Strategies of Aesthetic Engineering – The Production of Fiction Books and Digital Communication Applications

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Abstract
Our paper examines organizational processes that shape the production of aesthetic artifacts. In our view, the production of aesthetic artifacts is a highly relational process based on diverse interactions between actors and objects. We understand those highly interactive production processes as a form of aesthetic engineering – the interrelated activities of actors with other actors and objects to craft artifacts that should appeal to the senses. Our line of thinking refers to Actor-Network Theory as developed by Latour, Callon and Law. We particularly use the concept of relational materialism that grants objects an active role in interactions. Drawing from two empirical studies - the publishing of fiction books and the design of digital communication applications - we identify and explain the principal relational mechanisms of organizing aesthetic products. The paper concludes with a presentation of strategies that actors employ to manage time, representation and control – major challenges of these relational production processes.

Keywords
Aesthetic artifacts, book publishing, audio/visual media, digital communication applications, organizational theory.

The analysis of aesthetic artifacts developed here focuses on the making of fiction books and corporate websites for company-public communication.

The role of aesthetic artifacts in organizations has recently become a subject of research, especially in the studies of organizational aesthetics (Gagliardi, 2003, Linstead and Höpfl, 2000, Strati, 1999). These studies turn to the corporeal in organizational processes and typically centre on the effects of aesthetic artifacts in organizational settings (Czarniawska-Joerges and Joerges, 1990, Gagliardi, 1990, Hancock, 2002). However, only little attention has been paid to

related management problems like those that occur in the production processes of aesthetic artifacts. As these production processes are fundamentally affected by the aesthetic AND relational practices we argue that research on these management issues has to address the mechanisms of interaction while considering the specific aesthetic nature of the product.

Hence, our central question is how the production of those artifacts is organized on the basis of interaction and social networks within the context of the management of those aesthetic and also creative processes.

In particular, we look at strategies that actors employ to manage the creation, modification and acceptance of innovative aesthetic artifacts, that is artifacts with novel concepts, such as fiction books by unknown authors or highly innovative website designs.

We understand those extremely dynamic production processes as aesthetic engineering: the interrelated activities of actors who identify, assemble and juxtapose various kinds of material and enroll other actors in order to craft and shape artifacts that should appeal to the senses (Grau, 2005, forthcoming).

Drawing from our two empirical studies - one on the publishing of fiction books, the other on the creation of digital communication applications (interactive websites) - we identify and explain the principal mechanisms of the processes of organizing aesthetic products. The practices we look at include the evaluation of quality through individual taste and the knowledge of likes and dislikes of target actors, the mediation between object and market, the establishment of artifacts' "identity", the re-production of actor identity as well as the persuasion strategies to gain other actors' commitment and resources. By referring to relational materialism (Callon, 1991, Latour, 1988, Law, 1987) we analytically equalizes the realms of human and object. As such we specifically consider the role of objects as they relate to issues of control, time, location and relevant context factors.

We deem this discussion significant not only for understanding the strategies to successfully produce aesthetic artifacts. It is also important when talking about management characteristics in two important cultural industries - publishing and digital design.

The Production of Aesthetic Artifacts: An Effect of Relational Practices

Our starting point is the social process as typically divided into the three elements - circumstances, action, outcome (such as Strauss and Corbin, 1990).

We analyze those sequences, but in the inversed order that they take place. By looking at the outcome first - the production and diffusion of aesthetic artifacts within a community - we want to understand the mechanisms of how these products were chosen and created while considering the typical circumstances of their production. We assume that the production of aesthetic artifacts is an outcome of relational practices – instead of being an outcome of rational-economic decision-making (the most effective/efficient artifact will be produced) or of pure aesthetic concerns (the most beautiful artifact will be produced). It is rather a result of relational actions that align the will and efforts of key actors in favor of a particular artifact.

The relational refers to two lines of thinking: first, the idea of social embeddedness (Granovetter, 1985) of an aesthetic artifact in a community, and second, the interaction of actors with other actors and material directly part of the production itself.

First, we acknowledge that an aesthetic artifact is generated within a community. This community constitutes the reference group for the actors who are involved in creating and producing the artifact. For instance, the community sets quality standards and recognition systems. Any aesthetic artifact to become successful and gain public recognition must have first passed within this group that thus functions as gatekeeper.

