme types (product spot, art film spot) to two milieus described by Schulze. The product spot presents nothing but a pure product without 'aesthetical decoration' and demands little activity on the part of the viewers. These aspects correspond to the everyday aesthetical schemata of what he calls the harmony milieu which is characterised by focusing on what is necessary and essential: products are to be used for clear cut purposes or they are not needed, and this is exactly what the spot is about. The same still holds for the presenter spot which stresses the uses of the product and the good will of the producer. Since neither of these two types conceal their commercially propagandistic character, they fit nicely into the 'harmony scheme' of this milieu: the presentation is reduced to the product, the appeal of which lies in its mundane functions and effects.

Art film spots, on the other hand, are orientated towards a kind of audience which likes to be cognitively involved in the act of media reception. The audience of this kind favours 'serious' media, such as books, high brow films and music and therefore has access to a large stock of cultural knowledge. These aspects quite clearly correspond to the milieu Schulze characterises by the notion of "niveaus". Members of this milieu are active consumers and producers of high art, and therefore appreciate advertisement spots which challenge their cultural knowledge. The borderline between the features of art film spots and lifestyle spots is almost paralleled by the boundary between the 'niveau-milieu' and the 'self-realisation milieu'. The latter also have good educational backgrounds and are media 'literate' yet being younger they are therefore attracted to what Schulze calls the 'thrill-scheme': video-clips, pop music and a general orientation to adventurous and exceptional activities are accounted for in the lifestyle spots presented in these spots. One could carry these parallels even further. In fact, if one considers the characterisation of a final milieu Schulze calls "integral-milieu", one realises close similarities to the final spots: every day spots. It is exactly the aesthetics of everyday life coping with modern reality which is appreciated by this milieu and which is portrayed by the spot.

However difficult it may be to explain these parallels, with respect to aesthetics we end up with some clear results. First, it seems quite obvious that the thesis of aesthetisation one-sidedly builds on upper class (niveau-milieu) concepts of aesthetics which is realised in few spot types. Second, even if one accepts this narrow version of aesthetisation, the seemingly less aesthetic kinds of spots are not due to disappear at all. The adaptation of high brow aesthetic forms by some types of spots can be understood, thirdly, as a kind of secondary aesthetisation which, however, is based on the existence of a well established genre.

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Verbal Art across Cultures
The Aesthetics and Proto-Aesthetics of Communication

edited by
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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 en-
ccompasses varied sensory channels (audition, vision, touch, taste, smell).

In acknowledging this dimension, the authors of this book diverge from cur-
cent 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 em-
pirical 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 commu-
nicative 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 Commu-
nication”, 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 proc-
cess involving the objectivation of meaning, an accountable orientation of the
interlocutors to the design of discourse and nonordinary reception. Institu-
tionalised art (which carries its purpose in itself) and non-institutionalised

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schungsbereich 511).