BLURRING THE BOUNDARIES BETWEEN DOMESTIC AND DIGITAL SPHERES: COMPETING ENGAGEMENTS IN PUBLIC GOOGLE HANGOUTS

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Abstract

This study explores the phenomenon of multiactivity during recreational video-mediated communication (VMC) through the analysis of competing engagements. From a data corpus of naturally occurring interactions in public Google Hangouts, we focus on instances of competing engagements triggered by the co-presence of unratiſed participants in broadcasters' physical environments. As users are immersed in their everyday spaces, interferences from their domestic sphere are common occurrences that break the participatory framework established in the digital sphere. Following a conversation analytic approach, we intend to show that these interferences lead to competing engagements that can be exploited rather than simply dealt with. Drawing on literature on multiactivity, we argue that participants at times organize and coordinate these multiple engagements to add playfulness and advance their interactions. In sum, this study aims to highlight how situated competing streams of action are coordinated and the purpose they may serve in recreational VMC.

Keywords: Videoconferencing; Google Hangouts; Multiactivity; Recreation.

1. Introduction

Bodily conduct, voice and the physical environment are not something that used to be considered part of our presence in Web interactions. Once, we could not be seen or heard online, and we could simply type ourselves into online existence. Yet, with increased bandwidth and the advances in video technology, our embodied selves are potentially thrust into the Web. The Web seems to have shifted from the ultimate anonymous environment into a hyper personal and performance-like space with all its realistic intensity.

Video-mediated communication (VMC) has been around for over 30 years within work environments, but it was not until the era of Web 2.0 that it reached households, opening up possibilities for domestic and recreational use. As any emergent media environment, it presents a general challenge: It needs to be analyzed descriptively before a more theoretically informed analysis can be achieved (Herring 2013b). Scholars have warned against falling into the traps of technical determinism (Herring 2013a; Kalman, Raban, & Rafaeli 2013; Rafaeli & Sudweeks 1997) and maintain that technology should be seen as not so much determining but rather framing interactions (Hutchby 2001). Along this same line of thought, we view intrinsic characteristics of VMC as opening up possibilities through which new interactional phenomena can be observed.

This research focuses on the management of multiple engagements as a result of co-present unratiſed participants in broadcasters' physical environment during Hangouts interactions. In the first section of this paper, we provide a review of VMC used in different communication settings, followed by a discussion of the notion of multiactivity and how it applies to our analysis. Next, the method and data gathering efforts are briefly outlined. In the analysis section, we present three examples on how competing engagements that blur the boundaries of interactional spaces are approached. In sum, based on empirical observations of naturally occurring video-mediated interactions, this study aims to describe how multiple streams of action are coordinated in multiparty settings and the purpose they may serve in recreational VMC.

2. Literature overview

2.1. Video-mediated communication

With its proliferation, the use of VMC now spreads from corporate environments and educational programs, through families and friends, to entertainment experiences. Traditionally, most research on VMC has been based on task-oriented interactions within the work environment. Much of this type of research has explored virtual teams, with a focus on issues of task performance and trust among team members. For example, studies explored how distributed groups collaborate in order to carry out product development (Beers Fägersten, Holmsten, & Cunningham 2010; Finn & Sellen 1997; Heath & Luff 1992; Olson, Appunn, Walters, Grinnell, & McAllister 2012). In the educational sphere, main concerns in VMC revolve around issues of social presence and levels of students' engagement, which has been correlated with students' learning success (Swan et al. 2008). VMC is also increasingly used for commercial purposes, in order to create a space to reach out to clients and customers through platforms such as YouTube (Brogan 2012).

As well as these environments, the use of VMC has considerably increased within family and personal settings. For example, new video systems are being designed to support the sharing of everyday activities in actual shared media spaces. Domestic VMC helps family members and couples stay connected while at a distance by sharing not only special moments but mainly the mundane aspects of daily life (Judge, Neustaedter, Harrison, & Blose 2011; Kirk, Sellen, & Cao 2010; Yarosh, Inkpen, & Brush 2010). The claim is that rather than substituting for FTF communication, different media constitute their own communication environments. Media spaces are increasingly being studied for their ability to support dyadic as well as multiparty interactions in the context of domestic life (Judge et al. 2011).

In VMC for entertainment purposes, which is the focus of our present study, research has mainly addressed YouTube channels and gaming environments (Smith, Obrist, & Wright 2013). The possibility to broadcast through platforms like Twitch TV, JustinTV, YouTube, or what Bruns (2009) calls "Do It Yourself TV" has created fertile ground for a variety of hybrid genres, content curation, and different relations with third party content (Bruns 2009). For example, watching other people play video games has become in and of itself a valid and popular way to engage with gaming content (Smith et al. 2013). Through videoconferencing systems, the ability to support distributed groups broadcasting jointly or to engage as viewers in such practices encourages people

to experience social presence and to develop a sense of group identity (Cesar & Geerts 2011).

Among the many VMC platforms for personal and social use, this research focuses on Google Hangouts, a platform that allows one-to-one as well as multiparty interactions. Google launched Hangouts, a video chat and web conference tool, as another attempt at delving into the social networks market. While Skype, Facebook, Apple, and many others offer a free video chat tool, it was the multiparty videoconferencing feature integrated into Google Hangouts that set this platform apart from the rest. Furthermore, Google enabled the Hangouts on Air feature (from here onward referred to as public Google Hangouts), which after clicking a checkbox will broadcast interactions to a connected YouTube channel where anyone can watch live. Public Google Hangouts also automatically create a recording of interactions and upload them to the host's YouTube channel. Google has recently integrated the Hangouts option within Gmail (Youngkin & Kesselman 2015).