The role of the community for the production and diffusion of aesthetic artifacts has previously been analyzed by various authors. Howard Becker was among the first - together with Arthur Danto and George Dickie - to recognize the importance of the art community, the "art world" for a piece of art and art as an outcome of collective action (Becker, 1974, Becker, 1982). Becker claims that the social system with the artist in the center rather than an isolated individual generates an art object.

While Becker focuses on the cooperative aspect of the community, Pierre Bourdieu disguises the social system of art and in particular literature as a battle field. In this field actors fight for power and resource such as economic and symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1993).

Second, the relational refers to the actual process of making and shaping an aesthetic artifact: a collaborative work that involves multiple actors and various materials, such as text, documents, computer applications, screens etc.. These actors and materials have to be managed, that is brought together, aligned, formed and arranged to contribute to a stable artifact.

This perspective follows Actor-Network Theory (ANT) as developed by the sociologists Bruno Latour, Michael Callon and John Law in the late 1980s. ANT in its original sense explains how ideas and technological innovations become accepted in communities. ANT conceptualizes those accepted ideas and innovations as effects of actor-networks. An actor-network is NOT per se a network of practices - though a network of practices is the effect of an actor-network -, as for instance described in Manuel Castells studies of social networks (Castells, 1996).

It is rather a metaphor for a patterned and heterogeneous network of aligned interests (Law, 1992). "Heterogeneous" as an actor-network is composed of various elements including humans (actors) and non-humans (material). "Patterned" as these heterogeneous elements have to be shaped and ordered in a specific way to become a network stable enough to resist time and to reach across multiple locales. And "aligned interests" as resistances of actors and objects have to be overcome, for instance through negotiations.

These negotiations take place between actors who pursue their own goals. Further, their resources, time and attention is limited and strategically allocated to a specific project or idea. Consequently, various actors have to enroll in a network idea; the more actors needed, the more complex the network. By enrolling to a network idea an actor makes this idea part of his own strategy.

Our understanding of the relational rejects the paradigm of the individual creator/innovator-genius - as mystified in popular culture – such as currently Schiller or Einstein in the mass media. Rather, we believe in the relational as the main success factor of innovative cultural ideas and products, and, in the vein of ANT, we even extend the meaning of relational in another aspect: from the human to the non-human.

Relating with Objects

Talking of objects as if they could (inter-)act is not a new research phenomenon. The agency of things has been researched by anthropologists like Arjun Appadurai (Appadurai, 1986), sociologists like Goffman (Goffman, 1971), psychologists like Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (Csikszentmihalyi, 1991) or design theorists like Klaus Krippendorff (Krippendorff, 1990). Despite their different backgrounds these theorists share the idea that objects play a role in social interaction. Artifacts, and in particular aesthetic artifacts, receive agency through actors who create these objects. They also give meaning to them - by labeling - and make them represent something else.

Also, objects may function as interaction partners: they may take on agency – provided that they have received meaning and relate to persons. By interacting with objects, a person awards agency and identity to them. Likewise, objects influences a person's agency: they may empower but also restrict certain aspects of life and thus shape identities.

Two Ways of Interacting with Objects: At this point we need to analytically differentiate between a type of interaction that is mediated by objects and one that is oriented towards objects (Grau, 2005, forthcoming). Object-mediated interaction is patterned like this:

Actor1 → Object → Actor2

This type of interaction prevails in any kind of mediated communication. The interaction partner is another actor and meaning is transmitted via the object, for instance by a letter, an email or a mobile phone. Objects and especially artifacts - man-made objects with a certain purpose - are used to communicate between actors, to represent actors and to serve for various other purposes.

Whereas object-oriented interaction looks like this:

Actor → Object or
Object → Actor

In this type of interaction an actor relates to the object itself, or the objects "interacts" with the person: things "act", like in man-machine-communication. Take, for instance, the tyranny of mobile phones!

However, in practice the two types of interaction are tightly interwoven: the mobile phone intermediates communication between people and also "acts" by stirring emotions - anger, pleasure - or physical reactions - the reflex to push buttons.

