The Sociolinguistic Analysis of Genres and Its Application to Focussed Ethnographic Data

Abstract

The use of audiovisual recording devices is changing the practice of qualitative research. Extensive corpus of data can be generated in (short-term) focussed fieldwork. Nevertheless, methods to analyse video data are still in an experimental stage. This article explores the benefits and limitations of applying sociolinguistic genre analysis to audio-visual data. This is illustrated with a case study, based on the videotaped «deep-trance vision» of a New Religious Movement's spiritual leader, which is one the most famous contemporary religious visionaries in Germany. The analysis aims to reconstruct the construction of this religious experience of transcendence from the perspective of its followers. We will examine three different levels of communication (a) the inner context, exploring the textual, gestural, mimical and prosodic aspects, (b) the intermediate level where the focus lies on the setting and decorum, and finally (c) the outer context, focussing on the social embedding of this form of «transcendent» communication and its filmic presentation. The article closes with a reflection on the need to combine hermeneutic analysis of case studies based on textual analysis with ethnographic field data and observation to contextualise its interpretation.

Keywords
Video-data; Genre-analysis; Ethnography; Religious experiences; New religious movements

Technical recording devices considerably change the present ways of conducting qualitative research. In particular, the availability of video cameras has exerted a deep impact on established research practices. This can impact on ethnographic work in at least two ways: On the one hand, the very object of research changes and on the other, it requires different – if not completely new – methods of analysis. Aspects of the field that passed unnoticed when using conventional forms of data generation are increasingly being rendered visible due to the use of audiovisual recordings and these «recorded» aspects can be systematically scrutinised. Video-analysis enables the microscopic examination of minimal details that are unavailable with the use of reconstructive methods like fieldnotes or interviews. Video recordings as sociological data show some particular
characteristics. They are natural data insofar as they are obtained through conservation by registration.\(^1\) Their relevance for ethnography is not only due to the major richness of sensual aspects that they contain (like images, sound, movement, etc.) when compared to reconstructive forms like fieldnotes, interviews or diaries. In addition, video data is apparently less influenced by the researcher’s interpretations as, for instance, field notes or observational protocols. A further advantage of video-data lies in the richness of detail accessible for subsequent analysis, preferably realized collectively by a group of researchers. When compared to purely textual representations, video-recordings include another advantage. That is, due to their inherent sequentiality, they permit the preservation of the specific chronicity, the sequential unfolding of the recorded social action or chain of actions. Therefore, video data preserves the originality of the situation better than any form of (decontextualised) textual description. In addition, through resources of technical manipulation like slow motion, freezing a frame or rewinding, video can be accessed in achronicity.

Technological advance generates further consequences for the work of ethnography. Historically scholars have placed much emphasis on assuring the quality of data collection by insisting, for example, on the importance of first-hand experience in the field. However, it is evident that the same intensity of effort has not always been invested in assuring the quality and transparency of data analysis.

Nevertheless, video-data are not simple depictions of life-world occurrences, but mediated representations – that is reality is still transformed into data. This transformation comprehends, for example, reducing three-dimensional space into two-dimensional flat plane, eliminating perspectives and all non-acoustic and non-visual sensual qualities of the situation. In short, video combines mimetic and constructive elements. Although it easily preserves important aspects of a past situation and the interaction that have taken place, it would be naïve to view recorded interaction as a simple document of the situation. Video recordings as data entail some further problems for research. For example, it is easy to generate a large amount of data. But, managing a large data corpus exposes the researcher to a high degree of complexity as expressed some time ago by Südmerseen (1983) when she referred to audio-recorded interview-data: The bewilderment facing the magnitude of data and the sometimes helpless search for methods to analyze them. In other words, new techniques of data collection are not a simple benefit, but confront us with a series of unresolved methodological problems. General approaches to analyse visual data (English 1991; Hahn 1991; Rose 2000) are of limited use for video-analysis. And, the analysis of video-data requires more than »visual empathy« combined with a mainly descriptive »structured microanalysis« as Denzin’s (2000) »principles of a critical visual analysis« suggest referring to documentary films.

The development of adequate methods for analyzing video data is a serious current challenge. Video data are gaining increasing relevance especially in qualitative research (for an overview, cf. the contributions in Knoblauch et al. 2006b). At the same time, theoretical reasoning on visuality and visual culture in general in the humanities and social sciences is flourishing.\(^2\) In Cultural and Social Anthropology, visual data were extensively used at least since the midst of the 19th century, leading to the particular approach of Visual Anthropology as media supported field works (Collier 1967; Mead 1975). Although in academic Sociology

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\(^1\) For the distinction between «conservation by registration» vs. «reconstructive conservation» cf. Bergmann (1985).

\(^2\) There are already some approaches for the analysis of visual data in general (Banks and Morphy 1997; Davies 1999; Emmison and Smith 2000; Heßler 2005; Pink 2001). Hence, video is playing a subordinated role, (Pink 2007) or is completely absent (Rose 2007) in visual ethnography.
one finds early uses of visual data already between 1903 and 1915 (cf. Soeffner 2006), a proper Visual Sociology was not established until the 1970s (de Miguel and Pinto 2002; Schändlinger 1998). Despite thorough efforts to extend the field of Visual Sociology, its influence was resisted since the 1980s by the popular project of Cultural Studies. Originating in Anglo-Saxon countries, Cultural Studies aspire to establish the constitution of a completely »new cultural science of images« (Holert 2000) with new »post-disciplinary« approaches labelled as Visual Culture (Bryson et al. 1991; Evans and Hall 1999; Mirzoeff 1999; Walker and Chaplin 1997) and Visual Studies (Schulz 2005). These approaches combine substantial contributions from critical social theory, media criticisms and discourse analysis, and apply them on visual instead of textual data. However, studies in Visual Culture are largely preoccupied with epistemological problems (for instance, if – or to what extent – images may betray the observer), and few researchers have dedicated themselves to the question of how video data may be conscientiously and productively used in qualitative research (cf. Goodwin 1994; Goodwin 2000; Heath 1986; Heath 1997a; Heath 1997b; Heath and Hindmarsh 2002; Jordan and Henderson 1995; Lomax and Casey 1998)

