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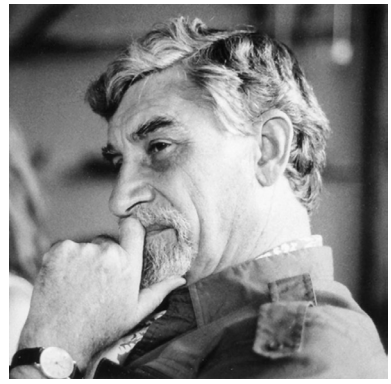
STEPHEN A. TYLER (1932–2020)

Ivo Strecker*



Meaning abounds
in the resonating silence
of the unsaid
(Tyler 1978:465).

In 2000, in an essay entitled "Rhetoric in the context of war" I stated:

> Like so many other post-postmodern anthropologists I have been searching for a new paradigm for the study of culture. The two great teachers and friends who have inspired me most in this are Baldambe (Balambaras Aike Berinas) from Hamar and Steve (Professor Stephen Tyler) from Rice University, Houston, Texas. Both have pointed to the same direction – rhetoric. Rhetoric is the key to a new (and one can also say very old) theory of culture (Strecker 2010:229).

Baldambe passed away in 1995, and under the title "Our good fortune brought us together!" I composed an obituary for him published in Paideuma (Strecker 1998). Now Steve has followed Baldambe across the River Styx, and it is once again my task to say farewell in an obituary published in Paideuma.

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* The following have contributed to this obituary: James Fernandez, Felix Girke, Robert Hariman, Karl-Heinz Kohl, Douglas Lewis, Jean Lydall, David MacDougall, Christian Meyer, Michał Mokrzan, Jamin Pelkey, Thomas Seibert, Richard Smith and Martha Tyler.

I first encountered Steve in 1981 one afternoon at the Haddon Library in Cambridge University. Rays of the winter sun passed through the windows and played on the covers of newly acquired books. I followed this spectacle for a while and forgot what I had come for. Then, suddenly, my eyes caught the title of Steve's green book: "The said and the unsaid" (Tyler 1978). What a title! Nothing could sum up better what had been the central issue of my current research into symbolization as a social practice (Strecker 1988). Curious as I was I sat down in a quiet corner and began to read, finding the following sentence on the very first page:

> Throughout I have celebrated the world of common sense, arguing that everyday life is far more rational and interesting than any scientific perversion of it, and that the commonplaces of everyday experience are more fantastic than those extra small and extra large worlds of modern science (Tyler 1978:xi).

This resonated well with what I had experienced during a decade of research among the Hamar of southern Ethiopia (Lydall and Strecker 1979). But I became even more enraptured when I found that Steve was arguing for a 'rhetorical and hermeneutical vision of language that returns language to its proper context of everyday uses and understandings' (Tyler 1978:xii).

Following Steve's thoughts about ethnography – expressed perhaps most poignantly in his widely read contribution to the 'writing culture debate' and entitled "Postmodern ethnography: from document of the occult to occult document" (Tyler 1986) – I felt right from the beginning that my obituary of Steve should have a 'polyphonic' character. On the 3rd of April 2020 Martha Tyler had written: 'Steve died yesterday. He is at peace at last. You were such good friends to him. Love, Martha'. So, from 5th April onwards I began to invite other scholars to add their voices. Their responses will follow throughout the text below. Here are the first five of them:

> In Rice University's spring semester, 1970, word circulated among the third-year anthropology students that the university had made an appointment to a senior position in anthropology. The new professor would come from Tulane University. His name was Stephen Albert Tyler.
>
> I trotted to the Rice University Bookshop, found a new title with his name on the spine and ordered "Cognitive anthropology" for me. It arrived, I inscribed the flyleaf 'Spring 1970'; I read it. Passed around my fellow students, it acquired the battered condition it carries five decades later. It was clear to us that Rice's small Anthropology Department, which included superb socio-cultural anthropologists and archaeologists, would soon welcome a major figure working in an exciting new field of general anthropology. What was in store for me I now look back on as a gale of intellectual challenges studying under an exceptionally acute and creative master teacher.
>
> Tuesday, 1 September 1970. Our first class with Steve in the first course he taught at Rice, "Anthropology, language and culture". I open a notebook to a blank page. Tyler enters the room, introduces himself, and begins to speak. I write the first notes I make in his

lectures: '1.0 Language & culture: two indescribable abstractions. 1.1 How does one know one's fellows are speaking a given language? What is it to know the meaning of a particular sequence of sounds? 1.1.1 Neither sound representation [n]or grammatical structure alone, or together, is enough to allow understanding of a spoken sentence'. Whatever else we had gotten ourselves into, we faced a professor who was interested in serious questions. We all noticed a lingering aura, a fading nimbus after Steve left the room.