Broadly speaking, users can interact in public, semi-public, and private spaces in which written text, video and audio converge. This feature has now become home to a variety of practices ranging from private video chats with friends to public spontaneous or scheduled broadcasts streaming live through YouTube. In this paper we draw on data from public Google Hangouts, which support multiparty interactions of up to 10 participants (up to 15 for some selected users) and can be livestreamed to unknown viewers. Fig. 1 below shows the standard public Google Hangouts screen configuration, in which all participants appear in the thumbnail strip at the bottom, the current speaker (or the participant regarded as such by the medium) takes the main video window, and the written exchanges in the public messaging window are on the right.

Figure 1. Public Google Hangouts screenshot

To understand the interactional dynamics of these video chats, the affordances of public Google Hangouts must be preliminary taken into consideration. First, all broadcasting participants as well as viewers can freely use the public written channel. Through this channel, viewers can interact with broadcasters via Live Text Commentaries (LTCs). A public message appears when a participant composes a public message indicating that he or she is typing. Due to the medium's internal linearization, texts appear on screen one after the other and are published in chronological order—either when users hit enter or when the system refreshes. This provides an embedded sequentiality that creates turns-at-talk very clearly compared with the openness and overlapping actions conveyed

through video and audio. Second, the visual organization of the screen is highly relevant in terms of interaction. Google Hangouts modify the main video window depending on who is speaking, while all the other participants using a webcam appear in a thumbnail strip at the bottom of the screen. In other words, the main video window automatically features whichever participant is the current speaker, or the speaker making the loudest noise. This affordance at times creates interactional mismatches since participants opting for a side participatory role at times become the visual focus simply because of loud noises in their physical environment (Rosenbaun, Rafaeli, & Kurzon 2016).

Another important consideration regarding these interactions relates to time. An important resource in interaction management is the allocation of time and its related notion of structure (Mondada 2014a). Hangouts On Air can run up to eight hours, thus interactions are not usually limited by time—other than the time limitations each participant may have. Similarly to findings in VMC for domestic purposes, these open and unstructured interactions easily fluctuate between focused to unfocused interactions as the video chat becomes an ‘always on’ experience (Judge et al. 2011). As Mondada (2014a) notices, the lack of time constraints is in itself relevant in shaping the organization of the interaction. Finally, public Google Hangouts constitute a complex interactional space in which participants mobilize resources to coordinate multiactivities while in turn they are or may be in the presence of an audience. Apart from a potential audience, group size dynamics as well as technical and spatial configurations also characterize these environments. Examples of these spatial configurations may include the physical co-presence of non-ratified participants outside users’ visual field. Furthermore, visual configurations turn Hangouts into constricted environments which project a somewhat rigid interactional space. This is accomplished by the manner in which participants usually arrange themselves toward cameras and screens. This arrangement either makes them appear fully oriented toward co-participants and the ongoing interaction even though they may be engaged in parallel unrelated activities, or produces an interactional mismatch if their focus of attention is somewhere else yet they appear in the main visual window. Because of this, managing multiactivities may work in a slightly different fashion when the group is interacting in a video-mediated environment.

2.2. Multiactivities and competing engagements

Communication technologies in general and video-mediated environments in particular allow and even compel users to engage in multiple tasks and activities. Traditionally, this phenomenon has been studied under the topic of interruptions and multitasking. Not surprisingly, this concern—which is deeply related to but somewhat different from multiactivities in terms of approach—has been widely studied in human-computer interaction (HCI) and Computer Supported Collaborative Work (CSCW) (Coraggio 1990; Hutchby 2008; Levy, Rafaeli, & Ariel 2012; Mark, Gonzalez, & Harris 2005). Although the literature on interruptions and multitasking is extensive, for the most part it has been primarily focused on the workplace and work-related environments (Tolmie, Crabtree, Rodden, & Benford 2008). Intrinsic to multitasking is switching attention between or among activities, which implies the combination of switching among engagements and between solitary activities and group communication (Su & Mark 2008). Self-interruptions are also partially responsible for multitasking and attention

fragmentation (Dabbish, Mark, & González 2011). The amount of time given to one activity before switching to another is also a characterizing factor, ranging from concurrent tasks to sequential engagements (Salvucci, Taatgen, & Borst 2009).

Within conversation analysis (CA), the notion of multiple engagements has been addressed through the concept of multiactivity. Goodwin (1984) proposed the term ‘multiactivity settings’ to describe participants’ involvements during a storytelling episode. The term ‘multiactivity’ highlights the interactional and sequential dimension of certain types of multitasking behavior (Mondada et al. 2014). Approaching multiple competing engagements from the angle of multiactivity—as opposed to multitasking—highlights the collaborative nature of this phenomenon as a joint achievement during interaction. From this vantage point, the emphasis is on ‘activity’ rather than on ‘task’, which appears to be more conducive to various sets of human engagements that are not necessarily goal-oriented or task-oriented. Furthermore, the focus is on how multiple streams of action are managed through social interaction as an intersubjective accomplishment. In other words, handling multiactivities in multiparty interactions constitutes a joint achievement. (Mondada et al. 2014).

Following Haddington et al. (2014), we refer to multiactivity as the ways in which two or more activities are interwoven and made co-relevant within a given interaction. Defining whether or not various on-going activities constitute multiactivity depends on the participants’ own orientations, how participants treat activities as they engage in them as one or multiple. Broadly speaking, there is some form of visible or hearable orientation to two or more engagements and some amount of interactional work done to maintain and coordinate them. This implies some sort of competition between courses of action with respect to the allocation of temporal, cognitive or material resources in a given situation (Circella, Mokhtarian, & Proff 2012).

