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Drama and Narration

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Reconstructive Genres of Everyday Communication[1]

1. *Genres as solutions to communicative problems*

Studies of social communication are usually concerned either with the most elementary linguistic aspects of the social transmission of knowledge, or with the varied forms in which that process was institutionalized in different historical social structures. In our paper we shall not separately consider either of these levels. Instead we shall describe an intermediate, structurally distinct level which has been less adequately explored than the other two. That intermediate level is directly linked to the *linguistic* structures serving as the "material" base for the social transmission of knowledge, and is also systematically connected with the *institutional* structures which regulate the concrete social processes of transmission. It is this level to whose organizational principles we refer with the term communicative "genre".[2] Thus, "genre" belongs to a level which is located between the linguistic, code-related, and the institutional, social structure-related determination of communicative processes. It is characterized by social modelling of the key features of communicative acts.

Communicative genres are solutions to *specifically* communicative problems. Along with the command of language itself, such solutions are available in the social stock of knowledge. There are of course many kinds of communicative processes in any society. Some are, and some are not shaped by, and modelled after, communicative genres.

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[1] Parts of this paper are based on earlier publications in which we deal extensively with various theoretical, empirical, and methodological aspects of genre analysis. We only want to mention Thomas Luckmann (1986; 1989; 1992) and Jörg R. Bergmann (1993 a). This paper, programmatic in nature, is closely related to an empirical research project with the same title which was sponsored by the German Research Foundation and which resulted in a series of studies, a selection of wich includes: Angela Keppler (1988; 1989), Angela Keppler/Thomas Luckmann (1992), Hubert Knoblauch (1991), Bernd Ulmer (1988), Jörg R. Bergmann (1993 b). A book length monograph will be published soon.

[2] The history of the concept of genre starts with Aristotle, and – surviving many attacks, e. g., by Benedetto Croce – the concept continues to be used and debated in literary theory to this day. It was adapted and developed among others, by Bakhtin (1986); it found its way into modern folklore studies and to some extent also into the ethnography of communication. For bibliographic references we may refer to the volume of readings, entitled "Communicative Genres of Everyday Life", which we are preparing for publication. Other sources which may be consulted are Richard Bauman/Joel Sherzer (1974), Dan Ben-Amos (1976) and André Jolles (1982).

Many communicative processes are not constrained in the selection and composition of communicative elements in the comparatively rigid form characteristic of a communicative genre. The individual selects elements from the inventory of linguistic, and more generally, communicative codes in a more or less "spontaneous" fashion. He puts together his message step by step. Sometimes he may pursue an overall communicative project with some degree of awareness, but he does so without following a clearly defined model. The speaker forms sentences by taking those words from the semantic inventory of his language which are available to him in his subjective stock of knowledge, and which seem appropriate to the purpose at hand. As he forms a sequence of words, he of course also follows the elementary rules of syntax and, in addition, he may use stylistic devices and rhetorical stratagems while obeying the prevailing rules of communicative etiquette.[3] In all this he is guided by a mixture of habit and explicit intention, occasionally even by a communicative plan as part of an interactional project[4] – but he does not assemble the parts according to a preestablished overall communicative model.

However, such more or less "spontaneous" acts are by no means the only ones to be found among the communicative processes in a society. Probably, they are not even the ones that occur most frequently. There are others in which the individual follows a recognizable overall model both for selecting elements from the various available communicative codes, especially language, and for joining them together into units larger than sentences and single messages. The use of such models occurs in certain clearly defined types of social situations, and does not occur in others. There may be even situations in which the actor on the social scene is *forced* to use a particular communicative genre, and others in which he is merely likely to do so.

