First I want to thank Adam Kendon for inviting me to review this book. If I had been randomly browsing around in a bookstore, I would never have spontaneously picked up a book with the title “Expressing Oneself — Expressing One’s Self”. Nor would I have suspected that it would be a collection of scientific papers to honor the life and work of the Robert M. (Bob) Krauss.

There is no question that Bob Krauss is a very influential psychologist. My favorite “Krauss paper” is Krauss, Apple, Morency, Wenzel, and Winton (1981), where Krauss and his coauthors effectively demolish the view that communication is primarily nonverbal. This view was very popular in the 70s and 80s, and still appears frequently in magazines and quality newspapers (“93% of all communication is nonverbal!”) when they need to fill their science sections with sexy little “factoids” that their readers can quote at cocktail parties. Scientifically speaking, these claims originated from studies by (among others) Argyle et al. (1970), Mehrabian (1972), and Archer and Akert (1977). But these researchers explicitly avoided using stimuli in which the speech provided crucial information. This meant that verbal information was not given a fair chance to contribute to the communication. Krauss et al. improved on this specific aspect by including and systematically comparing all relevant modalities in their design, and proceeded to demonstrate that the verbal channel is the workhorse of human communication. They also falsified the persistent claim that nonverbal information is the dominant channel to communicate emotional quality.

Bob Krauss contributed significantly to the development of a new experimental paradigm for studying human-human communication, one that broke through the constraints of the dusty straightjacket of Chomskyan linguistic analysis. By having participants communicate freely about nonsense pictures, Krauss and Weinheimer (1966) made it possible to study reference, a central aspect of human communication, in the wild. Subsequent research with this paradigm by Krauss and Glucksberg (and many others who followed in their footsteps) demonstrated that in referential communication, speakers have to take into account the perspective of their interlocutor. The influence that this paradigm had on the study of language and communication can hardly be overestimated. The approach has
been further developed by dialogue researchers of wildly different persuasions, ranging from those who argue that we do not actually worry that much about the perspective of our interlocutor (e.g., Keysar, 2007) to those who argue that taking into account the perspective of the other is absolutely crucial for communication (e.g., Clark & Wilkes-Gibbs, 1986). The chapters in the Festschrift by Torrey, Fussell and Kiesler, by Schober and Carstensen, and by Cheng and Chui in the section “Human Communication” all represent work that builds on this tradition.

Later in his career, Bob Krauss focused his energy on a new target, namely speech accompanying gesture, a topic for which readers of this journal do not need an extensive introduction. Possibly encouraged by his earlier success in establishing the dominance of language over nonverbal communication, Krauss became one of the most outspoken defenders of the position that the function of (a certain class of) speech related gestures is to facilitate speaker-internal production processes, and not primarily to communicate information to the interlocutor.

There is indeed evidence that gesturing can have speaker-internal facilitating effects. For instance, de Ruiter (1998) and also Wesp et al. (2001) have shown that people make more gestures when they have to retrieve spatial information from memory, findings that were later replicated by Morsella and Krauss (2004). That being said, this book gives the impression that Bob Krauss’s view on the function of gesture represents a consensus in gesture research. This impression would be incorrect. For a detailed critique of Krauss’s arguments on the function of gesture, I refer the interested reader to de Ruiter (2006); for an extensive and more balanced discussion of the communicative view of gesture, I recommend Kendon (1994).

Krauss’s work on gesture was the motivation for the first section in the book, called “The Production of Gestures, Speech and Action”. This section kicks off with the chapter by Sotaro Kita, who incorporates interesting new findings about the relation between linguistic (semantic) structure and gesture generation into the gesture model by Kita and Özyürek (2003).

The chapter by Miranda Rose is based on a her landmark article about the potential role of gesture in aphasia therapy (Rose, 2006), and is an absolute must-read for anyone interested in the relationship between gesture and aphasia.

The next chapter, by Palti and Hadar is a classical neurocognitive study, arguing that the motor cortex is involved in linguistic processing. The study irresistibly reminded me of Jerry Fodor’s (1999) quote “If the mind happens in space at all, it happens somewhere north of the neck. What exactly turns on knowing how far north?”, which I encountered in the highly recommended deconstruction of fMRI methodology by Page (2006). For those who are interested in neurocognitive approaches to embodied cognition, the chapter is probably an interesting read.

The next chapter by Morsella, Larson and Bargh is also concerned with an “embodiment” theme, namely the seemingly random motoric behavior during the
execution of cognitive tasks. As is the case with many other studies on embodied cognition, it provides circumstantial evidence for “motoric stuff” happening due to cognitive activity, but fails to convincingly show how or even that these motoric phenomena actually are involved in the actual processing that is needed for the cognitive task under investigation.