Studies on the coordination of multiple activities show that participants manage them in a way sensitive to the sequential organization of interaction. In order to do so, participants rely on spatial and bodily configurations such as gaze, orientation, the material environment, and bodily movements. In recreational VMC the interactional space has unique characteristics, as the multimodal resources available to generate it are of a particular nature. Furthermore, in Google Hangouts participants mobilize resources to coordinate multiactivities while in turn they are or may be in the presence of an audience as well as the physical co-presence of non-ratified participants.

In multiparty interactions, multiactivity is influenced by group size and the notion of schisming, which refers to multifocused gatherings with the co-occurrence of two turn-taking systems (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson 1974). Goodwin (1987) expanded this notion and proposed that schisming is a participation framework that includes enough participants to allow for some conversationalists to be both speaker and hearer. Furthermore, Egbert (1997) showed that schisming is a participation framework with two conversations, each with its own turn-taking system, but that cannot be fully understood separately since there is some interference between the two simultaneous conversations. At least four participants are required to accomplish schisming as a collaborative effort (Egbert 1997).

In recreational VMC, unrated participants are physically co-present, yet not part of the mediated interactional space, which leads to an asymmetric access to both simultaneous conversations, disrupting the most common participatory frameworks observed in these environments (see Rosenbaun et al. 2016 for a discussion on participation in Google Hangouts). Physically co-present yet unrated may be an

eavesdroppers who have some level of access to the interaction but whose presence escapes other participants. In our dataset, these typically were co-present spouses, siblings, or friends who may overhear the interaction and even be able to glance at the screen but remain outside the visual field of ratified Hangouts participants. Consequently, one ratified participant becomes the main link between the two spheres.

3. Method and data

This research takes a conversation analytic approach to the study of multimodal interaction. A central notion upheld by CA is that the orderliness of actions and interactions can be recognized and reproduced by participants (Garfinkel 1967). This analytic mentality emphasizes the structural mechanisms and orderliness of human interaction as they emerge (Jefferson, Schegloff, & Sacks 1989; Sacks 1992). In this research, we draw significant inspiration from the work of Goodwin (Goodwin 2000), Heath and Luff (Heath & Luff 1991; Luff et al. 2013), and Mondada (Mondada 2011) and their praxeological view on multimodal interaction. We follow their view on users as mobilizing different modalities to create meaning and manage interactions. Focusing on how Google Hangout users organize action through different resources, we approach multimodal interaction as both an extension and a contribution to CA

Public Google Hangouts are public livestreams broadcast through YouTube in which all participants must agree beforehand to make their interactions public. This implies there is an understanding of the potential presence of an audience. Furthermore, audience management appears to be a shared goal and concern as per the amount of time allocated to this topic. Due to the public nature of these interactions, and to the fact that users must agree beforehand to make their interactions public, informed consent was not used for this study. The transcription designed for this analysis is a combination drawing on Jefferson (2004), Rintel (2013), and Mondada (2007). Transcription conventions are included in the appendix section. Live text comments (LTCs)—comments produced by viewers—are not included as they are outside the scope of this analysis. All participants' names as well as names given to their Hangouts have been anonymized. The data for this study were gathered between 2012 and 2013 from Google Hangouts using Camtasia Studio 8 software. From that data collection, 20 different interactions were further selected, consisting of approximately 12 hours and 102 participants. Table 1 below summarizes these details.

Table 1 Data Overview Hangouts On Air

Type of Hangout	No. of Hangouts	No. of Broadcasters	Gender		Duration
			F	M	
On Air	20	102	24%	76 %	12 Hrs (approx.)

The data collection contains various instances of multiactivity caused by various occurrences that can be roughly grouped into two categories, depending on whether they concern the management of the Hangout or a given activity related to the community of interest on the one hand, or whether they are completely external to the Hangout and thus unexpected to participants. From our observations, occurrences were

treated as expected summoning events (Licoppe & Tuncer 2014) when they were either ‘legitimate’ co-activities such as gameplay in gameplay themed Hangouts, or medium-generated inconveniences such as technical disruptions. Such occurrences are routine and in a sense expected, or at least expectable. On the other hand, unexpected occurrences led to events that required more interactional work. These were caused by un-ratified participants from users’ physical environments or communicators breaking in from different media. The difference between these two types can be observed in the way the concerned party orients toward the occurrence and the amount of work done or required to make it part of the interaction. Table 2 below shows the different types of occurrences identified and the most common examples seen in the data.

Table 2 Routine and Unexpected Occurrences

	Occurrences	Examples
ROUTINE	Interaction/community-related	Gameplay, video content
	Medium-generated	Video/ audio lag time
UNEXPECTED	Communicators in different medium	Skype, cell phones, Facebook notifications
	Non-ratified participants from physical sphere	Parents, spouses entering the room

In making parallel engagements and attention switches intelligible to viewers and group members, more or less interactional work is carried out by the summoned participant. Interactional work in this sense refers to the series of linguistic, embodied, and material moves carried out to transform a given occurrence into a relevant and oriented-to event within the interaction. This involves displaying orientation to multiple tasks and demands, intertwining or inserting activities into other activities, and halting and later resuming activities (Haddington et al. 2014). The present study focuses on unexpected occurrences triggered by unratified participants in the physical sphere. As we will argue, competing engagements with co-present yet non-ratified participants bring with them the expectation of further interactional work as participants orient to a potentially shifting participatory framework. Livestreaming while handling engagements with physically co-present yet non-ratified participants such as parents, spouses, and siblings can be challenging. As domestic life breaks into the digital sphere, interferences from one sphere need to be made intelligible to the other. However, the management of these engagements is not the same for all social actors, as the types of expectations of those physically nearby vary greatly from those digitally connected (Tolmie et al. 2008).