The ideas of Steve's lectures would fill a book. Indeed, some of them turned up seven years later in "The said and the unsaid". The preview in the two courses he taught in his first year at Rice was a gift.

In the spring of 1971, my last semester at Rice, Tyler agreed to supervise an independent reading course for me. Thus unfolded my one semester-long encounter with the works of Edmund Husserl. I sensed the ideas were profoundly important, but understood hardly a sentence of the books I was reading. Yet, with Steve nodding approval, I acquired an intellectual persistence that has carried me through a fifty-year career.

I also learned from Steve that criticism is justifiable only when the critic can set out a better idea, hypothesis, or theory. Steve's 1980s consideration of postmodernism's implication for anthropology and our understanding of language and culture led to a reconsideration of rhetoric. With the many scholars the Rhetoric Culture Project brought together, Ivo Strecker and Tyler composed a breath-taking alternative to the formalism in the study of language and the pragmatics of speech. The basic concept of the Project was simple but, as demonstrated by the monographs of the Project's Series in Rhetoric Culture, immensely productive: 'rhetoric is founded in culture and culture is founded in rhetoric'.

Teachers transmit knowledge to preserve it; scholars think about what they teach. Great scholar-teachers shape the minds their students take into the world and alter a culture's soul, its *paideuma*. Steve was among them. In the 1980s, he inscribed my copy of "The said and the unsaid": 'Credo ut intelligam', he wrote on the book's flyleaf. Were he with us still, I would return with a summary of what he taught me: 'cogito ut intelligam' (Douglas Lewis, 24 April 2020).

I arrived at the Rice University Media Center in 1970, the same year that Steve Tyler joined the Anthropology Department. It was my first academic appointment, teaching filmmaking and media studies. From the beginning, Steve was interested in our activities at the Center and our attempts to make ethnographic films. He came to many of our film screenings. He became a friend and colleague, and we used to have long conversations. He would rail against academic anthropology, declaring, 'anthropology is not a science!' For him it belonged to the humanities and was an extension of history and philosophy. In 1972 I applied for a grant from the U.S. National Endowment for the Humanities to conduct an ethnographic film project about the Turkana people in northwest Kenya. Steve volunteered to be a joint applicant, thus giving the project added anthropological authority. We received the grant, and Judith MacDougall and I proceeded to make the "Turkana conversations" trilogy of films in 1973/74. Apart from our friendship, I remember Steve most for his iconoclastic and daring thinking. It was probing and creative, and he was far ahead of his time, examining the limits of representation and expressive forms of human interaction. He contributed to the efforts we were then making to break ethnographic filmmaking out of its didactic mould and make it more intellectually alive and exploratory (David MacDougall, 12 April 2020).

> Unfortunately, I came to the table too late to spend any time with Stephen Tyler. I'm also sorry to say that initially I overlooked the significance of his work on language: I was too quick to see only the continuities with the rhetorical turn, deconstruction, and other elements in the theoretical upheaval of that time. On reflection, I realize – as he would be quick to point out – that absence is another side of presence. And now that he has passed, I can see how there are several ways in which Stephen's work has become increasingly important. One is that he inspired Ivo Strecker, and that together they formed the Rhetoric Culture Project. I hope that many other scholars can benefit from association with that program of inquiry and can continue to develop its promise. Another important contribution of Stephen's work is that he resolutely held out for respecting the abyss that lies underneath and within human experience. His dialectic of speech and the unspeakable favoured neither control nor mystification, but rather a rigorous act of imagination that could not succeed unless already incorporating disorientation, precarity, loss, failure, and – in spite of all that – community. If that is a dream, it is only because one hasn't accepted that reality is inchoate (Robert Hariman, 13 April 2020).