Section II is called “Human Communication”, perhaps to honor by implication Krauss’s famous claim that the gestures that were the topic of the previous section are not primarily communicative devices. In this section there are a number of contributions that focus around the theme of referential communication, a field of research that, as mentioned above, has significantly been advanced by Krauss’s methodological innovations.

Torrey, Fussell, and Kiesler describe perspective taking in the context of human-robot communication. I appreciated the original topic and the clear writing style, but found the treatment a bit biased: the authors did not mention the large body of work that suggests that we humans neglect, or at least assign a very low priority, to perspective taking. The work by Keysar and colleagues is relevant here (see, for instance, Horton and Keysar, 1996). Especially considering how difficult it turns out to be to endow robots with such highly complex functionality, theories that suggest that we perhaps don’t need to do so are highly pertinent to the discussion.

In Chapter 7, Schober and Carstensen investigate the intriguing question whether people who have known one another for a very long time (for instance long married couples) get better at communicating. Intriguingly, although they (the couples) apparently think so, the authors conclude that this is not really the case.

Chapter 8, by Cheng and Chiu, is about the emergence of “brand culture”. The authors define “Culture” as “a set of loosely organized knowledge […] produced and reproduced by a network of interconnected individuals”. Brand culture then is the culture shared by “a collection of consumers who are strongly bound together by a common brand choice/preference” (for instance, the group of people who use Apple computers). It was an interesting read, but while reading it I realized that I know so little about this topic that it would be unwise to even attempt to summarize its content.

In the chapter by McNeill, Duncan, Franklin, Goss, Kimbara, Parrill, Welji, (Lei) Chen, Harper, Quek, (Travis) Rose, and Tuttle it is announced that the “mechanistic” dialogue theory by Pickering and Garrod (2004) is correct in its general assumption that successful communication is brought about by aligning representations, but not in its assumption that this is realized through priming (citing Krauss & Pardo, 2004). Instead, it argues that alignment is organized by “shared growth points” and “hyperphrases”. Interesting as this extension of the
original Growth Point theory (McNeill, 1992) is, the authors’ empirical arguments have little resemblance with the fundamental (and in my opinion very convincing) critique by Krauss and Pardo of the Pickering and Garrod (2004) approach.

The final section of the book is “The Perception of Speech and Identity”. This section contains three chapters.

Robert Remez’s chapter called “Spoken Expression of Individual Identity and the Listener”, and Jennifer Pardo’s chapter “Expressing Oneself in Conversational Interaction” are both truly excellent, brief, and well written, and I look forward to using these two chapters in my teaching.

Remez gives a compact overview of research on the phonetic variation in speech. This is a source of variability that, although it represents a major nuisance for automatic speech recognition, is explored by language users to express and detect anatomical, physiological, emotional and situational information.

Pardo discusses the intriguing finding that the phonetic properties of the speech of participants in a dialogue tend to converge, and concludes (with Bilous & Krauss, 1988) that this convergence probably serves nonlinguistic social purposes.

The final chapter of the book is by Julian Hochberg. I did not entirely understand the title (“Perceptual Prosody and Perceived Personality: Physiognomics Precede Perspective”), but perhaps this is because the ample alliteration averted adequate assessment. There are a number of highly speculative ideas in this chapter, many centered around theoretical extensions of the Gestural Feedback Model (GFM) by Morsella and Krauss. For instance, Hochberg suggests that the central mechanism of the GFM, the idea of “reactivating semantics through feedback from effectors or motor commands” reveals “an extremely powerful implication that expands the potential applications of the GFM beyond those it has addressed thus far; that is, GFMs sustain the speaker’s purposeful activity in advance” (p. 199, italics in original).

To summarize, this book certainly does what it is primarily supposed to do, namely celebrate the scientific career of Bob Krauss, and illustrate many of the ways in which he had a significant impact on the intersection between (psycho) linguistics and (social) psychology. On the other hand, the readability of the chapters varies considerably. Furthermore, many contributions in the book are noticeably biased in the sense that they tend to focus on theories and ideas that Bob Krauss supported (or that supported Bob Krauss), sometimes at the cost of ignoring other prevalent views. It could well be that this is customary in a Festschrift; I am not very familiar with the genre, but it is at least good to be aware of this caveat while reading the book.

For those who are interested in, or fans of, the work of Bob Krauss, this book is probably a must-buy. For those who are interested mainly or only in the scientific
content, it is like the old dilemma one faces when having to decide whether or not to buy a CD: how many of the songs have to be good to justify buying the entire album?

References


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