4. Analysis

The examples used for our analysis belong to communities of video gaming, *anime* shows, and Hangout livestreams. The first one is part of an interaction about gameplay and channel maintenance. Example two consists of excerpts from an *anime* discussion group, whose interaction mostly gravitates toward random topics of conversation.

Example three is a livestream among three YouTubers, all of whom admit being very active in their recorded channels but inexperienced with livestreams. In all cases, participants acting as hosts can see the number of current viewers, although viewers' names are not visible unless they post live text commentaries (LTCs).

4.1. Example 1: "My Mom is in the Room"

The excerpt below points to an occurrence generated by a co-present but non-ratified participant, and to the resulting amount of work required to account for it to participants both in the digital and in the domestic spheres. In this example, HAP is in the middle of sharing a story when her mother enters the room requesting her to do something. HAP's story originated as a response to a viewer's question posted via an LTC and it has been unfolding for roughly two and a half minutes when this attention switch takes place. Figure 2 below shows all participants from left to right: N7 (still image, this participant has momentarily left the room), DINA, SOL, HAP, and DAN.

Figure 2 Participants N7, DINA, SOL, HAP, and DAN

Example 1. <Tales 05:00:07 -- 06:10:34>

- 1 HAP: and I was like @I DON'T WANT AN IMPLA:::NT
- 2 *@ HAP's marked begging gesture. Main window@ Image 1
Image *Image 1

- 3 um.. so:: they were able to save my tooth so..you know .. after they give you like
- 4 medicines@
- 5 *@gaze off pass monitor. Main window@ Image 2
Image *Image2

- 6 ((monotone. To her mom)) um.. I'm explaining my tooth story @
 7 *@gaze to monitor, smiles. Main window@ Image 3
 Image *Image 3

- 8 ((fast pace. To monitor/webcam)) My mom is in the room @
 9 *@gaze back to her mom. Main window@ Image 4
 Image *Image 4

- 10 ((fast pace, monotone. To her mom)) I'm on a podcast @
 11 ((unintelligible remark from her mother))
 12 *@gaze switches back to monitor and smiles. Main window@ Image 5
 Image *Image 5

- 13 A::hhh
 14 ((unintelligible remark from her mother)) @
 15 *@ Gaze back to her mom's direction. Main window@ Image 6
 Image * Image 6

- 16 @ um.. can I.. explain.. my story? let me finish. u:h THAT? .. oh.. OK @
 17 *@ HAP leans off cam. Main window@ Image 7
 Image *Image 7

- 18 um SO::: .. ANYway, they saved my tooth

Through the very sequentiality of gaze, head orientation and speech, this example shows how both physical and digital spheres are juggled, and the amount of interactional work deployed by HAP, the summoned participant, to make both involvements co-relevant. Line 5 shows the speaker's first gaze and head orientation toward the source of the attention switch, which is followed by accounting for her main activity to her mother, thus setting the hierarchies of the engagements (lines 6 and 10). In lines 7, 8, 12, and 13 HAP orients to her Hangout co-participants and accounts for this disruption through verbal conduct, gaze, smiles and even a response cry (line 13). By not producing any type of response, which could have actually hindered HAP's management of the competing stream of interaction, co-participants show they align with HAP's efforts in keeping the floor. This is in line with the fact that HAP had been narrating a personal story as a response to a viewer's request (section not transcribed), which projects a slot for a sustained holding of the conversational floor (Sacks 1988). Furthermore, HAP engages in explicit interactional work to index this new engagement as temporary and hierarchically subordinated to the video-mediated interaction. Line 16 clearly shows her attempts at indicating to her mom her current main engagement, asking her to hold on her request ("can I .. explain ..my story? Let me finish"). It is also in line 16 that HAP signals her compliance with her mom's request after indexing she can probably quickly deal with it while her main interaction is suspended ("THAT?" .. oh ..OK). This is further displayed in the standardized way in which HAP resumes her engagement through the markers "so" (markedly lengthening the vowel) and "anyway" together with loudness, which are uttered even before she completely comes back to her initial talking head position (line 18).

As it can be seen, HAP deals with a stream of action initiated by a co-present participant in her physical sphere, and successfully manages to make both competing engagements intelligible to the social actors in each of the interactional spheres. These types of occurrences are treated, or expected to be treated, as unexpected and thus needing interactional work to make them co-relevant in interaction. Since Hangout participants have limited access to co-participants' physical environments, there is a partial loss of control over the joint interactional space and the established participatory framework when eavesdroppers are able to engage primary participants in side-conversations. As this example shows, linguistic and bodily conduct such as gaze and body orientation are used to coordinate and create a hierarchization of the two competing engagements. In this case, HAP configures the competing situation as both momentary and secondary, and her Hangout co-participants understand as much by not producing any further turns-at-talk during this attention switch.

4.2. Example 2: "A person in the background"

As the previous example highlights, users are immersed in a physical environment, with specific dynamics and expectations. As such, interferences from the physical domestic sphere can be common occurrences, yet they are expected to be accounted for as they disrupt the established participatory framework. However, accounting for these events is not necessarily a solo activity. Furthermore, our data indicate that even in the absence of actual interferences, participants can orient to any new or salient occurrence in the environment to use it as an interactional resource.