Video is used today in a wide range of research fields, as in doctor-patient interaction (Heath 1986), in visual ethnography of work and technology in the prominent approach known as Workplace Studies (Heath et al. 2004; Knoblauch 2000; Luff et al. 2000), studying work and interaction in high-tech working contexts like airport towers (Goodwin and Goodwin 1996), underground control rooms (Heath and Luff 1996), Information System Design (Luff, Hindmarsh, and Heath 2000) or tele-cooperation (Meier 1998). The application of video-analysis extends to research in fields like the study of contemporary religion (Bergmann et al. 1993), medical sociology (Schubert 2006), research of school interaction (Aufschnaiter and Welzel 2001), museums and galleries (Heath and vom Lehn 2004; vom Lehn 2006), social studies of science, technology and innovation (Rammert and Schubert 2006) or applied qualitative market research (Schmid 2006), to name but a few examples of the rapidly increasing research areas in which video is significantly used as a new form of data production and analysis.

In what follows, I will discuss the analysis of audio-visual data as a specific problem of contemporary ethnographic research, demonstrating the benefits and limitations of applying sociological genre analysis to video-data. Its potential will be demonstrated by using an example from a study on religious visions. The next section starts with some methodological considerations. Subsequently, I proceed to the example and close with some methodological reflections.

Genre analysis of visual data

The method of sociological genre analysis was originally developed for the study of oral communication (Luckmann 1985; Luckmann 1986). Communicative genres are patterns of speaking that represent predefined solutions to communicative problems which are historically and culturally specific. Their function is to deal with and to communicate intersubjective experiences of the life-world (Luckmann 1988). Genre analysis does not simply aim to describe different socially structured patterns of communication. Rather, it assumes that the communicative problems, for which predefined communicative forms exist, are of crucial importance in a certain culture. Communicative genres constitute the hard institutional core of social life; they serve as instruments that mediate between the social structure and
the individual stock of knowledge and as instruments of the communicative construction of reality (ibid: 716ff. For genre analysis cf. also Knoblauch 1996; Luckmann and Knoblauch 2004).

Genre analysis has proved to be a useful method for analysing oral face-to-face communication. But it has also been employed for technical mediated forms of communication. The special methodological approach of genre analysis consists in its threefold level of analysis (Güthner and Knoblauch 1995). This seeks to understand the internal structural elements, the intermediate level of interactive realization and the outer context as the embedding of certain communicative forms in the wider social structure. It is this broad approach that makes genre analysis especially apt for an application to naturalistic video data (that is, video recording of naturally occurring social interaction, in the sense of Goffman). In this article, I will apply genre analysis on a video data fragment taken from a study in sociology of religion.4

Contemporary Visions: The case of “Uriella”

Data are taken from a focussed ethnography5 of contemporary visionary experiences we conducted at the University of Constance.6 The research consisted in collecting, interpreting and building a typology of contemporary premonitions of future events that are rooted in extraordinary experiences, usually called »visions of the future« (Knoblauch and Schnettler 2001; Schnettler 1999; Schnettler 2004). Visions are experiences of »greater transcendence«,7 experienced in the inner realm of subjective consciousness. In order to acquire social relevance, these private experiences have to be communicated to others. The specific problem of visionary communication is located in the origin of the prophetic message, presented as something animated by the visionary without being him or herself the author of it. It is this ambivalent tension that constitutes the specific problem of presentation for visionary communication. In a more specific sense, visions are extraordinary experiences accompanied by extra-sensory perceptions (optical, acoustic, etc.) that are frequently interpreted within a religious frame of reference (Mohr 2000). In this sense, visions are conceived as revelations of transcendent knowledge that are being disclosed to others.

Vision is presently a frequently used term, although it is prominent in quite a different context. »Visions« are flourishing today in economics and politics. They

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4 Video-analysis has already been used in sociology of religion, see Bergmann, Luckmann & Soeffner (1993).

5 See Knoblauch (2005) for the methodological principles of »focussed« ethnography, its practice of collecting data and its differences to more conventional forms of ethnography.

6 The material is taken from the research project »Prophetic Visions at the turn of the Millennium«, granted by the IGPP, Freiburg (FP 68 15 10). I am especially indebted to Hubert Knoblauch, Regine Herbrik and Stefan Hohenadel, who considerably contributed to the analysis. Christian Heath and his team at Kings College London, the members of the ethnography circle Constance-St. Gall, Hans-Georg Soeffner, Jürgen Raab and other colleagues in Constance, also Matthias Kaup, Pavlina Rychterova, Bernhard Haupert and Klaus Krammer had been exposed, some repeatedly, with video/recording and in turn gave me a lot of very helpful ideas. I thank especially Beatrice Szczepesk for her support in transcribing the prosodic peculiarities of the material.

7 I follow the notion of Schutz and Luckmann that the capacity to experience transcendence is rooted in the specific intentiontional structure of consciousness that is constitutive for the human condition. For the distinction between »minor«, »medium« and »greater« transcendency see Schütz & Luckmann (1973) and Luckmann (1967). See Knoblauch (1998) for the distinction between the anthropological from the phenomenological transcendence.
abound in management rhetoric, business communication and political propaganda. However, these »secular« visions have little in common with divine inspiration, prophecies of doom, calls for redemption or other kinds of moralizing appeals. Instead, these »visions« represent quite mundane orientations and aims in contexts of pragmatic actions. Visions seem to have shifted from the sphere of religion into economic and political spheres, changing the character of a vision; initially transcendent and imposed on the experiencing person, into a mundane and intentional form of communication. Considering this, it may cause only little surprise to learn that persons invoking visionary inspiration to legitimate there religious activities are today faced with serious problems. They are widely marginalized and often believed to suffer from some kind of pathology. This reservation is not new. In our culture, since the warnings of Kant against the followers of Swedenborg, there has been strong intellectual criticism against such claims of supernatural inspiration, often interpreted as deriving from mental disorder or similar disturbances of the soul. Indeed, once they were condemned as »ghost viewers«. Times have thankfully changed and ritual prosecution and burning at the stake is a phenomenon of a bygone era. However, people claiming to hold some kind of direct connection to supernatural entities are still perceived with considerable suspicion and are often mocked in mass media publications. Similar reactions of hostility and rejection were suffered by the prophets in ancient Israel before the Exile, as Weber (1988 [1921]) reports. And, medieval visionaries were subject to proof about the origin of their inspiration, either believed to be »angelic« or »diabolic« (Dinzelbacher 1981). In this respect, little seems to have changed. But one fundamental change in contemporary views of visionaries is that they are often intended to have a primary function of entertainment.