> I met Stephen Tyler through the work of the Rhetoric Culture Project, thanks to the collaborative leadership of Ivo Strecker and colleagues. Though I never had the pleasure of meeting Professor Tyler in person, his writings resonated with me personally from my first reading. Here was a seasoned voice, crafted with intensity and writing at the level of a sage. Here was an adamant academic working to clarify differences and move beyond impasses. Here was a probing thinker driven to seek wisdom and impart understanding – a person indifferent to the constraints of academic fashion. Much like the celebrated 'thought pictures' he employed to map ideas, his observations on life, language, philosophy, and human culture are frequently arresting, paradox-affirming, sense-making, and true to life. Consider his claim on the 'first law of culture', for example, which states that, 'The more we control things, the more uncontrollable we both become'. Or consider his call for a new approach to the dialectics of sameness and difference, Self and Other, subject and object, us and them: 'We need a dialectic […] that allows and accounts for accommodation, growth, decay, change and creativity; a dialectic of becoming that does not necessarily imply the overcoming of difference or a progressive movement toward a final utopian resolution of difference in identity'. Such ideas are ancient, and yet somehow still ahead of their time. In this way, I would suggest without sentimentality that Stephen Tyler is timeless (Jamin Pelkey, 15 April 2020).

> I have always admired him as one of the truly towering figures at the university, both morally and intellectually (not to mention sartorially). He was also a team player. In fact, as you may or may not know, some years ago, when I asked Steve if he would be willing to co-teach a Social Science version of our Humanities-oriented Introduction to Asian Civilizations course for Asian Studies majors, he readily agreed, and it was only later that I discovered he did this as an extra course, without any sort of remuneration or class reduction. But that was Steve (Richard J. Smith, 17 April 2020).

In the summer of 1986, shortly after I had moved from Cambridge (UK) to the Institute for Ethnology and African Studies at Johannes Gutenberg University, Mainz, Germany, I sent Steve a postcard, introducing myself and saying that his rhetorical theory of lan-

guage seemed to me ideally suited to serve as the foundation for the rhetorical theory of symbolism that I was trying to develop. He soon answered that he was curious to hear more, and – to make a long story short – in May 1987 he arrived to spend the summer as visiting professor with us in Mainz.

In the introduction of the German translation of "The unspeakable: discourse, dialogue and rhetoric in the postmodern world" (Tyler 1987) I recalled my first impressions of him when I met him at Frankfurt airport:

> Although Tyler moved slowly and calmly I felt like I was meeting a fencer. The head slightly thrown back, an indefinable glitter in his eyes, slightly curly hair around his temples, a distinctive nose, a grey goatee and a pert kerchief around his neck […] I thought I had a musketeer in front of me. This impression was often repeated when Steve spoke in our seminars and accompanied the turns of his arguments with light and precise gestures. But not only his gestures, also the alert calm of his posture reminded me of an experienced fighter (Strecker 1987:vii–xiii).

Steve began his first lecture in Mainz saying that from Houston, Texas, he had now come to Germany, to the country of Johannes Gutenberg, Immanuel Kant, Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Jürgen Habermas; and that Paris was also not far away with towering philosophers like Jaques Derrida. I was surprised because in "The said and the unsaid" he had not mentioned Heidegger, Derrida nor Habermas, and I had not yet read his more recent essays soon to be published in "The unspeakable". So, in some ways the Steve with whom we spent the summer term in Mainz was more complex and also more difficult to understand than the one I knew from "The said and the unsaid". But there was also continuity: previously Steve had criticised the linguist Noam Chomsky for alienating the self from language, and now he was criticizing Jacques Derrida for alienating the author from her or his text.