Such is the case in our next example, in which one participant produces a noticing from an occurrence in a co-broadcasters' physical environment. In turn, all co-participants jointly produce a slot that invites an account for such noticing, effectively creating a competing stream of action for the concerned party. In the end, the concerned party succeeds in weaving together both such streams. This example illustrates the way in which co-broadcasters create the conditions for multiple engagements by focusing on potential occurrences, producing noticings and effectively leveraging potentially competing events. In this example, we join the action as the husband of one of the participants (HOL) appears in the background. A member of the group (JER) produces the noticing, which leads the group to project a potential parallel engagement for the sake of humor and playfulness. The concerned participant—HOL—eventually engages with her husband and juggles both domestic and digital spheres, so far still separated by asymmetric access to audio. This is so until she unplugs her earphones allowing audio to be heard in her physical environment, converging both the domestic and digital spheres.

From left to right, figure 3 below shows participants HOL, ZEG (visible but not active in the conversation), MEL, EMI, JER, and JACK.

Figure 3 Participants HOL, ZEG, MEL, EMI, JER, and JACK

Example 2 Stuff, <00:00:01 – 00:46:07>

- 1 HOL: what? @
- 2 *@ HOL's husbands appear at the back. Main window@ Image 1
Image *Image 1

- 3 JER: ((singsong tone)) a: pe:r?son in the back?ground @
- 4 *@ HOL turns head back toward husband. Main window@ Image 2
Image *Image 2

- 5 HOL: ((mirroring JER's singsong tone))that's my hus?ba:nd @
- 6 @all group members wave hi. Thumbnail@
- 7 All: [HELLO!] [Alo ""] @
- 8 @ MEL and JER make exaggerated hand waving movements. EMI sticks her

- 9 tongue out. Thumbnail@
 10 HOL: [they @ all say hi]
 11 @ HOL head orientation back toward husband@
 12 MEL: [“”] trying to wave! (0.2) ((MEL laughs)) *@ HI::::!
 13 *@ MEL marked hand waves. Main window@ Image 3
 Image *Image 3

- 14 JER: is he being @ anti social?
 15 * @ JACK makes exaggerated hand waiving movements. Thumbnail@
 16 HOL: of course! @ I think.
 17 *@head orientation to husband@ Image 4
 Image *Image 4

- 18 HOL: ((to her husband)) are you- are you going to bed? @
 19 @ HOL head orientation back toward group@
 20 yea:h he's going to bed
 21 JER: aww @BOOO::::!
 22 *@Marked disappointment face. Main window@ Image 5
 Image *Image 5

- 23 *@ HOL's husband crosses room. JACK exaggeratedly waves his hand @ Image 6
 Image *Image 6

- 24 JER: HEEYY:::! can he hear me?
 25 HOL: no
 26 JER: oh [sad Panda]
 27 HOL: [I have these “” @ on “”]
 28 @ HOL touches headphone. Main window@
 29 MEL: AAWW:: (0.2)

30 HOL: alright, here @

31 *@ HOL unplugs headphone and waves hi. Main window@ Image 7
Image *Image 7

32 HOL: say hi= @

33 *@ All group members wave hi. Thumbnail@ Image 8
Image *Image 8

34 All: =[Hi! Hello!] @((group laughter))

35 @ HOL head orientation toward the side/husband and back@

36 HOL: he wa::ved

37 MEL: YAY!

38 JACK: ((playful deep voice)) I LOVE YOU!! @

39 *@ group loud laughter@ Image 9
Image *Image 9

As this example shows, participants produce a noticing out of an occurrence in the domestic sphere, which is in turn topicalized and jointly harnessed. Turning this perceptible event into a group-initiated summons leads HOL to acknowledge and orient to the competing event as an already relevant activity. Unlike example 1, here the video feed exposes a non-ratified participant whose presence must now be accounted for. After JER produces the noticing, amplified by the sing-song tone of his remark (line 3), HOL accounts for her husband's presence with both gaze orientation toward him and speech (lines 4 and 5). Once this non-ratified participant has been accounted for, all group members attempt to engage him through greetings and hand-waving (lines 6-9). The husband's lack of response due to HOL's earphones is playfully and negatively evaluated by JER ("is he being anti social?", line 14), to which HOL replies with further interactional work, juggling both domestic and digital spheres as she accounts for her husband's lack of response (lines 16-19) and that "he is going to bed" (line 20). Co-broadcasters try to engage HOL's husband as he crosses the room again (lines 23, 24, 26 and 29) but now realize that he cannot actually hear them ("can he hear me?", line 24 and HOL's response "no", line 25). These two spheres finally converge when HOL unplugs her earphones and her husband can now hear the audio stream (lines 30 and 31). HOL now invites co-broadcasters to greet him ("say hi", line 32).

Once the noticing is produced, participants frame the occurrence as a competing event that requires the attention of the concerned participant, a summons (Sacks et al. 1974), which now makes salient some type of obligation that requires attention. In this

case, participants design the sequence after the noticing as an introduction-greeting sequence and thus insist on being greeted back by HOL's husband. The group then creates a situation in which HOL needs to attend to two courses of involvement until she finally combines both. This example actually illustrates how the digital breaks into the domestic sphere as co-participants playfully insist on engaging a non-ratified participant who has only partial access to their interaction. Group members put HOL on the spot as the boundary between her two environments is blurred by her husband unintentionally appearing in the video feed and co-broadcasters then leveraging that occurrence. Once this boundary is explicitly trespassed, participants get confirmation that HOL's husband can actually hear them. This confirmation takes place through HOL's report, since her husband is already outside the visual field ("he wa::ved", line36). This playful episode is topped by JACK who produces a humorous remark further trespassing into the couple's intimacy ("I LOVE YOU!!", line 38). This remark appears as a mark of success for having broken this boundary, and it also frames the joint efforts to greet HOL's husband as humorous and playful.