This also happens to one of the perhaps most well known »prophets« in the German speaking countries, Erika Bertsching-Eika, alias »Uriella«, who became prominent as a kind of anti-star in the media. Public reactions to her prophecies are less dominated by warnings to prevent from a dangerous leader-lady of a strange religious sect, but by a way of strange appreciation mixed with amused fascination.\(^8\) The trance messages of Uriella serve as a »loudspeaker« of Jesus Christ and entail an interesting problem for communication analysis. That is, how and by which means can an experience that is primarily enclosed in the inner stream of consciousness be communicated intersubjectively and thereby provide access to others? How does Uriella render plausible her claim that the messages she propagates are being communicated through and not by her? How does she interactionally produce the presence of an invisible entity that is using her as an instrument or a »tool« of communication?

As we will see, this specific problem of presentation – or, to use an expression of Alfred Schütz (1962[1945]): the »paradox of communication« – is resolved in the performance. The analysis that follows will show that those elements of the presentation which account for the theatrical humour to outsiders are precisely the elements that build up the plausibility of Uriella’s audition for the members of her community. The expression performance has to be understood as the physical presentation to a co-present audience, to which audiovisual analysis is the method of first choice. In analysing this performance we will distinguish between different levels: the framing elements as setting and decorum, four elements of the presentation itself, namely gesture, mimic, text and prosody, focussing on their respective forms

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\(^8\) Swiss expert on sects Franz Schlenk points out that Uriella »attracts primarily for her entertainment value, she seemingly amuses and raises roaring laughter. Most people may have problems to take her seriously« (Schlenk 1999).
and the way in which they are combined in the presentation. This detailed analysis not only allows reconstructing the symbolic stock and the identification of its respective origins, but also gives an answer to the question of how the presentation of a principally intersubjective and inaccessible inner dimension of experience is rendered credible through specific forms of presentation. This inductive analytic approach permits the reconstruction of the reality claim of the visionary performance and the resulting effects of it, seemingly absurd or at least problematic for an outsider.

The analysis, therefore, aims at reconstructing a specific external form of religious experience, that is: a vision. This is a new approach insofar as research in the field of religious experiences mainly draws on surveys (Yamane and Polzer 1994) or narrative data (Yamane 2000). Besides the fragment of video data under scrutiny, the analysis that follows is based on several visits to the field in May and July of 1999, in-depth interviews with Uriella and her husband Icordo. Interviews lasted for three hours and these combined with extensive documentary materials about the community »Order FIAT LUX«.

Analysis

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<td>Gesture and Mimic</td>
<td>Uriella’s eyes are closed (take 1), she inhales very deeply and slightly moves her head to one side, before abruptly turning her head to the sky (take 2). This abrupt movement of her head is synchronized with a demonstration gesture, moving her arms with hanging hands in a theatrical manner upwards and closing them, beginning to separate them again over her head (take 3), and then extending them at maximum. She now knits her lips together and her closed eyelids contract (take 3). For a short moment, an ecstatic expression shines up in her face. She moves slightly up her whole body, her mouth opens, but is being closed again without a word leaving her lips. She then begins to sink together a bit; the closed eyelids are now slightly turned downwards. Her whole head begins to drop a little to the front</td>
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Image 1: transcript of the onset of Uriella’s visionary performance
Following the principle of an upgrading contextualization, the analysis starts
with the core element – that is: the (recording of) the visionary performance.
Subsequently, I will introduce elements of the wider context of the field in which this
performance is embedded. The fact that we are not analyzing the situation but its
recording will be ignored for the moment in an attitude of »artificial (methodological)
naïveté« (Hitzler 1991), but I will return to that aspect at the end of this article.

Inner Structure: Text, Gesture, Mimic and Prosody

Looking from the order FIAT LUX members’ perspective, the starting analytic
focus aims to explore what is the central point or legitimizing moment for Uriella’s
claim to be a direct »loudspeaker of Christ« and how is this realised. The following
fragment dates from 1995 and is a video recording of one of Uriella’s »full-trance
messages«. Of special interest is the onset of this message, as it marks the
beginning of the transcendence communication and entails what seems to be an
important change in ›footing‹ (Goffman 1981). For this reason, we will analyze these
first decisive seconds of the performance in detail and treat the following trajectory in
less detail (see figure 1).

In this fragment, we are looking directly into the visionary’s face, observing not
only her mouth articulating the »divine words« but also her facial expressions and the
movements of her arms. Observe which methods of expression are employed to
transmit the visionary message, delivered in free monologue to a co-present
audience. The sequence, which in total lasts for around 10 minutes, starts with an
extremely long pause, in which the visionary remains completely silent and no words
are articulated. Nevertheless, this long interruption is very dense in gesture and
mimic. Uriella’s eyes are closed (figure 1, take 1), she produces deep inbreaths and
slightly moves her head to one side, before abruptly turning her head to the sky (take
2). This abrupt movement of her head is synchronized with a demonstration gesture,
moving her arms with hanging hands in a theatrical manner upwards and closing
them, beginning to separate them again over her head (take 3), and then extending
them to their maximum. She now knits her lips together and her closed eyelids
contract (take 3). For a short moment, an ecstatic expression shines up in her face.
She moves slightly up her whole body, her mouth opens, but is being closed again
without a word leaving her lips. She then begins to sink together a bit; the closed
eyelids are now slightly turned downwards. Her whole head begins to drop a little to
the front. In total, 11 seconds elapse in a room characterised by complete silence,
before she finally starts to speak (take 5).