These assumptions are refer to everyday objects. Yet, as we believe that aesthetic artifacts are objects with a dimension of agency that is particularly powerful - one that refers to the senses - we need to examine this aesthetic agency in particular. Also we deem the activities that generate an aesthetic object special in a sense that the related actions and interactions require a specifically close relation between actor and object: the aesthetic refers to a corporeal relation between man and artifact. So the corporeal also becomes an important element of organizational processes and the management of the design and production of such artifacts.

Aesthetic Artifacts and Management: What is the part that objects then play in management settings that generate aesthetic artifacts?

First, objects can be results or effects of management efforts. In this paper, we refer to these as aesthetic artifacts. As its main property the aesthetic artifact continuously changes it look over the course of time and at different places. Why? Because actors try to increase the aesthetic effect of an artifact according to different audiences. The taste of the public is culturally shaped and as such depends on time and space. Even if the audience consists of one single person only, the creator (artist, designer) him- or herself, he or she might want to change the artifact at a different time or place as his or her taste might change over time.

Second, objects can be used as tools to manage - that is to order, control, stabilize etc. - organizational processes. These tools can take the shape of various objects but may also include aesthetic artifacts that affect organizational activities through their aesthetic agency.

Pasquale Gagliardi - one of the early researchers in the strand of organizational aesthetics - for instance differentiates two ways how actors exercise power and control on other actors via aesthetic artifacts. They influence the sensation of others by manipulating the aesthetic artifact itself. And also actors try to control the effect of aesthetic artifacts by manipulating or enhancing a specific aesthetic discourse. This discourse then leads to a different judgment of the aesthetic effect (Gagliardi, 1990).

Aesthetic Engineering: Social Practices to Generate Aesthetic Artifacts

During the production process of aesthetic artifacts various aspects of interaction with material, objects and aesthetic artifacts take place for various purposes. Also, specific knowledge - about objects, aesthetic artifacts, other actors etc. - is applied. In order to identify strategies common for the production of aesthetic artifacts as heterogeneous as fiction books and digital communication applications, we now turn to the concept of aesthetic engineering (Grau, 2005, forthcoming).

The Concept of Aesthetic Engineering: Aesthetic engineering means the interrelated, knowledge-based activities of actors who identify, assemble and juxtapose various kinds of material in order to craft and form artifacts that should appeal to the senses.

The concept is linked to ANT in two ways: First, in its analysis, it refers to relational materialism. Relational materialism allows us to emphasize our view of aesthetic production processes as performances of man-man AND man-object interaction. As such, we not only discuss objects as if they could act but also refer to aesthetic artifacts as if they had identity. Identity in this relational sense means a relatively stable set of properties that serves others as points of references for interaction.

Second, the concept of aesthetic engineering is based on John Law's idea of heterogeneous engineering, originally applied to explain the production of scientific products as a process that transforms elements from the social, technical and textual into a scientific product (Law, 1992). The concept of aesthetic engineering departs from Law's heterogeneous engineering by applying and enriching it with regard to the specific field of aesthetic artifact production. In this view the making of aesthetic artifacts is an interactive matter of defining, assembling and shaping materials. It includes activities of putting a particular artifact to the fore against its many competitors, persuading other actors to enroll their minds, hearts and resources as well as establishing and maintaining a certain professional recognition which is tied to past successes.

Aesthetic engineering was originally developed with regard to the production and diffusion of fiction books among the professional community of the German-speaking publishing market (Grau, 2005, forthcoming). We now look at its dimensions as grounded in the data of book publishing and as it relates to existing bigger theories.

Aesthetic Engineering and the Publishing of Fiction Books: Aesthetic engineering covers four major dimensions, three practice dimensions and the related dimension of relevant knowledge. The three practice dimensions are defining, forming-mediating and convincing. They occur in the specific situation of fiction titles vying to get published on the German-speaking market - the biggest European market in end-user spending for books (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2003).

Situation: The perception of fiction books is highly genre-/category-based. Still, the books are expected to convey an individual and recognizable own "voice". The process of creation and completion of their basis, the manuscript, is difficult to control. Turning an idea into a final manuscript may stretch over years and depends essentially on the personal resources of the individual writer. Also this process is highly stratified as actors can only partially control the overall making of the book. The future book and its makers (authors, literary agents) face an extremely competitive situation for the attention and resources of various key actors like publishers. With a huge number of manuscripts competing to be published a title succeeds when it is accepted to be turned into a book in a manner that positions it well for further success on the market. For this to happen, a title needs a series of champions to push it. These champions, such as agents and editors, would use their own reputation, skills and identity to further interpret and shape the artifact to convince other actors of its quality and relevance.