As this example illustrates, a minor occurrence can become a noticing and be collaboratively leveraged into an attention switch as a resource for entertainment. The affordances of the medium allow for users' partial loss of control over boundaries, cracking the imaginary wall that is supposed to keep both spheres—and streams of activities—apart. This blending of spheres results from the very nature of domestic VMC, since the video and audio feeds expose physical environments and thus bring together social actors from two different spheres in real time while on the spotlight. The management of the co-occurrence of two turn-taking systems, or schisming (Sacks et al. 1974), is evident as HOL unsuccessfully attempts to keep both spheres separate. This is nicely conveyed by HOL's bodily conduct in lines 4, 17, and 33 where her head and gaze clearly orient toward her husband, who is outside the participants' visual field within the Hangout.

4.3. Example 3: "This is gonna be a challenge"

As we have discussed so far, broadcasters are immersed in a physical environment with social actors who have different levels of interactional obligations and expectations in terms of what is unfolding in the digital sphere. The physical sphere and its social actors can be both a source of disruptions, as well as a space into which the digital environment can trespass. Social actors from the physical sphere may be purposefully disrupting the digital sphere, silently lurking, or as we saw in example 2, simply minding their business in their own domestic sphere. Co-broadcasters and viewers may not always be aware of the presence of non-ratified participants in other interlocutors' physical environments. Since non-ratified participants may have only partial access to ongoing Hangout interactions due to the use of earphones, their ability to fully participate or even answer back may also be limited depending on the medium settings. Yet, they can be publicly exposed and thus easily made the target of playful remarks. This is the case in our last example, through which we analyze a specific practice by which unrati fied participants are exposed and thrust into the interactional floor.

These exposing sequences are done by imposing the webcam, that is, by orienting laptops or external webcams toward non-ratified co-present participants. This is possible thanks to the 'mobility turn' described by Lippoppe and Tuncer (2014),

which allows users to move the webcam and orient it toward details of their environment. In our data, we observed that users usually incorporate humorous teasing remarks right before and after moving the webcam, framing the exposing episode and its “victims”. This practice appears to be similar to good-natured banter, in that it is a lighthearted way to produce mild embarrassment and perplexity as well as a way to reveal social closeness. Key elements appear to be the fast speed of the webcam move, which acts as a flashing device that catches co-present participants off-guard, and the asymmetrical access to the interaction. The latter is created by the widespread use of headsets with integrated microphones, which usually results in exposed participants who cannot be clearly heard if they speak or who cannot hear what is being said about them. Not surprisingly, recurrent targets in the data were friends, spouses, and siblings.

In the example below, one of the broadcasters (SOUTH) is in a room with two co-present friends who are outside the visual field displayed in the Hangout. Apparently, these non-ratified participants have been trying to disturb the broadcaster’s Hangout interaction, as evidenced by SOUTH’s sporadic gaze orientation toward the side accompanied with tight-lipped smiles (section not transcribed). Eventually, these two friends are exposed and made the butt of impolite remarks due to their constant disruptive behavior. Co-broadcasters also pick up on the prank and add playful impolite comments, collaboratively co-creating the exposing sequence. Flashing the webcam on non-ratified participants creates in itself a playful tone, as it somewhat destabilizes the participatory framework within the Hangout. Additionally, this practice produces mild embarrassment and awkwardness for the exposed participants, who are put in the limelight and become the butt of the playful frame. Figure 4 below shows the three participants in this Hangout from left to right: SOUTH, MOON, and ROB.

Figure 4 Participants SOUTH, MOON, and ROB

Example 3, excerpt 1— ROB <00:21:49–00:22:16>

- 1 ROB: South, tell everyone about your channel .. what @ you do, who you are, everything
- 2 *@ SOUTH looks to the side. Main window@ Image 1

Image

*Image 1

- 3 SOUTH: the=this is gonna be ..it's "" wait.. this is gonna be a challenge because I@
- 4 *@ SOUTH turns webcam toward friends. Main window@ Image 2

Image

*Image 2

5 have these two @ assholes here ..

6 *@Both friends laugh. One performs a military hand salute. Main window@ Image 3

Image

*Image 3

7 totally making @ ["]

8 @ SOUTH orients webcam back to self@

9 ROB: OH they're cute, wholly crap .. they're REA::lly CU::TE

10 SOUTH: they are .. they ARE cute .. they're aDO::rable ["] tattoos all over the place,

11 like WHA::T

SOUTH has been sporadically gazing toward the side (section not transcribed) orienting toward a source of distraction. As ROB invites him to talk about his YouTube channel (line 1), SOUTH once again orients his gaze toward the same angle and produces a tight-lipped smile (line 2). Once ROB yields the floor, SOUTH hesitates to start (“the=” line 3) and proceeds to account for a distraction outside viewers’ visual field. The instruction to suspend the current stream of involvement (“wait” line 3) together with his disclosing of a parallel competing event that makes ROB’s request untimely (“this is gonna be a challenge” line 4) function as a preface to the imminent exposing sequence. The move is then framed as an exposing sequence by SOUTH’s quick webcam turn toward his friends (line 4) accompanied by his teasing remarks (“I have these two assholes here” line 5). SOUTH then becomes a sort of mundane video director, producing an image that is framed as a ‘point of view shot’ (Licoppe & Morel 2014) and that effectively initiates a relevant playful sequence.