This long lasting silence of profound significance does not only mark the
interruption between normal and transcendent communication. Uriella uses additional
bodily signs to signal to her audience that she now is »tuned in«: Therefore, she

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9 Since the foundation of her community, Uriella had around 600 auditions, communicated in trance to her
followers, mainly from Jesus Christ, in some cases from Maria.
combines at least three forms: (1) She takes a deep in-breath, which is a classical physical symbol of enthusiastic inspiration, where the inhaling of air represents the spiritual force penetrating and taking possession of the medium. (2) She adopts a head posture commonly seen with visionaries, with the slight variation of closed eyes and a short ecstatic expression flickering over her face. Finally, (3) her arms extend like antennas, and serve to display her as a cosmic receiver of a divine message. It is only after this complex sequence of para-linguistic action, when she finally starts speaking. She begins with a formal greeting (»my beloved children«), interrupted by a clearing of her throat (line 3).\(^\text{11}\)

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1 U: .hhhhhhh
2 (7.0)
3 «t meine ((räusper)) ge’llEten ↑KINder. (6.0)
   my    beloved       children
4 ↓S:::ELikh:::::,› (2.0)
   blessed
5 sind die «all+f ↑H:ONGernden.› (2.0)
   are   the   hungry
6 «f+h) denn sie werden ge’s:Ättigt(-) «t: WERden.› (1.0)
   for   they   satisfied will be
7 «f+h) ↑↑S:ELig*,!=
   blessed
8 sind die:: barm: ↑↑H:ERZ:igen. (3.5)
   are   the   merciful
9 .h denn ↑sIE werden barm↑↑HERZich:`kei::t erf:Ahren dÜrfen.› (5.0)
   for   they   will            merci be shown
10 «t sElkh\(^\text{h}\) (1.5) «f+h) sind `JEne::;
   blessed are those
11 dIE `reinen ↑↑HERZEns sInd\(^*\) › (3.0)
   the    pure         in heart
12 denn sie `wEr`den: (2.5) ↓GOTT «flüstern+t+f, schAUen\(^\text{e}\).› (1.0)
   for they will God see
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\(^\text{10}\) One can find this typical head posture documented in paintings of saints as visionaries, for example in El Greco’s *Apparition of the Madonna with the child to St. Lorenzo* (ca. 1777–1580, see above, left) or pictures of contemporary visionaries in Marian apparitions (see above, middle and right).

\(^\text{11}\) This transcription follows the GAT-conventions (Selting et al. 1998). See also the selection of transcript symbols at the end of this article.
Following the salutation (at line 3), three verses from the Sermon on the Mountain (Mt. 5, 6–8) open the visionary speech (see also the full transcript at the end of this article). The following vocalization shows on the four different levels – that is: text, mimic, gesture and prosody – these structural characteristics:

The lexicon of the talk includes a series of terms and expressions drawn from a Christian canon, as for example the beatitudes (line 4–12), »God« (line 12, 74, 84), »reincarnation in flesh« (line 28), »Kingdom of Heaven« (line 48), »Hallelujah, Hosanna« (Line 70, 71), »mysticism« (line 85), »the beyond« (line 87), »prayer« (line 108), »penitent sinner« (line 75) and the reference to Trinity (line 115–120). But Uriella also uses terms that clearly do not stem from a Christian tradition, like »divine sparkle« (line 25), »wheel of time« (line 32), »ancestral law of karma« (line 33), »cosmic clock« (line 127), »sublimation of being« (line 51). Although pertaining to different registers, both mark her speech clearly as religious. This special mixture also makes comprehensible the accusation of heresy that Uriella is confronted with from parts of the official Churches. Elements of the Christian tradition are mixed up with those of non-Christian ones and linked to technical metaphors: »therefore everyone has to repair that what he has broken« (line 54–56), »the best glue to mend this broken spots« (line 54–56) »because he has constructed his doctrine on this imperishable love« (line 78–79), »the wheel of time is connected to this ancestral law of Karma« (line 44-45), »my content of truth that I have built-in to my doctrine« (line 100–1001).

Analyzing the textual elements shows how highly sophisticated the composition of the visionary talk is: Uriella (or Jesus) draws on a series of rhetorical techniques to deliver the message. For example, she produces triple lists, e.g. in the beatitudes (line 4–12), »thanking, praising, and glorifying« (line 47), »he is..., he is..., he moves, he is (line 18–26); rhetorical questions »where, you may ask yourselves« (line 13-14), »if only the people would know« (line 46 ff., line 52ff); and, a series of causal conjunctions that knit together quite heterogeneous dogmatic elements in a conclusive relation to each other: »ergo« (line 29), »therefore« (line 37), »then« (line 57), »since« (line 66) »for that reason« (line 81), »because« (line 121). She also frequently uses categorical formulae like: »God can only be experienced through mysticism« (line 84–85). The text is also loaded with metaphors like »being rewarded with the most splendid coat of love« (line 78), »prayer as the most powerful spiritual weapon« (line 110), »sword of love« (line 68, 106), sparkling in the darkness« (line 93–94), »key to the Kingdom of Heaven« (line 47–48). There are also typical topoi like »the Holy Ghost that blows everywhere« (line 119-120), the »collapsing house of cards« (line 100–101); and, two motives from the apocalypses: the »gathering of the last third of mankind« (line 122) and the »purification of the Earth« (line 125) in the final part of the message.

But it is not only the density of the textual composition that accounts for the effect of the visionary communication. Above all, it is the way in which it is enacted what creates the visionary character of that communication. The performance acquires its vigour through the simultaneous orchestration of gesture, mimicry, and prosody. The performance is accompanied by expressive gestures, partly used declamatorily to accentuate the text, for example in the moment when Uriella says »Hosianna, Hallelujah« (line 70–71), she throws up her hands, and when ending her

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12 It would perhaps be more precise to call it a constructivist metaphoric, because repairing, mending, constructing and building resembles the construction process of the Uriellas’ new Doxa that seems to underlie her eclectic belief system.
speech she stands up, extends her arms and in so doing works to emphasize her words with her gesture (line 112).