No doubt it is often difficult to draw an exact line between the elementary problems of social life and the *specifically* communicative issues to which genres offer procedural solutions. They are obviously closely interwoven in human life. The elementary and essential problems of food and starvation, sex and love, power and justice, life and death, are always also a matter *for*, and often even a matter *of*, communication. But these matters are first and last something else than communication: They are things to be done rather than things to be talked about. Communicative genres are therefore best not simply considered as social institutions, and if one uses the concept in a merely analogical fashion, it should be understood that they are "institutions" of *communicating* about life, including social life, within social life. However, there may be instances where social institutions and communicative genres overlap almost to the point of identity. This is the case whereever and whenever talking is a *constitutive* part of the resolution

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[3] Concerning communicative etiquette cf. the excellent volume on the history of the *ars conversationis*, edited by Claudia Schmölders (1979).
[4] Cf. Geoffrey W. Beattie (1979) and the systematic analysis of Elinor O. Keenan (1977).

of elementary problems of social life, as for example in a wedding ceremony, judicial sentencing, etc.

The elementary function of communicative genres in social life is to organize, routinize, and render (more or less) obligatory the solutions to recurrent communicative problems (see also Heritage, this volume). The communicative problems for which such solutions tend to be socially established, are in the main those which have to do with the communicative aspects of those kinds of social interaction which are important for the maintenance of a given social order. Of course what is important in one kind of society may not be equally important in another, and what is important in one epoch need not remain important at a later date. It should therefore come as no surprise that different societies do not have the same repertoire of communicative genres (Auer, this volume), and that the communicative genres of one epoch may dissolve into more "spontaneous" communicative processes, while heretofore unbound communicative processes congeal into new genres. At the same time, given the essential similarity of the human condition, it is hardly surprising that cross-cultural and historical comparison not only shows the universality of communicative genres as an organizational principle of social communication but also remarkable similarities in many of their specific historical forms.

2. The structure of communicative genres[5]

In the detailed analysis of similarities and differences between communicative genres it may be useful to consider two aspects of structure. Those features of communicative genres which result directly from the relation between their basic function and their "material" basis may be considered as forming the *inner structure* of communicative genres. But obviously communicative action, whatever intrinsic properties it may have, is also an essential part of social life. It is therefore subject to the general regulations and constraints of social action which derive from the prevailing historical system of social institutions and social stratification, – a system, of course, whose construction presupposes a long chain of communicative actions. The features of a genre which derive from the relation between communicative action and social structure may be considered as forming their *outer structure*.

In the most general terms, the *internal* structure of communicative genres is characterized by the fact that the actor is provided with fixed communicative

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[5] There is a voluminous literature concerning aesthetic genres, but it is of limited value for our sociological interest in (especially oral) genres. After the investigations of Milman Parry (1930) and Albert B. Lord (1960) on the heroic epos, oral communicative genres began to be studied more intensively. On oral poetry cf. Ruth Finnegan (1977) and Paul Zumthor (1983). Of special interest is the "ethnography of communication" approach developed by Dell Hymes and John Gumperz (1972).

patterns consisting of preselections of various components of various codes. The patterns form overall models of communication and are stored as such in the social stock of knowledge with implicit or even explicitly formulated rules for their appropriate use. Elements are preselected (with varying degrees of constraint) from different levels of the main communicative code, a language. They concern elementary phonological, prosodic (Gibbon, this volume), semantic, and syntactic aspects of the code, as well as routinized composite elements, such as idioms, phrases, etc. In addition to the varying preselections from the main code – from which the key "textual" elements of the "message" are built up –, communicative genres also vary with regard to the use they make of additional codes and expressive systems: mimetic, gestural, kinetic and others.

The inner structure of communicative genres thus consists of rather diverse elements: words and phrases selected from different registers, formulae and entire formulaic blocks; rhetorical forms and tropes, stylistic devices, metric and melodic forms, rhymes, adjectival or nominal lists, oppositions, etc. And as regards the intersubjective, dialogical regulation, the inner structure may contain genre-specific rather than general regulations with regard, for example, to turn-taking organization, repair strategies, and to the selection – or avoidance – of certain topics or entire topical fields as for example, politics, sex, etc.