Unlike other instances in the data in which exposed participants simply smile and/or cover their faces or try to leave the room, in this example the exposed participants clearly play along. In line 6 image 3, both friends are seen comfortably sprawled out on a couch probably playing video games (they are holding game controllers), smiling, and looking straight at the monitor/webcam. The friend on the right actually tops this nonchalant reaction to being exposed by saluting straight at the monitor/webcam. This salute is produced as a sequential response to “these two assholes”, and as such it is a move that actually signals agreement and compliance with that statement, pointing to a reciprocal engagement in SOUTH’s banter and thus signaling social closeness. For this type of visually playful behavior to be effective, cooperation among co-participants is pivotal, as all participants frame and constitute the ‘exposed’

participants into the butt of the joke. This can be seen in ROB's insincere and exaggerated compliments ("OH they're cute, wholly crap .. they're REA::lly CU::TE" line 9), which both acknowledges he has noticed the two non-ratified participants and contributes to the ongoing banter. SOUTH then amplifies ROB's playful compliments, which can be heard by his two co-present friends and thus marks the exposing sequence as successful.

The tension between online and offline spheres is then acknowledged and made part of the ongoing interaction by using the video feed in this unexpected and novel manner. This situated practice adds to the recreational charm of public Google Hangouts, since the online/offline divide can be easily blurred opening up possibilities for playful practices. Although this is somewhat similar to example 2 in which non-ratified participants in the domestic environment are turned into noticings for the sake of group entertainment, the main difference lies in the exposing sequence initiated by one of the participants rather than a noticing produced by viewers.

In the next excerpt, the co-present yet non-ratified participants insist in engaging SOUTH, which is leveraged by ROB through humorous and exaggerated reproaches and complaints. The divergent interactant (SOUTH) also engages in humor as a form of repair work to account for his engagement in a competing conversational floor.

Example 3, excerpt 2 ROB <00:28:43 – 00:30:01>

- 1 SOUTH: I never learnt [how to juggle]
- 2 MOON: [they taught] me when “”
- 3 ROB: juggling?! @ I wish I'd had THAT gym class
- 4 *@SOUTH's gaze towards the side@ Image 3

Image

*Image 3

- 5 MOON: brain hand @coordination (.) I know!
- 6 SOUTH: @SOUTH's gaze towards the side, laughing@
- 7 BOB: they used to make us @run (.) like six miles
- 8 SOUTH: *@SOUTH's gaze towards the side, lifts earsets and laughs@ Image 4

Image

*Image 4

- 9 ROB: @((mock anger)) hey SOUTH SOUTH SOUTH (.) why don't you stop talking to
- 10 your stu::pid ass friends ok?
- 11 *@making angry face, orienting towards cam@ Image 5

Image

*Image 5

- 12 ROB: those stupid friends .. they aren't friends to you South, WE are friends
 13 SOUTH: ((mock exaggerated seriousness)) they aren't they aren't.. 'cause you know what? I
 14 said I wish I know how to juggle and they're making si::de jokes-si::de comments
 15 an' I said what's so fucking funny? and said if you wanna learn how to juggle just
 16 open your mouth=
 17 ROB: =HAHa:: that was (.) that was actually pretty good (.) I enjoyed that
 18 ((SOUTH's co-present friends in side conversation))
 19 ROB: soo:: ((playful voice tone)) @letme see if I can somehow refresh these stupid ass
 20 stupid damn comments [(0.4)]
 21 *@head orientation back towards LTCs@ Image 6

Image

*Image 6

The second part of this example also points to the treatment of occurrences that may violate the interactional space and participatory framework. SOUTH temporarily suspends his engagement with the group, which is made clearly visible to the other two Hangout participants when he partially removes his headset (line 8). Gaze and body orientation often indicate suspension of an ongoing activity rather than abandonment (Sutinen 2014), and in this case SOUTH displays the prototypical 'body torque' position (Schegloff 1998), in which there's a double body orientation to both the main and the secondary activity. SOUTH displays this double orientation with his body toward the monitor and his face and gaze oriented toward where his co-present friends appear to be (lines 4, 6, 8). Furthermore, he effectively temporarily disengages from the ongoing interaction by lifting his earphones and displaying a freezing gesture (line 8).

Although this is the expected way in which participants engage in multiactivities and show suspension of an ongoing activity, due to the affordances of the medium SOUTH's suspended activity is not truly 'backgrounded' (Mondada 2014b). For SOUTH's interlocutors (and viewers), his bodily conduct and his audio channel actually give his divergent activity prominence, as by technical default his image display is regulated by his audio channel (in this case, his laughter and co-present friends' voices), making him appear in the main interactional window. Interestingly, as SOUTH does not initiate any interactional move to repair or account for this parallel engagement, it is ROB who creates a slot for SOUTH to make this occurrence relevant for his co-participants and viewers. ROB resorts to playful complaints about SOUTH's concurrent attention engagement with his co-present friends (lines 9-12). Through this move, ROB not only creates humor as he disciplines a divergent participant, but also playfully dismisses SOUTH's domestic sphere and the social actors in it by stating the relationship with the

Hangout participants is the friendship that counts (“those stupid friends .. they aren't friends to you South, WE are friends”, line 12). SOUTH plays along with this notion, and frames his reporting on what his co-present friends had been saying as evidence of his agreement with ROB and his own alignment with the Hangout interaction (“they aren't they aren't.. 'cause you know what?” in line 13 and “they're making si::de jokes-si::de comments an' I said what's so fucking funny?”, lines 14 and 15). Consequently, both ROB and SOUTH engage in playful exchanges to repair this dispreferred event in order to resume the participatory framework established within the Hangout.

Once ROB has assessed SOUTH's explanation (“HAHa:: that was (.) that was actually pretty good (.) I enjoyed that”, line 17), he signals the resumption of the main engagement within the Hangout, his previous ongoing attempts to check LTCs (section not transcribed). This resumption is achieved both through bodily conduct, with his head and gaze orienting to the side of the monitor (line 21) as well as verbal cues. ROB resorts to the use of the vocative “so” as an attention getter, said in a marked and playful tone (line 19) and to an announcement of his next engagement with checking comments from viewers in an playful tone achieved through the use of a string of negative modifiers before the word “comments” (“letme see if I can somehow refresh these stupid ass stupid damn comments”, lines 19 and 20).