The most striking peculiarity of Uriella’s performance in this fragment is the vocal character of her talk, which differs from normal speech in several ways. Unlike in glossolalia, another form of ›inspired speech‹, she articulates words and sentences in a language understandable to those listening. But there is a noticeably special prosodic pattern that differs from speaking in tongues, which in contrast is composed by strange, non-identifiable words, but follows the contour and melody of the speaker’s normal daily language. As the ›organ of Christ‹ Uriella’s voice sounds bass, nearly masculine and especially at the onset of her speech sounds sonorous and hollow, and has an almost ghost-like quality. Uriella speaks with the Adam’s-apple lowered (the opposite of falsetto), a characteristic of news speakers’ and actors’ voices, which indicates the performative efforts she makes. She produces a hypercorrect pronunciation, speaking with much aspiration. The rhythm of her visionary speech also differs from that of normal talk, as she drawsl and extends the words, takes extended pauses and reduplicates final consonants; aspects which when combined produces her as deciphering and reading an invisible text that is viewed only by her inner eyes. This intonation resembles that of children having recently learnt to read, when they spell out their first lines without being fully cognisant of its meaning. The repetition of final syllables (e.g. in line 7: «f+h!†S:ELig®,= [blessed]» is reminiscent of a kind of echo imitation. The strange rhythm with atypical pauses, elongations, stretching and change of tempo frames her talk in conjunction with the frequently forced mimic she displays as a kind of effort similar to that of consecutive language interpreters.

Uriella also undermines the preconfigured emphasis of the text. She falls low at very untypical points, a further prosodic characteristic we often find in the articulation of news speakers or in speakers that can not be contradicted in an asymmetric communicative arrangement. This melody of her voice is characterized by a very low basic tonality, from which she rises suddenly in very emphatic moments (see line 93: «len ´dIE::se ´LEUCHtEn®.» (1.0) [this refulgence]). Generally, her speech stands out for a significantly louder volume, nearly reaching that of screaming at certain moments. This intensity is not justified by the local ecology (a relatively small, closed room, all spectators remain absolutely silent, and, in addition, she is equipped with a microphone). Rather, it is another feature of the performance strengthening the metaphorical might and the power of her bodily possession. As a whole, the performance seems to express vividly how difficult, strenuous and exhausting it is to operate as a mouthpiece of God. That the communication’s source emanates from a different realm than that of normal daily life is, as we have seen, marked clearly in and through the internal structural elements of this ›trance vision‹.

The level of situated realization: setting and decorum

It is not only the talk in itself that includes liturgical elements framing the speech as a religious message (e.g. opening address »my beloved children« in line 3 or the final blessing, line 122ff). This speech is also embedded in a fixed course of action, a

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13 As Stark points out: «Glossolalia has not the sense, but more or less the form of the popular language around» (Stark 1987). But see also the work of Goodman who, in contrast, has observed stable sound patterns independent from culture and therefore argues for a different, neurophysiologic explanation of glossolalia (Goodman 1972).

14 Cf. for the display of suffering of Christ as a part of the visionary charisma the chapter on »Visionary Imitatio Christi« in Benz (1969).
liturgy of a periodically celebrated religious service: the community’s monthly held holy service that takes place every first Sunday in their ›sanctuary‹ near Ibach, a small village in the Black Forest. This service is preceded by abstinence during several days, in which Uriella gets ›spiritual injections‹. On the day of the service, Uriella — who also practises as a spiritual healer — receives an audience of followers that consult her for spiritual or health advice. Thereafter the congregation gathers. After three quarters of an hour of spiritual music Uriella enters the room and salutes her community, and this is followed by a piece of harp music, the Lord’s Prayer, and a twenty minute exercise of ›the Sending of the Light‹ (FIAT LUX’s regular prayer). Next the »Laudate Dominum« is played whereupon the visionary performance begins. During her presentation, Uriella is seated in front of the audience on a slightly elevated throne-like chair, from which she stands up at the end of her performance. After finishing the 10–15 minute presentation, a Gregorian chorus sounds from a record.

In contrast to prophetic messages, which tend to be enunciated spontaneously and are directed to a reluctant and heterogeneous audience (Weber 1988 [1921]), the arrangement and the social composition of this auditory rather resembles the form of a traditional community of Sunday church-goers, though, in this case, restricted by a special exclusiveness. The content of the visionary message points directly to the community itself and its internal affairs; it contains spiritual tutoring, edification and direct and practical instructions on how to cope with particular problems of the daily life, rather than being directed to a broad public of non-believers or renegades, which are threatened with the Judgment of God and which are persuaded to radical conversion. The decorum, as well, follows the same pattern. A strict clothing norm unites FIAT LUX’s adherents, which demonstrates their membership to a specific religious community and visibly segregates them from non-believers. They all wear white cloth, and cultivate a unique aesthetic that can not hide its roots in traditional popular Marian adoration, even though it has a slightly more modern character. To give an example, the white skirt that Uriella wears in the performance is reminiscent of a wedding dress, which can be read as an allusion to the bride-of-Christ metaphor; her sparkling diadem is also reminiscent of holy first communion attire and an angel costume from a nativity play. The colour white symbolism is repeated in the clothing of the order’s members and the order’s cars. Cloth, furniture and the whole housing equipment that serves for living, working and religious service of the community are carefully selected and display a consistent style, which is repeated in the architecture of the housing. The sanctuary of FIAT LUX in the Black Forest is surrounded with impeccable white Madonna statues in the centre of a green scissor-cut lawn and a small lagoon with floral arrangements. These characteristics work to further distinguish their community from that of ›others‹, a practice common to other sects across the world.

External context: the medium

We will only shortly refer to the reflexive level of the video data. To this point, we have taken the video recording as a kind of window to the situation, a looking glass giving direct access to the visionary performance, without considering the sort of data. See the publications of the visionary messages in the community’s own journal »Der reinste Urquell« (»The most pure ancestral source«), formerly called »The hot wire« (»Der heiße Draht«).