The *outer* structure of communicative genres consists in the main in clearly established definitions of appropriate social milieus for certain types of communicative acts; and for the specifically communicative transformations of social roles. The reciprocal relation of the actors is defined with a higher degree of constraint than it normally is in more "spontaneous" communicative acts. These definitions are evidently not independent of overall, social structural definitions of milieus, situations and actors – but they are not simply identical with them. General social structural and genre-related definitions tend to merge in those instances in which communicative genres are directly related to social institutions, and then the definitions commonly refer to age, gender, status, etc.: teacher, judge, physician, mother-in-law, etc. On the other hand there are genres in which the definitions are *relatively* independent of general social definitions and are valid specifically for the duration of the communicative acts: the actor as story-teller, singer, shouting-match opponent, etc.

Taken together the two structural levels define the concrete patterns of genre-like communicative action and determine the degree of rigidity and constraint with regard to preselection and combination of communicative elements.

In our next chapter we shall deal with a certain "family of genres", which – next to didactic genres – is particularly important in the mediation of action-orienting knowledge, a process in which various kinds of past experiences, events, etc. are reconstructed. In fact, there seems to be an entire group of communicative forms whose main purpose is reconstruction, such as conversion-accounts,[6] interviews, disaster reports, gossip, etc. Different as they are,

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6 Cf. Bernd Ulmer (1988) and Thomas Luckmann (1987).

they have certain features in common which they do not share with, e. g., didactical genres like preaching, teaching, etc.[7] and which they do not share with the minor genres such as sayings, parables, etc.[8]

3. Reconstructions of events as genres

Social events are essentially transitory (see also Quasthoff, this volume), i. e., they occur, they are gone and irrevocably become part of the past. The idea that events appear and disappear again seems, of course, trivial. In our everyday experience events come and go but we have socially institutionalized solutions for the problems which arise from that. Thereby they become "unproblematic problems". An occurring event does not simply dissolve into nothing but becomes an event that has occured, a past event. We know that events are transient. But we also know that past events can be retained in memory, named, typified, thematized, and presented in conversation. For human social intercourse these communicative techniques possess elementary significance. They open up the possibility of historical consciousness and the formation of tradition. Research on historical consciousness of preliterate cultures shows that "for all ethnic groups known to us the past is not accepted as something self-evident or even indifferent, instead events that have occurred are viewed as essential to the present and the future of the affected group and are made the subject of reflection and tradition."[9] Although social events, one after the other, flow downriver in the stream of what has been, this does not mean that every occurrence drowns in it, as it were, the moment after it surfaces in the stream. In this case, too, Odo Marquard's (1973, 241) dictum holds: "People can nearly always do otherwise." And so, past events, "gone forever", are reconstructed.

The assumption that, because of their essentially transitory nature we can control social events only by reconstructing them, seems to contradict the observation that social processes frequently result in material states or facts that out-last them, forming ever-available documents of the past. Whether such "material witnesses" are sought in order to provide criminal evidence or for historiographic, archaeological and sociological purposes, they seem to provide the observer with something tangible. They seem to have "secured" the past because the material objects themselves escape transient time. But this security is treacherous. The presence of a material trace does not bring the past back by itself. Traces must be "read", i. e., the observer must organize whatever he sees in such a way that "there is an occasion for a narrative sequence". Thus the historian Carlo Ginzburg (1980, 12). He continues:

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7 Cf. Richard Bauman (1974).

8 For two classical papers dealing with proverbs and parabels cf. E. Ojo Arewa/Alan Dundes (1964) and Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1975).

9 Rüdiger Schott (1968, 169).

The simplest formulation of this narrative sequence could be: 'someone has passed by here'. Perhaps the idea of narration itself (in contrast to magic spells, curses and conjurings) arose for the first time in a society of hunters and from the experience of tracking. [...] Thus the hunter would have been the first 'to tell a story' because he was the only capable of reading an interconnected series of events in the mute – if not invisible – tracks of his quarry.

Ginzburg's speculation about the origin of the idea of narration is less interesting than his basic point: Even when social events leave behind a trace for the observer, the fact that the original *process* has disappeared remains, literally, a chronic problem. The material traces of an event, no less than the memory of immediate participation in the event, require reconstruction. Furthermore, Ginzburg's remarks on the origin of the idea of narration make clear that the structural problem of the communicative presentation of past events cannot be solved arbitrarily, by each individual for himself. Rather, some socially institutionalized models must be provided to serve as intersubjectively usable solutions for this problem. Communicative genres that specifically serve to reconstruct past events, in short, reconstructive genres, provide such solutions.