5. Discussion

We have analyzed how Hangout participants manage competing engagements with their domestic spheres and instances in which such interferences from the physical environment blur the boundaries between the domestic and the digital spheres. The pragmatic force of the competing events we have analyzed is constituted through an interactional process and is the result of an emergent distribution of agency in terms of how the group collaboratively makes such events co-relevant. These occurrences can then be accounted for and exploited, leading to episodes as striking as the one in example 2. Here, by designing a noticing that inevitably led to the unmet expectations of the noticing-introduction-greeting sequence, participants jointly create a playful situation in which a participant (HOL) needs to attend to two spheres that are kept separate due to the materiality of the medium as well as to her husband's lack of interest in interacting with the Hangout group. In all of the cases analyzed, participants responded to competing engagements by producing a situation in which the two streams of action were both active and oriented to. One of these engagements, the conversation prior to the summoning event, is somewhat put on hold in a manner that projects immediate future resumption, and that makes it temporarily subordinated to the involvement initiated by the summoning event.

These examples highlight that the management of multiple engagements is a joint interactional accomplishment that usually relies on resources through which the summoned party can display dual involvement. Such resources are verbal instructions such as “wait”, the incomplete structure of the ongoing interaction, embodied conduct such as the body torque (Schegloff 1998), freezing gestures, and manipulation of material and technical resources (Licoppe & Tuncer 2014). Consequently, participants manage an interactional episode in which they visibly orient to two competing courses of interactional activity. In the cases discussed in this paper, two distinct streams of action are managed in a way that makes occurrences relevant to the temporarily

suspended stream of action, and upgrades the treatment of such occurrences as interactional resources.

As discussed in our analysis, competing engagements that disrupt the participatory framework established within the Hangout do not always run smoothly, but rather they can create interferences that require more or less interactional work. In this sense, occurrences may actually be used to advance the interaction through playful remarks that support the entertainment experience for participants and viewers. The use of multiple engagements as interactional resources has been documented in other contexts as well. For example, Licoppe and Tuncer (2014) observe that unexpected, even improper events (such as incoming cell phone calls during a live TV show) may trigger a sense of performance as a way to allow the summoned party to disengage temporarily from the main activity while showing awareness of the presence of viewers. Licoppe and Tuncer (2014) remind us that multiactivity episodes are one among a set of possible responses to summons. Unexpected events caused by non-ratified participants require more interactional work and as a result are managed through joint humorous exchanges attuned to the presence of viewers in a recreational setting. Competing engagements and multiactivities are by no means unique to recreational VMC. Rather, in this context they acquire a different quality since they are negotiated, coordinated, and acknowledged as the boundaries between the domestic and digital spheres--and their corresponding participation frameworks—blur and become unstable.

We now wish to explore the affordances of the medium that highlight aspects of competing engagements that are more intrinsic to recreational VMC. First, participants' visual displays produce an interactional space in which users usually orient toward the Hangout group and one another. In this interactional space, the speaker who makes the loudest noise will appear in the main window, so noticings and disruptions are harder to ignore or conceal. In our data, the interactional space created makes divergences hard to overlook. So, for instance, if physically co-present friends were interacting in a living room, and one of them were playing a video game on his or her personal device, the other two participants could still orient to each other and maybe leave the divergent participant slightly outside the interactional space. With the technical settings observed in the data, engagements in parallel co-activities appear to be harder to ignore because participants with any type of background noise will take the main video window. This explains why in example 3, ROB mock complains and tries to create a convergent focus. ROB uses this disruption as a way to create playfulness as he complains of SOUTH's lack of focused attention. Part of the disturbance is not being able to hear what SOUTH's physically co-present friends are saying as well as the fact that SOUTH appears in the main window as a contributing participant, even though he has actually suspended the ongoing main interaction.

The other aspect of competing engagements in recreational VMC relates to the asymmetry of access to physical environments. The visual field and frequent use of earphones will produce theatrical appearances of non-ratified participants whom other users/ viewers do not perceive coming. Perceivable events in physical environments constitute an interesting interactional resource since due to the lack of contextual cues, their appearances are abrupt. As example 2 shows, much of the fun resulting from the appearance of HOL's husband derives from the asymmetry of interaction produced by the audio set up and limited visual field. Unlike FTF interactions, nuances in terms of possible upcoming disruptions or summoning events are less smooth and gradual mainly due to the lack of access to subtle behaviors and changes in involvements. These

subtle behaviors give participants the possibility to negotiate transitions before the ongoing interaction arrives to the transition-relevant point (Licoppe & Tuncer 2014). In VMC, on the other hand, the asymmetrical access to co-participants physical environments creates a greater interactional effect when somebody “suddenly” appears in the shared visual field. Appearances like these are then resources to produce noticings, topic initiations, and even add playfulness to the interaction.

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Appendix

SYMBOL	MEANING
WORD	Emphasis, higher volume
?	Question intonation
:	Elongated sound
-	Word is cut off.
.	Micropause (less than 0.5 seconds long)
(n.n)	A timed pause/gap (in seconds).
=	Latching: one word occurs directly after the other with neither gap nor overlap.
“”	Unintelligible
[“”]	Multiple speakers overlap.
[]	Speakers overlap.
(())	Description (vs. transcription)
@	Start of bodily movement
*	Screen shot of bodily movement

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