16 Or, as Raab and Tänzler (2006) call it: the second and third analytic level: that of camera action and editing. For the distinction between different sorts of data cf. also Knoblauch (2004).
»documentary video« produced and edited by the Order FIAT LUX. It was first published in 1995 and lasts about 90 minutes. On its cover, this film is presented as »giving an insight into the community of Fiat Lux«. Its plot follows the scheme of the six works of mercy (cf. Mt. 25, 35–40: I was hungry... , I was thirsty..., I was imprisoned). The scene containing the trance visions is the longest thematic unit of the complete film. Throughout the whole scene, the camera position nearly does not change during the entire 10 minutes. It varies only slightly when zooming into Uriella’s face during her vision and it changes to a medium long shot at the end during the moment when Uriella gives the final blessing. There are a total of 22 scenes cut into this take of Uriella’s face, showing the co-present audience from different angles, all demonstrating various forms of devotion, prayer, absorption, and – towards the end – also ritualized interaction.

These cuts have a clear function, they show the shifting of experience by which we – the video spectators – are able to view how those co-present react to the performance (see image 3). The cut-ins, therefore, operate like a guide on how the audience ought to interpret the recorded situation. In this sense, the editing of the raw recordings does not primarily show its supposed manipulation. It rather documents how the editors of this material react to the specific problem and anticipate the subsequent difficulties people viewing the screen may have when attempting to decipher the meaning of the video. The inserted subtitle »Uriella receives a full-trance-message from Jesus Christ« (see above image 1, shot 4) serves the same purpose: invisible to the co-present audience, it instructs the media-audience about the character of the ongoing action. It is a clearly identifiably trace of how the editors try to deal with the split-audience problem.

To sum up the results, the detailed analysis of this short fragment reveals a broad array of interpretative aspects, thus creating a need for a dense interpretation of this case of visionary proclamation. In addition, the fragment illuminates some of the community’s specificities which serve a key function. The microanalysis demonstrates the concerted performative efforts that are employed to convey Uriella’s visionary messages. We did not only discover single dramaturgical elements referring to the text, the gesture, the prosody of the visionary communication. Rather,
the analysis also leads to an encompassing interpretation of a specific form of community building in this new religious movement. Fiat Lux turns out to be a community showing quite modern facets, present not only in their experience-centred religiosity. It is also visible in their ritual of aesthetization and, finally, in the use of modern technological equipment for the propagation of the visions. The visionary message is not restricted to the co-present audience but transmitted simultaneously via telephone to those members of the community living in the other two centres in Switzerland and Austria. They are also tape-recorded and transcribed in preparation for publication in the order’s bulletin »The Hot Wire«, and, in some cases, published in press releases.\(^{17}\) Moreover, Uriella’s frequent appearances on the television and that of her husband Icordo clearly demonstrate that the claimed detachment from the mundane is obviously not the correct characterization for this religious community, in spite of a strictly followed ascetic way of life and the firm regulation of its member’s conduct.\(^{18}\) Rather, one could speak of a quite market-oriented form of religiosity, which is grounded in the following observations: (1) There is a kind of double mediatization, in which a traditional medium’s messages are disseminated to a second order via mass media techniques (the video); (2) the open syncretism of the community, combining elements of tradition Christian belief with non-Christian elements of other religions and that of a popular scientific belief systems; (3) this accounts for a quite manifold and flexible religious order that works together with the service of spiritual healing; (4) a corporate identity fostered by »corporate design«, present in the specific sophisticated symbolism of costume, ornamentation and jewellery which when taken together, may be a persuasive and compelling religious proposition to some followers. Its appeal may, however, be restricted to a particular population segment. Surely, FIAT LUX’s special dogmatic and aesthetic pattern is not primarily attractive to the average middle classes, as the analysis may have indicated.

Conclusion: Video analysis and ethnography

Coming back to methodology, I will conclude with some observations that can be drawn from this example. This analysis illustrates how visual data collected for »focussed ethnography« can be usefully scrutinised by using the approach of genre analysis. This approach has been successfully applied by others (Ayaß 1997; Keppler 1985; Knoblauch and Raab 2001) and has proved to be especially apt for analysing ritual performances, as the studies of Kotthoff on Georgian toast performances (1995), lamentations (1999) and grieving (2001) have shown.

Naturally, as already mentioned above, when referring to the character of video as a quasi-natural document, the recording does not encompass all sensual aspects of the performance. Freezing action and interaction into video data actually transforms the original situation into analyzable data, a process in which various aspects pertaining to the performance are lost, e.g. the spatial, olfactory and tactile dimensions. Therefore, analyzing the data is not an exhausting method for an analysis of performance.

What I have shown in this article represents a slight variation of the usual way that genre analysis proceeds, as it focuses on primarily recurrent structural aspects of communication, whereas I have centred my analysis on a single data fragment,

\(^{17}\) Broad interest caused the press release of August, 8th, 1998 that contained a prophecy of doom for august (cf. http://www.relinfo.ch/off/august98.html, visited Jan. 9, 2001)

\(^{18}\) See the orders’ regulations as formulated in the document »Mirror Image of the ORDER FIAT LUX« (undated).
which may be criticised by orthodox methodologists. Nevertheless, I augmented the single case analysis with insights from ethnographic data and documentary materials that served to contextualize the fragment of video data that was analysed in detail. In the course of analysis, I have introduced in a stepwise fashion broader contextual information by drawing on data that is not evident in the video fragment. In fact, we would not have been able to decipher the meaning of certain aspects of Uriella’s visionary performance without our field observations and the information gathered in interviews; neither would we know how this episode is embedded in the community’s daily life and the centrality of its role for them. Therefore, I would argue that not only for the purposes of this singular case but in general, the analysis of video data needs to be augmented by focussed ethnographic fieldwork and other forms of social research (such as interviews, documents, and even survey data). Restricting the analysis exclusively to the video data and its interpretation carries with it the danger of drawing conclusions that contradict the situation and thereby running into the methodological problem of missing the ›postulate of adequacy‹ (Schütz 2004[1953]).