(1) Relevant Knowledge

As Donald Schön suggests in his study on professional knowledge, knowing is inseparable from action (Schön, 1983): every action produces knowledge and conversely, every action is based on knowledge. But knowledge also goes beyond past action. The knowledge relevant to the production of aesthetic artifacts refers not only to previous similar production procedures. With his concept of reflection-in-action, Schön points for instance to professionals' practices of dealing with the complexities of a unique and uncertain situation: mainly a selection management of large amount of information and the capacity to hold several ways of looking at things at once.

As for the production of aesthetic artifacts the situation is extremely complex. Major knowledge challenges occur in two areas: the artifact to be produced (product) and the actors/objects involved (interaction):

(1) The effect of the artifact refers to the corporeal and a form of human knowledge that is yielded by the perceptive faculties of actors and by their capacity for aesthetic judgment. This connoisseurship - a form of tacit knowledge - of the knowing subject is established in relation to the aesthetic artifacts and his or her interactions (Strati, 1999).

(2) The artifact is produced in a highly divided work process that involves various actors with different backgrounds, motivations and goals. It also includes various materials. From the vantage point of ANT, knowledge always takes material form: it is either embodied in a person or appears in various objects, primarily written forms such as texts (Law, 1992).

Therefore, the two types of knowledge most relevant are:

Aesthetic knowledge, that is knowledge on the aesthetic features of the artifact -- how the aesthetic effect can be enhanced and how a prospective public might react; and
Process-related knowledge, that is information on involved actors and objects: when and where do actors/objects appear, what kind of knowledge is embodied in them, who/what are they, how are their minds, goals, resistances etc.

(2) Defining

Typically, in the initial phases when a new aesthetic artifact is being created it has no distinct identity yet. Its value and importance is unclear, the final physical shape to a certain extend as well and the effect - its agency - not known yet. The aesthetic quality and the value of the artifact need to be assessed in order to make it part of organizational and management transactions. Defining means to make distinct - WHAT is it? - , to categorize -WHAT is it LIKE? - to judge - how big is its IMPACT? - and to value - HOW MUCH is it worth?

This labeling are powerful acts of calling things into being. The organizational researcher Karl Weick holds that labeling is so potent in organizational contexts as it produces sense by removing ambiguities (Weick, 2001).

(3) Shaping-Mediating

Any aesthetic artifact that is created to appeal to the senses of a public needs to reach this public first. Mediating means to bring the artifact to the public and - vice versa - to bring the public to the artifact. This practice involves bridging the gap between production and reception of an aesthetic artifact. To do so, the shaper-mediator takes on two roles: first, he or she serves as a spokesperson of the artifact to the public. Second, he or she represents a target public to the artifact, that is the creator of the artifact. This involves a more or less active role in forming the aesthetic artifact – depending on the agency of the shaper-mediator and other factors such as laws and regulations like copyrights.

These two-fold activities require excellent knowledge of both realms. While representing the one to the other, the shaper-mediator is typically not neutral, but committed to either the production or the reception side. The practices of mediating have previously been subject to research for instance by Antoine Hennion. Hennion refers to intermediating practices of actors during production and reception of popular music (Hennion, 1989). For Hennion this entails a procedure of successive approximations between the two worlds, first from a lab-like studio then to a growing public.

(4) Convincing

The practices of aesthetic engineering may remain without effect until the person applies his or her agency and that of the artifact. Convincing means to apply one's agency to overcome resistances of other actors. The hearts and minds of those other actors have to be aligned in favor of the aesthetic artifact for it to form a powerful network.

The practices of convincing involve various activities especially direct and object-mediated communication. They include the efforts of presenting, highlighting and hiding with a special regard to circumstances of place and time. Turning others into allies, bending their will or at least getting their consent is closely related to issues of power. Actor-Network theorists call this

phenomenon "social ordering" (Law, 1992). Concerning the struggle for social ordering Law points to two aspects: first, the procedural character of what might appear as a static social structure. Any social structure is site of a continuous struggle. And second, any attempt for ordering meets resistance as humans and things have their own preferences. As such the limits of social ordering or convincing practices have to become a relevant part of the analysis of convincing strategies.