There are essentially two reasons why we speak of reconstructive genres and not simply of stories, tales, or narrations. Everyday (story, tale) or scientific (narration) concepts have a normative component which tends to make them deaf to the manifold concrete possibilities of reconstructive reference to social events. First of all, these concepts fail to take note of non-narrative forms of reconstruction. After a sporting event, the players – and sometimes even the fans – can be observed to present single events or passages in a mixture of re-actualizations of scenes, critical or euphoric evaluations, and imagined possibilities about alternative hypothetical courses of the game. That, too, is reconstruction, although in situations of this kind, in which all those who do the reconstructing participated as actors or eyewitnesses to the past occurrence, narrative elements hardly play any role. Yet this is a species of a reconstructive communicative genre: One must know the rules or this form of communication in order to be able to participate in it.

Concepts like "story telling" or "narration" do not reduce the plurality of reconstructive communicative forms only externally. To a great extent they also narrow the spectrum of forms of reconstruction internally. Everday narration occurs for the most part in forms that are not shaped in the fully developed format of a story. Through the observation of family conversations, for example, one notices with some astonishment that events and occurrences are thematized, i. e., "told" for hours, but that "tales" nevertheless remain a rare exception. Instead, brief depictions of new matters, rehearsals of old matters, suggestive anecdotes, individual observations of unusual things succeed one another, sometimes rapidly, sometimes with persevering slowness. For a long time, sociologists and linguists failed to take note of these communicative forms. They were supposedly primitive or degenerated versions of true narration, not to be regarded worthy of investigation. Their autochthonous formal qualities were not recognized. This misplaced disdain can be explained by the fact that it was based on

a normative conception of "narration" that was to a large degree influenced by the traditional literary ideals of narrative form. Normative aesthetic conceptions influenced the analysis of everyday story-telling, if in no other way than by making the "primitive" forms of reconstruction appear as unimportant trifles.

Interestingly, writers like Jane Austen, Theodor Fontane, or Leo Tolstoy were not led astray by literary theory. Using dialogue as a central narrative device, they recognized the "primitive" forms and their conversational significance and reproduced them in their works.[10] As an example we can take a passage from *Anna Karenina* in which Tolstoy describes the conversations of the guests at an evening party in the house of Countess Lisabet:

> The conversation began amiably, but just because it was too amiable it came to a stop again. They had to have recourse to the sure, never-failing topic – gossip [...].
> Round the samovar and the hostess the conversation had been meanwhile vacillating in just the same ways between three inevitable topics: the latest piece of public news, the theater, and scandal. It, too, came finally to rest on the last topic, that is, ill-natured gossip.
> 'Have you heard the Maltischtchev woman – the mother, not the daughter – has ordered a costume in *diable rose* colour?'
> 'Nonsense! No, that's too lovely!'
> 'I wonder that with her senses – for she's not a fool, you know – that she doesn't see how funny she is.'
> Everyone had something to say in censure or ridicule of the luckless Madame Maltischtchev, and the conversation crackled merrily, like a burning faggot-stack.[11]

Tolstoy saw – without articulating the insight theoretically – that a conversation can crackle "merrily, like a burning faggot-stack" through the introduction of trifling news, the continuation of, and comments upon, "piquant" information, and that it is gossip, above all, that is nourished by these rudimentary narrative forms of reconstruction. To be sure, it is not unusual that such piquant information in gossip can be developed into whole stories. But in order to comprehend the entire spectrum of reconstructive forms and subforms that are found in everyday communication we need another, less prejudicial concept than "narration". This was our main motive to speak of "reconstructive genres".

4. An example: gossip as a reconstructive genre

When people gossip they are busy with reconstructing certain episodes from the lives of others. In that sense gossip is just another instance of story-telling. But this qualification is by no means specific enough to clarify, what makes gossip gossip, i. e., why a given instance of story-telling may be legitimately called gossip. Relying on dictionary definitions does not help; they usually try to capture the essence of gossip through a description of the content. But

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[10] For conversation as the dominant medium of modeling reality in Fontane, cf. Wolfgang Preisendanz (1984).