What, in my view, still remains open is the question of how single case analysis following the hermeneutical interpretation combines with ethnographic field research. Without going into details, I would argue that the methodological debate still lacks a solution for the challenge of how to combine a hermeneutical approach with linguistic-structural approaches in interpretative sociology. One of the most relevant problems in video-analysis is the problem of selection and the search for methodological principles that would adequately account for the reasons an analyst selects certain fragments to scrutinize in detail over others. I suggest that the hermeneutical practice of producing an exhaustive amount of context-free reading versions and its stepwise consecutive exclusion from within the material needs to be combined with a more corpus-oriented analytical approach as practiced in conversation or genre analysis. In addition, it is essential to take into account the broader distal contexts in which data fragments are actually produced and embedded. Consequently, ethnography is essential for research in any area of modern, pluralized societies with wide-ranging and highly fragmented areas of local culture and situated knowledge. Even the most erudite interpreter does only have limited insight into the rich and manifold segments of contemporary social worlds. Therefore, ethnography is indispensable for qualitative research.

One last point has to be considered. Along with the greater availability and use of digital technology, the analysis of video data is increasingly gaining importance in qualitative sociology. Due to the popularization of video equipment, the practice of videography may spread even in people’s everyday life. As a result, this produces a growing corpus of visual recordings, recordings that can be analyzed as autoethnographic data. This is especially important for an insight in fields with difficult or restricted access, for which these recordings gain special importance in ethnographies as in the case at hand, where participation is only allowed for members of the community after long times of spiritual exercise and strict ascetic purification, entailing the renunciation of alcohol, coffee and cigarettes during weeks beforehand. Nevertheless, I would not suggest the employed style of analyzing data is apt for a general approach. Surely, it has to be tested in further studies, where its advantages and limitations of generalization are explored. Without doubt, in ethnography, every field has its peculiarities and therefore may need an approach other than video.

Notwithstanding, video recordings will change the way in which field work is conducted for many researchers. The practice of videography is expanding throughout many areas of qualitative research (Knoblauch 2006). Different data types
have to be distinguished in video-analysis (Knoblauch et al. 2006a), each entailing its own methodological challenges. Beside other types, video data produced by members itself, like the one analyse above, is of special interest for sociological interpretation. It may open up areas of restricted or difficult access for research. Moreover, it contains the members’ self representations. Therefore its analysis allows studying the forms by which member construct and represent their own reality. Admittedly, even video is not able to produce genuine copies of that practice in all its details; though that is not the aim at all. Rather, these recordings provide insights selected by the members themselves. Hence, auto-ethnographic video data is a privileged resource which can provide access to the mediated ›ethnotheory‹ of members, whose reconstruction is one of the ongoing tasks of focussed ethnography.

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References


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Annex: Transcript of Uriella’s “Full-Trance Vision”

1 U: .hhhhhh

2 (7.0)
3 ‹‹t› meine ((räusper)) ge´lIEbten (6.0)
   my beloved children

4 ↓S:::ELikh:::::,› (2.0)
   blessed

5 sind die ‹‹all+f› ↑H:ONGernden.› (2.0)
   are the hungry

6 ‹‹f+h› denn sie werden ge`s:Ättigt (·) ‹‹t› WERden.› (1.0)
   for they satisfied will be

7 ‹‹f+h› ↑↑S:ELig¹,!=
   blessed

8 sind die:· barm: ↑↑H:ERZ igen. (3.5)
   are the merciful

9 .h denn ↑sIE werden barm↑↑HERZich:· kei:·t erf:Ahren dÜrfen.› (5.0)
   for they will be shown

10 ‹‹f+h› sind `JEne:·,
   are those

11 dIE ´reinen ´ HERZEns sInd (3.0)
   the pure in heart

12 denn sie ´wEr`den: (2.5) ↓GOTT ‹‹flüstern+t+f› schAUen .› (1.0)
   for they will God see

13 .h !↑WO!. (4.0)
   where

14 ‹‹f+h› werdet Ihr euch `FRAGen, (4.5)
   may you yourself ask

15 er ↑↑Ist ja ↑↑UberA:LL. (2.5)
   he is everywhere

16 in dieser geWALTigen (natU:r) und krEatUr.› (5.0)
   in this tremendous nature and creature

17 in (d)er unENDlichkeit des:· grEnzenlosen Alls:. (3.0)
   in the infinity of the boundless universe

18 E:R .hh – (2.5)
   he

19 ist dÄ:r SCHLA:G .hh – (1.0)
   is the beat

20 eurer HERZen. (2.0)
   of your hearts

21 er ist der GLANZ eurer ‹‹all› AUgen.›› (4.5)
   he is the splendour of your eyes

22 er bewEgt eure ↑GLIEDer. (2.5)
   he moves your limbs

23 ‹‹f+h› E:R IST": (1.0)
   he is

24 ↑DA:S L:ICH:::T².
   the light

25 .h da:s::: (2.5) als gOttesFUNKe; (1.0)
   that as divine spark

26 In EUch (1.0) BR:ENNT.›
   in you burns

27 .h ↑↑wÜssten die MENschen; (1.5)
   if only know the people

28 .h Um” die ’wiedergeburt im „FLEIsche, (1.5)
   about the reincarnation in flesh