Case: The Production of a Digital Communication Artifact

In the following we will present a case study conducted with a global company (named C) for high-priced consumer goods in Germany. The aesthetic artifact is an innovative highly interactive website concept based on latest animation and sound technologies. Launched in the spring of 2004 it has served since as a novel medium to enhance C's communication with the public and potential costumers. For the complex production project several external partners were involved; among those a small but distinguished German media agency (named A) that supplied the creative competences.

To understand the characteristics of the production of digital communication artifacts like this we will analyze actors, situations and processes on the basis of the above described concept of aesthetic engineering. We will show that:

1. the aesthetic nature of the artifacts directly and indirectly influences the way of acting,
2. identity and knowledge are crucial for the success of the process,
3. actors have developed strategies to deal with the management challenges of those artifacts.

The analysis conducted for this paper focuses on the relationship between the global company C and the external media agency A. The data was extracted from four extensive qualitative interviews (two hours each), two with marketing experts from C and two with creative people from A. Besides, we utilize materials and documents produced during the creation of this exemplary digital communication artifact.[1]

Situation: In this case study we examine the activities of the digital media team in C's communication department. The digital media team is a rather small team of only four people (in 2004) but with several external partners, most of them agencies specialized in digital media. The buying of creative work force is typical and is primarily justified by the need for innovative, highly flexible and creative minds to be found in those small versatile agencies with their exclusive pool of graphic and media designers. Several external partners were involved because of a general capacity overload of the digital media team. During the time of research C had hired six external companies to work on different digital communication artifacts. Depending on the extent of the artifact, a dozen or more people were involved in the production process of each artifact.

In this case the work is conducted by two main groups of actors: the 'marketing people' from C and the 'creative people' from A. A is industry-wide classified as a high-quality partner on account of its awards and prizes. This acknowledged creative reputation is extremely important for the marketing people as they consider themselves the integrators of different competences and as the "arm of the brand" (Hüter der Marke), as one of the marketing experts pointed out.

The Nature of the Digital Communication Artifact: While all experts agree on the growing importance of digital media for the communication between company and customers the

marketing people of C complain about the still little attention and about insufficient resources. Particularly when comparing to the "traditional" media like print and television they don't see the digital medium as stand-alone. A marketing expert called it a "downstream medium", where basic information (e.g. communication goals, content) and materials (e.g. sound, images, text) are often taken from other media – especially when the artifact is part of a larger communication campaign. This results in temporal dependency, which is a considerable management challenge during the production process.

The field of digital artifacts covers a wide range of different applications based on information technology. The artifact of our case belongs to the group of so-called digital communication artifacts that are launched by brand owners to convey product-related information as well as other issues relevant for (potential) customers. Today these applications are used on the internet, on terminals in the sales floor or during fairs. Digital communication artifacts don't primarily fulfill functional needs like ordering or configuring products but they respond to communicative needs of the public. As such these artifacts function as a medium between the company on the one side and clients or potential customers on the other side.

Despite this focused use all interviewees pointed out that those artifacts are characterized by an enormous complexity that causes problems and challenges concerning the production process as well as the content and form of the artifact. This complexity lies also in the nature of the digital medium itself. One marketing expert commented that „it's much more complex than other media. We have to achieve what other media are offering plus the interactive. Also, compared to the traditional media we not only have one claim to coordinate but a vast number of texts, media etc.. In addition there's the technology. So I would say that it is very, very complex."[2] Actors therefore see themselves confronted with challenges in terms of greater temporal effort and flexibility. The vastness of means, technological demands and design requirements imply continuous monitoring of the production process.