[11] Leo Tolstoy (1931, 178 f.).

describing gossip as "bits of news about the personal business of others"[12] is insufficient insofar as the very same bit of information may at one time count as gossip and not at another, depending on who gives it to whom and whom it concerns. To take a classic topic of gossip: If a woman has an extramarital affair then we would surely call her friends' and neighbours' talk about this event gossip, but not the injured husband's discussion about it with his divorce lawyer. That is to say, whether news about another person is news about his private affairs (and thereby could be the content of a gossip-conversation) depends not only on the content of this news but equally on the relational configuration of those who disseminate it, perceive it, and are affected by it. Starting from this observation a description of the inner structure of gossip as a communicative genre has to encompass the following elements:

Social relation. The basic pattern of gossip to which all imaginable constellations of gossip-talk can be reduced, always incorporates three figures constitutive of the interaction: the producer of gossip, its recipient and the object of gossip, i. e., the person, about whom one gossips. Not everybody may be eligible for inclusion in this gossip triad. There are several constraints as to who is permitted to enter the social circle of gossip. For example, one does not tell juicy gossip stories about one's colleague to a stranger; gossip participants usually have to know each other. At least they need to have a shared knowledge about the identity of the "victim". (If this knowledge is not reciprocal, a derivative form, "celebrity gossip", may develop.) To be sure, stories are told about unknown third persons, but then we would not categorize and treat the resulting conversation as gossip. *Lege artis* one should gossip only about friends, colleagues and acquaintances and only with friends, colleagues and acquaintances. Thus, the gossip triad reproduces the pattern of intimacy within the relational network of the participants involved. The right to gossip about friends is a privilege, which is extended only to those persons who are recognized as members of this network and who know that it is their duty to show interest in the virtues as well as in the bad habits of the other members. Moreover, to gossip about others is – in a sociological sense – as important as to be gossiped about. This insight was nicely put by Elizabeth Bott (1971, 67): "No gossip, no companionship."

Non-presence of third party. A further communicative prerequisite for the occurrence of gossip is that the person gossiped about is excluded from the communication itself as an active or passive participant. He is present only as somebody whom the others talk about. This negative determination of the object of gossip is a constitutive feature of gossip as such. When this prerequisite is not or no longer given then gossip (about this person) is blocked or suppressed. This can be observed in such cases in which an absent person, whom others are talking about, suddenly appears on the scene, with the result that the co-interactants may put an abrupt end to their conversation. An embarrassing silence may

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12 Thus the definition in *Wahrig's Deutsches Wörterbuch.*

follow or the intruder may retreat with an "I'll see you later". Instances like this show that the rule, according to which the object of gossip must not be present, is not just a statistical regularity or an imputed relation, but a feature of gossip, to which the gossipers themselves are oriented. Again it may be claimed that there are situations in which parties to a conversation in fact talk about a third party who is present. We do not want to deny this, but we maintain that the type of communication occurring in such a situation differs significantly from what we described as "gossip" and deserves to be analyzed as another communicative form.

Privacy. A further pre-condition for gossip to emerge pertains to a specific qualification of the object (the "victim") of gossip. In order to become a target of gossip a person must be capable of claiming privacy. Gossip draws an essential part of its energy from the tension between what an individual does publicly and what he seeks to keep private.[13] The transgression of a boundary to a sphere, which the person spoken about would claim as his private one, is a constitutive element of gossip – and at the same time a major source of fascination for the gossipers. This feature may explain why conversations about little children (or about pets) would not count as gossip, even if during these conversations "intimate" details were mentioned. Virtual objects of gossip are only persons who are accorded the ability to claim privacy for themselves, i. e., a hidden "second" world behind the obviously given "first" one.[14]