To provide a sample of the light, often ironic and provocative conversations in which Steve engaged with students and staff, Jean Lydall has selected and transcribed the following tape recording:

> When Stephen was visiting professor at Mainz University I had the unforgettable experience of attending some of his seminars. Stephen gave me such a feeling of intellectual liberation that, shy as I was, I felt free to intersperse his dialogue about dialogue with my own naïve comments. Below follows an example, recorded on 8th August 1987:
>
> Jean: I would think that if anthropologists were to focus on verbal dialogue instead of literature, they would learn a lot […]
>
> Stephen: Yes, I think that is quite right, yah, I think this brings to remind us there's another reason why we find dialogue peculiar. That has to do with the notion of efficiency of reading, which is one of the things, I think, that students are taught. You read to get information out of something and so the text should be most efficiently organized for the reader to get information out of it efficiently. Whenever anything is

> presented that doesn't fit this model of transmission of information such as dialogue it is rejected because dialogue can be very inefficient, can wander off in different directions, can drop a theme here, forget about it, picks it up twenty minutes later or never again or […] doesn't even have a goal often and, er, or if there's a goal that you start off with, by the time you get done you've changed your mind and forgotten the original goal […].
>
> Jean: There are usually many, many different goals.
>
> Stephen: Right.
>
> Jean: Your goal differs from mine.
>
> Stephen: So seen from the perspective of efficiency then it's a very inefficient and very ineffective mode, um, and it's also, I think, seen as, as a, um, as a mode that doesn't somehow really tell the truth, er, because it doesn't bring you to a conclusion, er, and now we're back, it also makes us suspect because it's about, um, it's about verbal discourse, and verbal discourse is always suspect, uh, because it is, it's what, because of the possibilities of the speaker's manipulation, er, possibilities that it disappears too quickly, it doesn't reoccur, it doesn't endure and so on, it's not there to come back to and so on, so even if it's written dialogue I think that the very fact that it's connected to the idea of orality and speech makes it somehow a little suspect, and there's one final thing which is that for the most part I think we are not taught to read books to form questions, we're mainly taught to read for information (Jean Lydall, 20 April 2020).

The 'intellectual liberation' which Jean mentions was felt by quite a number of students, but perhaps no one was affected by it as much as Thomas Seibert, who at the time was studying philosophy in Frankfurt but used to come to Mainz especially to attend our seminars:

> In 1986/87 Ivo Strecker invited two 'sages' to enrich his seminars: Balambaras Aike Berinas, called Baldambe, from Hamar in Ethiopia, and Professor Stephen Tyler from Houston, Texas. From both of them I learnt that the age-old question of truth is always a rhetorical issue. By this is meant – so Professor Tyler – that questions of truth are ultimately framed by the 'said, the unsaid and the unspeakable'. I couldn't get my mind off Tyler's and Baldambe's 'said and unsaid' and, as Tyler's seminar drew to a close, I asked him if he would accept me as translator of his latest book, "The unspeakable". I told him that I had never translated a book before, but had published two small volumes of poetry in my youth. He agreed without fuss and I followed his 'written' line by line, transferring it into my 'written'. Chapter for chapter I sent to Stephen what I had translated, for reading and checking. "Das Unaussprechliche" appeared in 1991. Years later, Stephen and I saw each other again – in a fast-food restaurant in Houston. During our conversation we reconfirmed our shared view that philosophy should never be separated from poetry, politics and the love and friendship people feel and express for each other in everyday life (Thomas Seibert, 5 May 2020).

The 'postmodern' Steve was rejected by many of the anthropological establishment in the USA and the UK, but some like James Fernandez at the Department of Anthropol-

ogy, Chicago University, found him inspiring and incorporated Steve's essays on "Discourse, dialogue und rhetoric in the postmodern world" (Tyler 1987) in their teachings. Interestingly, Fernandez draws attention to the circumstances under which he wrote his recollections: the current Corona pandemic. This tells us how, as we remember Steve and thereby try to gain a clear picture of the past, we also live in a present that allows no clear vision of the future:

> We are holding up through the quarantine, which has just been extended to end of May here in Illinois. Our offices and the library are closed to us except by special request. I was granted three hours two weeks ago today, Saturday, in my office and a half hour library visit last Saturday to pick up books and papers for a small seminar on Oral Narrative I am teaching on the Zoom platform this spring quarter. The students have all gone home to shelter in place! Indeed, it does feel like being at 'the edge of University existence', as Jean remarks. In reference to Steve, a week or so ago you did forward news of that sad milestone of the passing of an extraordinary colleague. You added that you were working on a 'polyphonic obituary' and wondering if I had anything to contribute. That's a challenge!
>
> I do remember something of my reaction, forty years ago now, to some first readings in "The said and the unsaid": that here was a truly capacious memory palace at work with fertility and agility and impressive common sense. It went a long way in showing the coherences in what I had written off as the inchoate of inquiry!! His was a tour de force that few of us, surely not this journeyman, could ever undertake. Indeed I was tempted to abandon that term with which I had been so long associated! And I did change the title of my course from just "The figuration of social thought and action" by adding 'post modern considerations' with Steve's work in mind. Several of Steve's essays on ethnography became obligatory reading in the course! Most particularly "The vision quest in the West". That was in the mid-eighties!
>
> I did feel some differences with Steve, of course. The revitalization paradigm, and consequently the predication paradigm have been fundamental in my work. After all, working a quarter of a century in and on Africa on religious movements: Gabon with Fang, South Africa with Zulu, and Togo Dahomey and Ghana with Ewe, Fon and (peripherally) Akan, I tended to see the trope problem and the rhetoric problem in the context of cultural revitalization, the everlasting challenge of the imagination – maintaining and restoring vitality to the life of culture!
>
> Ah well, Ivo, a flawed effort to contribute to the polyphony that Steve's passing so justly deserves (James Fernandez, 26 April 2020).

After the 1987 summer at Mainz, Steve continued his study of the French 'post-structuralists' and phenomenologists, among them Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Maurice Blanchot, Gilles Deleuze, Michel Foucault, Emmanuel Levinas, Felix Guattari and others. To get an inkling of what a reading of the 'postmodern' Steve – buoyant with French extravagant thought – might entail let us look at Michal Mokrzan's recollections:

> No one else has influenced me like Professor Tyler. I 'grew up' reading his works. One of them is particularly special to me. My reading of "A post-modern in-stance" was like an epiphany. This text – or better: process, not product – is a performative act. This is

> not writing and narration on postmodernism (stating what it is or can be), but it is an act of bringing to life, prosopopoeia, an act of creating postmodernism in the presence of a reader. Hence, the essay is affirmative and connotes kinesis. Parodies, homophones and thought pictures are used there to express what is the unnameable. Single sounds and transcriptions of words evoked in my imagination unforeseen images, images – feelings, and the feelings provoked actions. Something like an unruly chiasm of mind and body. This work induced me to backbreaking writing, speaking and thinking divergently. Against a straight line! It moved me. It was something that did not leave me alone. One of the chapters of my PhD dissertation I devoted to the rhetorical reading of this text. Professor Tyler read it and replied that my argument had 'brought him pleasure'; I was honoured and unspeakably happy. I am eternally grateful to Stephen Tyler for this 'different kind of journey'.
>
> To put it in more general terms: Stephen Tyler was truly visionary about where anthropology and linguistics should be. His works are characterized by the rhetoric of renewal and kinesis. They have initiated numerous theoretical and methodological turns in the contemporary human sciences. In the Introduction to "Cognitive anthropology" (1969), Professor Tyler announced the rebirth of anthropology through an objective approach, in which culture was identified with cognition. Less than a decade later, in "The said and the unsaid: mind, meaning and culture" (1978), seeking a way out of the clinch between formalism and functionalism, he proposed a rhetorical vision of language and a model of discourse that anticipated the true intellectual revolution that was yet to come in the 1980s. His collected essays "The unspeakable: discourse, dialogue and rhetoric in the postmodern world" (1987) as well as the articles "Post-modern ethnography: from document of the occult to occult document" (1986) and "A post-modern in-stance" (1991) are full-blooded manifestos of postmodernism in anthropology, undermining our beliefs about the possibility of separating modes of discourse: logos (science), pathos (poetry) and ethos (politics). Works written in the 1990s (e.g. "Vile bodies – a mental machination" [1993] and "Prolegomena to the next linguistics" [1993]) develop the concept of a middle voice – a type of discourse free from the mechanism of representation that reproduces the subject/object distinction. Some of the concepts listed here have found further development in the Rhetoric Culture Project (Michal Mokrzan, 18 April 2020).