In addition, the design space of the artifact alters during the iterative procedure of acceptance and rejection of design alternatives on the way from an abstract idea to a concrete artifact. This vitality of the artifact is one of the greatest challenges to manage during the production process. One of the marketing experts: "In most cases, the rough concept is quite abstract. We have just presented the rough concept for product XY and there was a meeting for all media and this is really difficult, of course. (…) Many teams present something tangible but WE only have five grey screens, where it says how the application is composed because pretty much things are still very abstract in this phase."[3] This becomes highly problematic when the state of the artifact is to be presented to corporate colleagues outside of the team: "For us, the abstractness is a minor problem but for the others – to imagine what we are doing... Once a colleague presented the project for product XY and the product manager of XY asked me afterwards - though he had seen the presentation -, if my colleague couldn't present eventually the XY-artifact. It had not gotten through to him at all. This is because of the medium."[4]

The division of knowledge: The marketing experts - as "integrators of competences" - are responsible for finding the right persons and companies to ensure the essential knowledge supply for the production of a successful artifact. Marketing experts accredit (outsource) creativity, handcraft, innovative ability and technical competence to the external partners and claim expertise in terms of product/brand and organizational knowledge. Complementary, the media agency's creative people see themselves as experts in bundling the required creative competences inside A into a high-performance team. A major reason for the lasting relationship from the point of view of both marketing and creative experts is that A has acquired substantial knowledge about the brand and the organizational structures that influence the production

process of the artifact. The successful collaboration can be seen as a result of and at the same time a requirement for the cross-company sharing of knowledge and an open culture.

Hence, aesthetic and process-related knowledge areas are clearly divided and complementarily allocated to one of the partners. Likewise, knowledge is highly interrelated.

Reciprocal defining procedures: documents as central references: The production of digital communication artifact is initiated in different ways. On the one extreme some of the most successful innovative ideas emerge in informal conversations between colleagues. The marketing experts call those projects "freestyle", as in sports terminology. On the other extreme so-called "compulsory exercises" - highly-integrated projects - are part of larger campaigns, where the digital media rarely have the lead. Typically one of the traditional media teams like print or television establishes a guideline in form of a general briefing document. On this basis the digital media team conducts the specific briefing for the artifact, in which they set the key parameters. For instance, they define vague attributes like tonality or personality. Defining the essential idea of form and content is as important is leaving ample room for creativity: "Of course we define limitations and requirements, strategy, intention, goals, target group as well as technical specs. All these are actually fixed. Needless to say that A has to provide the creative input. As such, we do not necessarily come up with creative details!"[5]

Defining by C is mirrored at A by the procedure of re-briefing. Answering to the briefing A would verbalize in their own terms how they had understood the issues in the briefing. Here the procedure of defining is reciprocal. During the following production process discussions, feedback and continuous exchange assure the alignment of senses. From the beginning of the process actors continuously use briefing documents as reminders, focus and reference points.

Shaping-Mediating as a negotiating challenge: managing potential contributors: The experts describe their work as oscillating between strict, highly structured and unrestricted, unstructured. Despite their educational background (business studies) the marketing experts regard themselves as members of the creative team but express concern: Who is allowed to be creative and to form the actual artifact? This also emerges as a general issue during the whole production process. Core teams are relatively small but tightly connected to other actors not directly involved. These outside actors have to be aligned to ensure the future success of the artifact. The outside actors include product managers in the case of a new product launch or product modification but also managers and employees of other media teams (event & trade fairs, television, print), brand manager and top management as well as representatives of the worldwide markets. All of them can influence the final shape of the artifact. The high number of potential shapers may render the process inefficient. „There are many people at C who need to be consulted. First there are the product managers, then the people of the traditional media and so on. That's the most precarious. […] So I have the feeling that they get it but only the person we have direct contact with – not likely the other people of C."[6] Negotiating concrete features and elements as well as the general orientation (e.g. emotional or rational) of the artifact is a fundamental practice of shaping-mediating. The briefing documents serve as a basis for this iterative process and are successively complemented by more precise and tangible results until the final digital communication artifact.

Convincing: the active role of trust: Convincing practices highly depend on the distribution of power and on the type of power. At first glance the interviews revealed power imbalances between C and A. The two of them work on the basis of a classical business partnership with C as the client and A as operating unit. During the interviews representatives from C emphasized

C's financial power: decision making may range between blunt commands and direct control of resources and results. C uses its power to "convince" the counterpart A.

But at closer inspection the relationship between C and A is not mainly influenced by this monetary framework but by some basic underlying "soft" practices that were regarded as very important by both parties:

1. active (vs. passive) enrollment: esteeming the counterpart and accepting to being convinced,
2. trusting in the expertise of A based on its reputation and familiarity,
3. allowing subjectivity to some extent (e.g. in terms of shaping and judging the artifact).