Ethno-theory of gossip. It is a feature of many (but not all) communicative genres that there is a common stock of everyday knowledge about the normativity and social reputation of the communicative activity prescribed and modelled by these genres. Frequently, genres are much more than neutral guidelines for the accomplishment of certain communicative activities. They are imbued with cultural values; people rely on socially accepted knowledge about them (an ethno-theory) in order to make use of genres. Gossip is a good case in point. A striking and crucial feature of gossip is that there is a sharp discrepancy between the public proscription of gossip and its prevailing occurrence in private. Following the suggestion of Karl Vossler (1923, 239), "to take the instruction books of eloquence, the old rhetorics as first attempts of a sociological reflection on language", one can find that gossip always was regarded a violation of good manners and was condemned as impoliteness, tactlessness, if not as proof of poor character of those engaging in it. The denigration of gossip is not restricted to those books and treatises of etiquette in which the rules of good conduct are documented and normatively postulated. There are many vernacular expressions and phrases by which those who like to gossip are characterized in a very disparaging way. Now the interesting question is whether those who nevertheless

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13 Erving Goffman's (1959) early distinction between on stage and off stage behaviour could be used for a more thorough account of this argument.

13 It was Georg Simmel (1950) who developed in his "sociology of the secret" the idea that the first, visible world is tremendously enlarged and enriched through secrecy.

engage in gossip simply ignore its public condemnation or take it into account – and how they do either the one or the other.

The danger of gossip. Transcripts of gossip-talk clearly reveal that the formal structure in which gossip is communicatively realized is strongly influenced by its disreputable public image. People who engage in gossip are obviously aware of the fact that they endanger their own reputation. There are many features from which it can be inferred that gossipers are at pains to cope with the problematic implications of their doing. They take various precautions in order to avoid negative ascriptions. To begin with, interactants do not start to gossip outright. Regularly the participants begin by trying to establish to what extent knowledge about the character of the potential "victim" is shared, and to get the co-interactant to ratify the moral framing within which the talking is to take place. This pre-gossip sequence[15] can either take the form of an offer (if one of the participants has a story to tell), or it can take the form of an invitation (typically presented in a fishing format) if someone wants to receive news about a mutual acquaintance. The rationale for both devices is self-evident: By either of these procedures irrevocable unilateral moves toward gossip are avoided. Thus, because all participants are involved in the dubious business of gossiping from the very beginning, a one-sided, righteous assignment of blame is prevented.

Accentuation of the extraordinary. Other features of gossip-talk which are occasioned by the disgraceful quality of gossip may be found by looking at the reconstructive activity itself. Gossipers talk about the private doings of an absent acquaintance. Gossip information is "advertised" as worthy of communication through the general way it is presented by setting specific accents. Against the background of such "advertisement", it is easily understood why gossip-talk tends to emphasize in its reconstructions of past events the unexpected, the unconventional, the juicy, the strange, the improper, the immoral and the eccentric in the behaviour of the "victim". The accentuation of the extraordinary has two important implications. On the one hand, it heightens the entertainment value of the information. And on the other hand, dramatic accents placed upon rule-breaking behaviour help to legitimate the gossiper's intrusion into the private sphere of the "victim". Scandal turns a private event into a subject of public interest.

Authentification. In principle, the gossiper's concern is to present his information as believable. Because gossip contains a built-in tendency to exaggeration, gossipers are always in danger of being considered slanderers. Whether a speaker's presentation contains false statements about an absent third party cannot, of course, be decided solely through the analysis of gossip-talk. We can observe, however, that gossipers employ numerous authentification strategies within their reconstructive activity in order to prove that the narrative version they present is valid and that their information is trustworthy. For example, in reconstructing

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[15] On pre-sequences cf. Steven Levinson (1983, 345 ff.).

an interactive episode they strongly prefer to use direct quotations in order to present again what someone already had said earlier. The quotation format is especially suitable for the purpose of gossip because it not only conveys a flavour of authenticity and originality, but – as Volosinov (1973) and Goffman (1974; 1981) have pointed out – it also provides room for uncensured and unrestricted expression, for which the one who is quoted rather than the one who quotes can be held responsible. This again provides the opportunity both for exaggeration and dramatization as well as for entertainment.