In the spring of 1995 Steve was back in Mainz to take part in an international conference on "Anthropology and the question of the other" that Karl-Heinz Kohl had arranged together with Tullio Maranhao, one of Steve's younger colleagues at Rice University. This is how Karl-Heinz remembers Steve:

> It is a curious experience that memories of persons who have deeply impressed you often crystallize in a single image. When I think of Steve Tyler, I see him lying on a couch in my study in Mainz. He was wearing a chequered shirt, had a kerchief around his neck and Texan cowboy boots on his outstretched legs. The reason why precisely this scene has stuck in my memory has something to do with the fact that after reading his books I had imagined him to be completely different: a theoretician on whom the rebellious spirit of the Sixties had left its mark, who was equally well versed in philosophy and linguistics, and had – after a long academic drought – decisively contributed to turn anthropology from its feet to its head again.

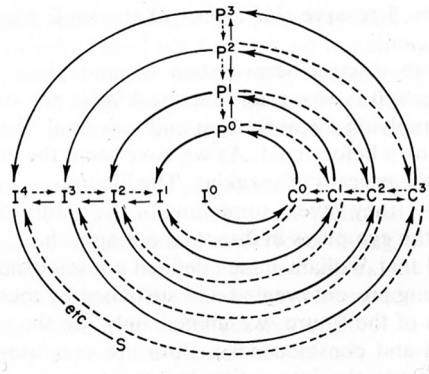
> There he was now really lying in front of me: a southern aristocratic gentleman like from a picture book taking a short rest after five exciting days of discussions that we had jointly spent at an old hunting lodge in the hills above the river Rhine. It was the closing of our conference on "Anthropology and the question of the other" (1–5 May 1995) that we were celebrating in my house in Mainz. Steve did probably not even know that the conference materialized largely because of him. For had he not several years before suggested that I invite his colleague Tullio Maranhao to Mainz University, the close friendship would not have developed that was to connect Tullio and I from then on, and was only to end with his tragic death in September 2002. Tullio and I had jointly arranged the conference at which, thanks to Steve, some of the most distinguished members of the postmodern wing of American cultural anthropology took part, and this was also the beginning of a series of further workshops and mutual invitations that led to an intensive exchange between American and German anthropologists (Karl-Heinz Kohl, 21 April 2020).

While we participated in the conference on "Anthropology and the question of the other" which Karl-Heinz has mentioned above, Steve and I sometimes wandered off to enjoy the scenery and the sweet smell of blossoming trees in nearby orchards high above the river Rhine. As we walked and talked I took heart to ask Steve something that for some time had been on my mind: 'Could we not aim to conceptualize a rhetorical theory of culture?' Steve smiled and answered: 'Why not?'

There is no space here to recall all that followed at this first phase of the "Rhetoric Culture Project", but one episode needs telling. As part of the intensive exchange which Karl-Heinz has mentioned above I was invited to Houston to give a talk at the Anthropology Department of Rice University. This was also the time when Steve and I began to discuss our project in more detail. One day, at Houston's "French Café" we reviewed various possible designations of our endeavour. I vividly recall Steve's hand as he wrote 'rhetoric and culture' on a paper serviette and then crossed out the 'and'. He replaced it with 'in' and 'of' and the like, only to delete these alternatives and to replace them with a slash: 'rhetoric/culture'. The slash was at this point most important for Steve because it signified the inseparable relationship between rhetoric and culture that we were going to explore. Only later, when other members of our team argued against it, did we drop the slash and used the simple and more opaque collocation 'rhetoric culture'.

Then, and also on later occasions, I urged Steve to broaden his model of the interaction of components in speaking to apply not only to an analysis of particular speech situations, but to human discourse, history and culture in general. His initial model included the basic components in speaking: intention, convention, and performance, and it was meant to explain speech 'as a conscious act of will expressed through a medium of necessary constraints which influence but do not determine what can be said' (1978:137). Later, when the Rhetoric Culture Project had taken shape, Steve offered the more generalised application of the model that I had suggested:

> The following model illustrates this open-ended and emergent nature of discourse. It shows how in prospective and retrospective fashion, speakers' intentions (I), their competence (C) or awareness of existing conventions, and their performances (P) are linked and act upon each other. The visual representation of the model is a spiral – or rather two superimposed spirals – showing the prospective and retrospective elements in the I-C-P triad, consisting of a number of cycles, which may range from 1 to *n* (Tyler 1978:137).