29 Ergo; (.)
   ergo

30 ↑nlcht ’nur im GEIste, (1.0)
   not only in spirit

31 dAnn² würde vieles auf ’die::sem² (.) gLO¨bus ↑ANders AUsehn.›
   that would much upon the soul ↑ANders AUsehn.
then would much in this globe different look
do the wheel of time

ist an mein Urgesetz des KARmas gebUnden. (1.0)
is to my ancestral law of karma bound

in IHM ruht; (2.0)
in it rests

⁄UR: ‘sAche, (2.5)
cause

und WIRkung. (3.0)
and effect

‘DEMzu folge. (1.5)
as a result

muss ‘EINjedes;
must everything

‘DAS was Es; (2.0)
that what it

‘ZERbricht; (2.0)
breaks

wieder (.) ‘SELBST r:epaGlieren. (1.5)
again (it)self repair

and der ‘BESTe IElm. (1.5)
and the best glue

um ‘dIE:se ‘schAdSTEllen; (3.0)
to this damaged spot

zu FLICKen. (1.0)
to mend

‘trÄgt den ‘nAmen LIEbe. (1.5)
carries the name love

‘wEnn:: ‘doch die ‘MENSchen wüssten. (1.5)
if only the people would know
dass im ‘DANKen ‘LOben und ‘PREIsen ein schlÜsse l; (.)
that in thanking praising and glorifying a key

to the Kingdom of Heaven lies

 Dann .h (1.0)
then

würde es ‘Auch noch ‘SCHNELLer vorAngeh’n;
would it also much faster go ahead

mit der ver ‘EDelung ihres SEINS. (2.0)
with the sublimation of their being

wenn doch die ‘MENSchen wüssten. (1.0)
if only the people would know

DASS::: - (.)
that

im em ‘PFANG’en, (1.5)
in receiving

‘und GEben. (.)
and giving

.h ein ‘Rgesetz gOttes ruht. (2.0)
an ancestral law of God lies

 Dann .h,(2.5)
then

‘wÄre das ANTlitz. (1.5)
would be the visage

‘VON’ MI:R; (-)
of me

‘NICHT ‘mehr ‘so dur:chfUr:cht; (2.0)
no more so furrowed

von ‘FALten des ‘KUMMers und der ‘sOrgen. (2.0)
by wrinkles of sorrow and of worries

62. the people have the Evil to an idol created

63. that they adore

64. with perishable values

65. which for God never count

66. for he has his doctrine

67. on this imperishably love build on

68. therefore is it the creation’s crowning glory

69. and not man

70. who me after the Halleluja

71. Hosanna

72. to the cross has nailed

73. wonderful

74. may be also for you the certainty

75. that every penitent sinner

76. by God

77. to the most plentiful

78. yeh, with the most beautiful coat will be donated

79. the true homeland

80. is situated yonder

81. therefore have I also

82. to the most plentiful

83. shouted at

84. never

85. can only trough mysticism be experienced

86. without intermediary

87. between this world and the other

88. could have been the content of truth

89. that I have incorporated into my doctrine

90. never

91. unter die ’mEnschen ge’brAcht werden KÖNNen. (1.0)
under the man could be brought

`je DOCH;
however

"len" dIE:se " đựngECHtEn". (1.0)
this refuglance

In:" der FINsternis dieser MENSCHheit und WELT. (.)
in the obscurity of this mankind and world

werden von den lUNwissenden. (-)
will be by the ignorants

be 'KÄMPFT; (-)
combatted

ja am lIEbsten möchte man sie auf dem schEIterha ufen verBRENNen; (;)
yeh, they would prefer them at the stake to burn

.h `wEL DA:r; (-)

because that

was über ihre LIPPe:n; QUILLTn;
what over their lips swells

.h das gAnze KARTengebäude; (1.0)
the whole house of cards

"där mEnschen" zUUm" "STÜR:zen BRINGTn. (4.0)
of the people to collapse brings

die pOlariTÄT – (-)
the polarity

die auf eurer lIEBHERRSCHT; (-)
that reigns in your Earth

trägt (.) DIES:n gEgenpOl.
carries this conterpole

und er kann NUR – (-)
and he can only

mit MEINem schwErt der lIEbe; (-)
by my sword of love

IN BANN (. ) ge'hAlten werden; (2.0)
in check being kept

.« das ge; .«h: BE:T – (-)
prayer

ist die STÄRKste. (2.5)

GEISTige WÄFFe die es gIbt.» (5.0)
spiritual weapon that exists

((Stuhlrücken))

« das ge; .«h: BE:T – (-)

mit AUS ge breite'ten Armen. (1.0)
with extended arms

ver`ABschiede ich mich von EUch:; (1.5)
say goodbye I to you

`Im `NA:men; (-)
in the name

`und in der ALLmacht des Ewigen gOttVAters. (3.0)
and in the almightiness of the Eternal Father

dEr: zU EUch SPRICH:T.» (.)
in the love of his native son Jesus Christ

who to you talks

Und: in der KRAF'T; (-)
and in the power

des HEI:Ligen gEIstes:. (-)
of the Holy Ghost

die Ü::Berall wEht .» (3.0)
who everyday blows

WEIL. (-)
because
das |Etzte drittel der MENSCHheit\(\text{c-} (1.0)\)

*the last third of mankind*

zus: Ammenger` BRACHT werden muss:\(\cdot (-)\)

*together must be brought*

<<\(\cdot\text{ um (. ) in} \) \(\uparrow\) BÅL:de; (-)\>

*so in brevity*

<<\(\cdot\) die  \(\uparrow\) REINigung ElniElten zu kÖnnen. (2.5)\>

*the purgation starting can*

<<\(\cdot\) alle  \(\uparrow\) VO:Rbereitungen sind getrOffen. (4.0)\>

*all preparations are made*

<<\(\cdot\) die  \(\uparrow\) kOSmische UH:R; (-)\>

*the cosmic clock*

steht <<\(\cdot\) nUr noch hUnderstäl: seKUNden;\>

*stands only hunderth of seconds*

vor der `ZAH:L ( . ) Z:WOLF.\>

*before the number twelve*

<<singen> amen\>

*Amen\>

Selected transcription symbols

(-), (--), (---) short pause, one dash representing 0.25 sec. approx.

(2.0) pause (in seconds)

.h, .hh, .hhh exhaling, according to its duration

gesättigt\(h\) strongly aspirated final consonant

?: high rising intonation

, medium rising intonation

; medium falling intonation

low falling intonation

akZENT primary or main accentuation

ak!ZENT! extra strong accentuation

\(\uparrow\) high onset

\(\downarrow\) low onset

<<h> > low register

<<f>> forte, loud

<<all>> allegro, fast

<<acc>> accelerando, accelerating

Citation