In their utterances gossipers repeatedly reveal that they have not lost sight of the morally contaminated character of their information. This is shown in their efforts to present their knowledge as passively acquired, that is, as information that was given to them by others, or that they had received it in some other way, which did not imply that they were actively seeking to get that information. In reconstructing an event, gossipers typically not only describe the event itself but also the genealogy of their knowledge, thus providing evidence that the event intruded into their sphere of perception and that they could not help perceiving it.[16] By objectifying their version in this fashion the gossipers make sure that they escape the danger of being compromised by their stories.

Moralizing. Gossip producers do not present their information in the detached, neutral mode of a news broadcaster. What is important for the gossipers is not so much the informational content of their stories but the commentaries and evaluations added to mere information. Two of the most striking features of gossip-talk bear witness to this. First, it can be observed that what is the stimulating effect of gossip for the gossipers themselves is to be found mainly in the joy of speculation about the why's and wherefore's of the story and about the motives of the "victim". Second, a prevailing characteristic of gossip is moral indignation – often hiding outright malice. The latter may be discovered in the inflection marking much gossip-talk. Gossip producers indicate early, how they wish their story to be interpreted. Whenever the recipient agrees with this evaluation, one speculative and denigrating remark may follow upon another. An outside observer could then easily get the impression that the information itself served the gossipers only as a pretext for idle speculation, mischievous remarks and joint moral indignation.

Social typing. The gossipers are interested in the generalization of their knowledge at least as much as in the reconstruction of the event itself. The story is not taken to be a singular episode but is interpreted as typical of the character of the gossip's "victim". Thus, the "victim" is identified as a social type. The "moral" of a gossip story always points beyond the single individual actor; he is seen as a specimen of an entire breed. By generalizing about the single episode and by turning the "victim" into a social type, a solid base for the continuation

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[16] Cf. Robin Wooffitt's (1992) study of talk about paranormal events in which frequently an "I was just doing X when Y"-utterance format occurred. The same format could be observed in a certain type of calls to the fire department, cf. Jörg R. Bergmann (1993b).

of gossip-talk is provided. Either the gossipers move on to the next story about the same victim – or go back to an old one. This will serve as further evidence for the character revealed in the original piece of news. Or they turn to another member of their common social network who is taken to be a further representative of the social type exemplified in the story. Gossip is thus a self-perpetuating communicative activity in which people denigrate their mutual friends and acquaintances. It is only through external signs and constraints that they may be forced to leave the universe of gossip, return to the world of everyday business, and take up the duties they interrupted for the sake of gossip (and which often served as a pretext for approaching potential fellow-gossipers).

Inferring, speculating, commenting, re-playing, insinuating, denigrating and, of course, story-telling are constitutive elements of every gossip-talk. But story-telling is only one and not necessarily the most important feature of gossip. Studying gossip by way of narrative analysis would have drawn our attention again primarily to the story part. We think it is one advantage of the concept of communicative genre that it is capable of redirecting the researcher's attention to hitherto ignored phenomena deserving systematic study.

5. Communicative genres within the communicative "budget" of a society

Other communicative forms can be studied in a manner analogous to the one we exemplified in the case of gossip. We have already mentioned that it is possible to imagine a large spectrum of closely related communicative forms by varying one by one the features that are constitutive of gossip. What kind of communicative activity is it when instead of the delivery and exchange of new stories *old* stories are retold? Is it a communicative genre in its own right when people talk about somebody who is *present*? Is it already gossip when two friends who see each other after some time bring each other up to date ("How is your wife?")? Pursuing this line of research one can think of a whole group of "consanguinal" relatives of gossip forming an entire "family of genres".

To be sure, the same procedure may be applied while starting from a different point of departure, say, the communicative form of taking leave. Again one would find that by minor changes of a single element other forms emerge and that they may be grouped together as a separate family of communicative forms. But then there are cross-links between these various families, even cross-marriages which eventually lead to genre hybrids and other communicative forms whose *genus* may be a bit unclear. What is clear to us is that a concept is needed which is able to cover the multitude of communicative forms, genres, families etc. and which nevertheless is open enough to new ideas developing out of detailed empirical studies. We suggest, that the idea of a "communicative budget" of a society (Thomas Luckman, 1989) may serve as such an organizing concept.