> The I-C-P model illustrates what we have emphasized above: cultures are interactive, autopoetic, self-organized configurations. They are emergent, instrumental adaptations characterized by rhythmic, sequential, oscillating iterations manifested as transitions in phase space where each state is new and all states are bound together by resonance, tuning, and feedback. Phases are dissipative, responsive to emergent interactive features that function reflexively as both constraints and *telos*. The model has a dialectical form in which components are simultaneously cause and effect, and all components are co-constructed, co-dependent, and co-determined (Tyler and Strecker 2009:24–25).

In 1998, and again in the early years of the new millennium, other conferences were to follow as Christian Meyer and Felix Girke have vividly remembered in their Preface to "The rhetorical emergence of culture", the fourth volume in the Berghahn Books series "Studies in rhetoric and culture":

> In writing this preface we are reminded of the earliest days of the Rhetoric Culture Project at the end of the twentieth century, when we were working on applications for funding, invitational letters, programmatic outlines, and all kinds of bureaucratic texts in Ivo Strecker's office at the University of Mainz. The animated atmosphere was more reminiscent of a bustling open-plan editorial office than of the solemn quietude of an academic retreat. The room housed three permanently occupied desks, an additional workstation for student assistants, a small but comfortable coffee lounge, a kitchenette, and a camp bed. Ever-shifting piles of papers, photocopies, journals and books, the ringing of the phone, the aroma of Ivo's 'Wuestenkaffee' (wasteland coffee) and constant visits by curious colleagues, startled students and confused computer repairmen contributed to the ambience

> of the place. The three of us were constantly chatting, muttering fragments of text, discussing tropes and figures, intuitively suggesting words to complete somebody else's sentence, reading out emails as they were arriving. […]
>
> Something out of the ordinary was in the making, as anyone who witnessed the turbulent activities could tell. For several years already, Ivo Strecker had been calling for a reunion of anthropology and rhetoric, and had alerted us to the promises of a rhetorical theory of culture, but it was only at the 1998 EASA Conference in Frankfurt (Main) that he and Stephen Tyler organized a panel on the topic of "Rhetoric culture". One of the presenters was Christian Meyer, who only three days before had completed his MA in anthropology. After the Frankfurt conference, we all began to envision a larger project. A first step was taken in an application for funds from the German Research Foundation (DFG) that allowed Christian and a host of student assistants to assemble and study much of the literature on the anthropology and ethnography of rhetoric. One of these students was Felix Girke, who soon joined the team as a full member.
>
> Out of the transatlantic emails between Stephen, Ivo, and Christian, a general theoretical manifest began to emerge, which subsequently helped us to secure some practical support, the interest of scholars from all over the world, and finally persuaded the Volkswagen Foundation to join the Rhetoric Culture endeavour. Once we held in our hands the grant approval from Volkswagen, we jumped right into inviting all those scholars whose texts we had been reading but whom we had never met. The replies we received raised true storms of enthusiasm on the bridge of our flying dreamboat, as we realized that people found our vision congenial to their own. All the somewhat overly optimistic ideas we had been juggling suddenly seemed less outlandish (Meyer and Girke 2011:ix–x).

As Steve was considered a kind of 'dean' of the Rhetoric Culture Project, we decided to prepare a Festschrift for his 75th birthday, and in 2006, while we were busy preparing the publication of our recent debates at the Rhetoric Culture conferences, word was sent to all scholars involved in the project inviting them to contribute. In the event, an amazing mixture of texts was produced filling two volumes, which we printed out in a copy shop in Berlin. Then Markus Verne and I took a plane to Houston where, on 8th May 2007, we presented the improvised Festschrift to Steve at a surprise party that James Faubion had arranged to celebrate Steve's 75th birthday. Most of the essays were later published in "Astonishment and evocation: the spell of culture in art and anthropology" (Strecker and Verne 2013), and "Writing in the field" (Strecker and LaTosky 2013).

In February 2015, I received an invitation to author an article on "Rhetoric culture theory" for the Oxford Bibliographies in Anthropology. Full of enthusiasm, I wrote to Steve, Felix and Christian suggesting we did the job together: 'Stephen, you always have been the strongest when it comes to questions of epistemology, you, Felix have an old expertise on matters relating to resonance, and you, Christian have always been interested in religion'. But Steve's response showed that he was from now on to leave academic work behind. He wrote, 'Let me know how things develop. I have to tell you, though, that I may not be very helpful. It seems that I get dumber and lazier every day'. These were the very last lines he ever sent to me.