As goals of the involved actors are sometimes competitive but aren't always mutually exclusive, different ways could be chosen to succeed. The above-mentioned inherent complexity of the artifact is reduced by adopting those mental attitudes.

Strategies to Produce New and Old Media Artifacts

The production processes of both fiction books and digital artifacts are similar in several ways: they are both highly open ended, are based on creative work and require numerous man hours: fiction book authors may need several years to complete a manuscript, several digital designers may work up to a year on one project. These projects also involve the collaboration of people with different professional backgrounds providing different but complementary skills and knowledge, such as creative and commercial competences. Hence, major challenges on managing such production processes tend to occur regarding time, the intermediation between different types of collaborators and the handling of control. Our analysis of the two types of aesthetic artifacts revealed three typical strategies to manage these challenges.

(1) Management of time: object-structured processes

Key actors meet formally on fixed dates. These formal meetings are centered around objects that document the production process of the aesthetic artifact in its respective stage. These documents - for instance rough concepts/fine concepts (digital communication artifacts) respectively book concepts/cover texts (fiction books) are at the center of the formal meetings: they represent the progress of the work and the efforts invested into the aesthetic artifact. They mainly serve control purposes but these documents also significantly shape the production phase leading up to the formal meeting. They function as reference points (milestones) and structure the overall work process by dividing the overall work process into distinct phases.

(2) Management of representation: advocating between the creative and the commercial

Typically the production process of an aesthetic artifact involves two parties: the provider of creative input (designers, authors) and the input buyers (publishers, brand owners). In both cases, we found certain actors in the buyer organization who act as advocates of the creators. Project manager and editors would represent the design people respectively authors to their colleagues. As advocate of the creative people they stake their own reputation on their conviction and the quality of the design or manuscript. Likewise, they represent their company to the author respectively designers. As a mediator between the two sides they keep up trust relationship and knit the collaborators together. As such they perform an essential function for the overall success of the production.

(3) Management of control: feedback loops and negotiation

In settings as multifaceted as these control is difficult to maintain. The three main control issues are quality (of the result), deadlines (timely delivery) and budget (time and resources invested). Whereas delivery time and budget can be set and controlled via formal contracts between partners in both artifact cases, control of quality is managed on a more informal level. For this the publishing and design industries employ different strategies.

In publishing content control of a book is by law exclusively held by the author (copyrights). The author has the final say on the manuscript. Conversely, the control of the external form of the book edition lies mainly in the hand of the publisher/editor as of the publishing rights acquired (subsidiary rights). Depending on the publisher's philosophy/practices the author will be granted more or less influence on the look of the book. In this case the relevant control issues are content and look and held by either actor. Alignment of interests becomes a matter of negotiation between actor and publisher/editor.

Whereas alignment of minds in the case of digital communication artifacts is achieved differently. Relevant control issues are process and overall aesthetic conception. Process control is held by the brand company as they set the parameters of the procedure. Direct control of the aesthetic design of the digital artifact is performed by the design company. The client, as the "arm of brand", only punctually controls the aesthetic via feedback loops - in a more (briefings) or less (informal communication) structured way. Specifically in our digital case an intense mutual checking system became evident on the informal level with actors being in constant interaction to discuss upcoming issues.

Concluding Remarks

Our analysis of the production processes of aesthetic artifacts indicates that enrolment and alignment of other actors and objects through relational interaction is a significant part of the management work.

The relational practices of making an aesthetic artifact - as conceptualized in aesthetic engineering - and interaction management become a critical success factor for the final artifacts such as fiction books and digital concepts for company-public communication. In this respect, we believe that those relatively ignored practices and strategies of the production of aesthetic artifacts need to be taken into account by practice and deserve further attention from researchers.

Notes

[1] All interview quotes are made anonymous and translated from German by the authors. Please direct your questions about the case study to Lydia Wimmer.

[2] Quote from transcript of interview with Marketing Expert 2.

[3] Quote from transcript of interview with Marketing Expert 1.

[4] Quote from transcript of interview with Marketing Expert 1.

[5] Quote from transcript of interview with Marketing Expert 2.

[6] Quote from transcript of interview with Creative 2.

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