We would like to introduce the term communicative "budget" to refer to the whole of the communicative dimension of social life. The term is considerably more abstract than the concept of communicative genre. It should be obvious that under some circumstances almost any communicative process may have a bearing upon the maintenance – and transformation – of a society, but it is also clear that, in fact, some communicative processes are more important than others. It is a matter for empirical and systematic cross-cultural study to establish which is which; it is not a matter to be decided in the abstract. Nonetheless, one may be sure that there are some basic problems to be resolved in all societies; that these problems will have a basic similarity one to another, and that therefore some kinds of communicative issues may be universal and, therefore, some kinds of similar genre-like solutions to communicative issues will be found everywhere.

The communicative "budget" of a society consists of different kinds of communicative processes, the difference being not only one of content but also one of form. Much of the "budget" can only be estimated. It is loosely structured and contains "spontaneous" communicative processes. But its most important part has the substantially more rigorous structure of a system. It consists of the field of communicative genres.[17] A reasonably accurate analysis of the repertoire and the functioning of communicative genres should give a rough estimate of the entire communicative "budget". And even a rough estimate should prove of great value in an area characterized by so much guesswork as is the theory of "cultural" and social change.

The word "budget" is quite appropriate in the present context. The colloquial meaning of this book-keeping term refers both to the precisely established and to only the apparently precise, roughly estimated components. It alludes to exact figures as well as to guesswork. All this nicely captures the heterogeneous elements of a communicative "budget", and provides a good idea of the mixture of reasonably reliable empirical data and a rather speculative estimate of facts which is likely to characterize the study of communicative "budgets".

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[17] We use this term in analogy to the term semantic field in linguistic theory. This means that communicative genres are defined not only by a comparatively rigorous organization of their component parts (which distinguishes them from "spontaneous" forms of communication), but also by their systematic relation to one another. In a "field" of genres, changes in one genre have consequences for all the other genres.

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ERIKA FISCHER-LICHTE

Written Drama – Oral Performance

1. The drama: literature or theatre?

Theatre in the West is essentially characterised by the tension between written drama and orality. Since Aristotle, there has been much dissent as to whether drama should be considered under literature as writing or under theatre as orality. Whilst Aristotle sharply distinguished drama as literary text from its performance in the theatre because "the effect of tragedy can be felt without the performance or the actor", (Aristoteles 1964) drama theorists today tend to classify drama as a "multimedial text" (Pfister 1988: 6–11). This is a valid approach since literary theory has consistently neglected the dimension of performance. Some conclusions drawn on the basis of such an approach, however, may not always be entirely appropriate.

This is because there are fundamental differences between the performance of a drama and its literary text both in terms of the media and semiotics. Drama, with its fixed, written text, belongs to the class *monomedial texts*. The performance, on the other hand, which at the very least is communicated by two media – the stage and the actor, belongs to the class *multimedial texts*. Whilst the literary text consists exclusively of *homogeneous* linguistic/written *signs*, and even complex signs (such as figure[1] and plot) arise through the combination of linguistic/written signs, the performance is made of *heterogeneous signs* which may be verbal or non-verbal (mime, gesture, proxemics, mask, costume, props, set, sounds, music). (Compare Fischer-Lichte 1987: 197–221). The literary text of the drama belongs, therefore, to the category "writing", the performance of the drama, on the other hand, to "orality".

This important distinction between the drama and its performance in media and semiotics has far-reaching consequences in the study of the dramatic dialogue. For the dramatic dialogue primarily represents – even in the fixed, literary text – a face to face interaction which, by definition, must fall within the sphere of orality. Secondly, the language of the dialogue can be constructed so differently that its variants can range across a whole continuum extending between two extremes – a highly elaborate written language and a completely artless

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[1] "Figure" is used here rather than "character" to differentiate fictional figures in the theatre from any character or person in real life. All terminology of drama and theatre used in this paper is based on Pfister 1988.

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