Time passed, and then in January 2016 I wrote to Martha that I often worried about Stephen. She answered:

> Thank you for caring. Steve has had cognitive issues for some time now, but he remains his old cheerful, serene self. We have moved into a Continuing Care Community and have sold our property, which we miss. We'll always be grateful to you for the gracious connection to your part of the world, and I know Steve very much enjoyed working, playing and theorizing with you.

For Steve's birthday on May 8th 2016 we sent him greetings and best wishes, to which Martha replied:

> What a lovely thing to tell Steve! He was brightened by your birthday words and rejoices over recognition of his work. He has been holding steady since his arrival here. There will be an inevitable decline over time, but we still are enjoying our lives where we have good company and good food in our new digs.

For more than a year we did not hear from Martha, but then on 4 November 2017 she wrote: 'I wanted to tell you, as his closest of friends, that Steve had a bad stroke a week ago. He has a long road ahead with a lot of rehabilitation therapies. At this time he's still unable to speak'. Understanding that Steve was never to recover and that sooner or later I would have to compose an obituary for him, I wrote to Martha asking whether she would be so kind as to write about Steve's life for me: 'Nothing grand or heavy, just what you would like to tell me (and others) about his life, early as well as late. According to Steve's theory of evocation small details may tell a lot'. Not long after, I received the following reply:

> Here is a rather slapdash version of Steve's life. I was interested in Steve's early life, which was so different from my own. He was raised in a remote rural area of Iowa on a farm where they raised hogs and corn. There was no running water, nor electricity (which made him easily ready for a life in the Indian jungle!). He attended a one-room school – where most of the other students were his siblings – until he went to high school. (During high school he had to move into town and board with another family.) He raised animals that were shown for ribbons at the Iowa State Fair. When schooling was finished he joined the U.S. Air Force and was sent to Korea, where he worked in communications. He's often said that being sent to Asia opened his eyes to the interesting features of other cultures and the thought of reading anthropology.
>
> He began coursework for college while still in the Air Force and acquired a G.I. Bill to pay for tuition later at Simpson College, a small liberal arts institution. At that time he lived with his parents, who'd sold their farm and lived in Indianola, Iowa. Upon graduation he enrolled at Syracuse University to study Political Science/Foreign Affairs but tired of it in the first year and so moved to Stanford University, where he eventually received an M.A. and Ph.D. in anthropology.

When living in a house with other students Steve was the house cook and developed culinary skills and an interest in food preparation, which lasted his whole life. Through the years he studied in food classes and baked a lot of bread, acquiring the flour from North Dakota.

Steve and I met at U.C. Berkeley where we were the only two students in a Telugu class (Telugu is the Indian language that serves as a contact language for Koya, the tribal language that Steve recorded).

We married in 1962 and immediately went off to India to live with the Koya people. They were an isolated group that we reached by river; there were no roads. He was sponsored by the Ford Foundation. Steve finished his Ph.D. thesis the following year and then took his first teaching job in 1963 at U.C. Davis (where he managed the Peace Corps Training Project for India and I taught the trainees Telugu).

In 1967 he was promoted to Associate Professor and took a position at Tulane University. Later, in 1970, he was promoted to full Prof. and moved to Houston to teach at Rice University, where he remained for forty years. He was given the Autry Chair in Social Sciences. Our daughter Alison was born in 1973; Steve was an especially active father. One of Steve's favourite interests was flower gardening.

He retired in 2010, and we travelled extensively […] his favourite sites were the Asian ones, especially Angkor Wat. His interest in languages was never dormant. I remember that in his off-time he studied Mayan and Egyptian hieroglyphics and always went back to the un-deciphered Indus Valley script. We sold our house and moved to Bayou Manor in 2015. By then Steve was starting to show symptoms of memory loss. After he suffered a stroke in 2017 he lost his ability to speak and walk and had to be moved to a nursing home, where he's been as cheerful and responsive as any long-term patient could be (Martha Tyler 17 September 2019).

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