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Omnirelevance in Technologised Interaction

Couples Coping with Video Calling Distortions

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Introduction

The concept of omnirelevance in Membership Categorisation Analysis refers to participants invoking categories that reflexively treat the understanding of particular interactional moments as controlled by the context of the current activity. This concept is of fundamental value to the analysis of computer-mediated communication (CMC), as it relates directly to the field's fundamental interest in exploring how technology effects interaction. When interacting via technology, the affordances of that technology are materially inescapable and thus potentially contextually controlling. However, the control of technology over interaction is not absolute. The affordances of technology are materially inescapable but their relevance as a semiotic resource is a matter for participants. Ian Hutchby (2001a, 2001b, 2003) calls this 'technologised interaction'.

In this chapter I explore examples of how couples cope with audio and video distortions in video calling. The data show that in the face of distortion the couples treat the relationship and technology as omnirelevant (i.e., controlling) devices deployable in a fluid interdependence that differs with respect to how audio distortions and video distortions potentially affect conversational continuity. When coping with audio distortions, relational and technological omnirelevance are used as an organisational feature to *disambiguate* the potential source of trouble in repairs. Coping with video distortions is shown to involve an orientation to *expressive possibilities* of relational and technological omnirelevance.

Omnirelevance, I argue, is a central feature of technologised interaction. While video calling couples are engaged first and foremost to the social activity of doing being couples, their efforts to maintain conversational continuity in the face of distortions orient to doing being a couple in a video call.

Omnirelevance

Omnirelevance, is one aspect of Membership Categorization Analysis's wider attention to the sociological import of context (Fitzgerald and Housely, 2002). Drawing on examples from automobile and school conversations as well as therapy and military contexts, Sacks first canvassed the possibility of omnirelevance organisational devices in Lecture 5 (1995: 306–19). As discussed in the introductory chapter to this volume, omnirelevance has re-emerged as a topic of interest in Membership Categorisation Analysis research due to its explanatory power for exploring the contextualised underpinnings of *in situ* organisational devices in interaction. Recent omnirelevance research has explored omnirelevant category collections used in children's disputes (Hester and Hester, 2012), playground interaction (Butler, 2008), family interaction (Butler and Fitzgerald, 2010), and relational video calling (Fitzgerald and Rintel, 2013), television interviews (Butler and Fitzgerald, 2011) and radio phone-in programmes (Fitzgerald et al., 2009).

For Sacks (1995: 312), the genesis of the omnirelevance came from bringing together two questions about how interactions could be recognisably organised. First, Sacks noted that participants are able to name the kind and/or context of an interaction, for example as an automobile discussion or therapy session, and thus there must be devices used to enact and recognise an interaction as organisationally 'of a kind' or 'in a context'. Second, taking on a long-standing issue from the philosophy of language (e.g. Austin, 1962; Grice, 1989) he noted that the accuracy of statements alone does not provide for their relevance to an interaction, so again, there must be devices that provide for the relevance of any given turn and that prevent the deployment of just any accurate statement.

Instead of either treating the overall kind or context of interaction as a given (and thus uninteresting to sociology) or seeking maxims by which an analyst could account for relevance (and thus of philosophical or linguistic but not sociological interest), Sacks was looking for evidence of the enactment of society as a public achievement through members' own deployment and analysis of categorical devices as organisationally defining an interaction as of an overall kind or context.

For example, Sacks observed that group therapy sessions could include instances of turns produced by one person that others treated as organisationally relevant to the roles of therapist and patient. For example, around opening periods in a group therapy session a therapist might produce a turn inviting someone at the door to come in and join the group despite that not being responsive to the actual prior turn (Sacks, 1995: 314), or, 'patients' might produce an out of place imagined greeting round for a participant marked as notably absent by the therapist (1995: 318). Similarly, he observed that after some time had already passed in a session, the production by the therapist of an apparently topic-opening question, such as 'Well, what's new gentlemen?' (1995:314) could be treated by patients not as a request for more talk but rather, as indicative of the therapy session being drawn to an end.

As such, Sacks argued, particular sequences within overall activities are sometimes treated by participants as being controlled by a category deployment or an enacted

category-bound action so fundamental that ‘there is no way of excluding its operation when relevant’ (1995: 314). Sacks termed these ‘omnirelevant’ devices, and noted that omnirelevance may constrain the use of other devices (1995: 316–18). Sacks’s (rather complex) example of such constraints concerns cover-identifications used by therapists and teenage patients to interact in public as adult and child in a way that allows for consistency of both sets of identifications. For the purpose of this chapter the more simple point is that omnirelevant devices are resources used by participants to both enable and constrain interactional understandings.¹

When analysing talk via technology, we must be mindful of Button’s (1993b) injunction not treat technology as omnirelevant in the sense of an external platform that is merely a convenient place in which to gather data or an arena in which to view the playing out of traditional sociological interests. Further, as Greiffenhagen and Watson (2005) warn, as is often a special temptation in mediated interaction research, omnirelevant devices should not be confused with the blunt contextual assumptions of traditional sociology. Categories such as gender or relationship are often treated by researchers as inescapably there *to be found* and amplified in importance rather than found to be relevantly occasioned.

Rather, as for all interactional methods, omnirelevant devices are invoked by participants as needed, both explicitly and tacitly, and while always available they are not always and only the primary device at work (Sacks, 1995: 315). They often appear ‘in the cracks, joints, and articulations of touched off-topic devices’ (Fitzgerald et al., 2009: 45). Once invoked, the work of an omnirelevant device is to tie the particular interactional moment to the context of the activity by drawing attention to who-we-are-and-what-we-are-doing.

Omnirelevant category devices are related to Goodwin’s (2000; 2007) notion of ‘participation frameworks’, which enable interlocutors to ‘build joint action together in ways that take account of both relevant structure in the environment that is the focus of their work and what each other is doing’ (Goodwin 2007: 69). However, there is a nuanced distinction. Participation frameworks (and the instrumental, epistemic, cooperative, moral, and affective stances that they are used to convey) are how participants display the context of embodied interaction. While they may be cooperative or contested, Goodwin emphasizes that they are essentially unnoticed; unspoken or taken for granted. But this does not quite seem to capture the value of omnirelevant devices, either for participants researchers. Omnirelevance involves how participants invoking, controlling categories to produce meaning – especially, as we shall see, in the case of difficulty with interactional organization. That is, the distinction is between using a meaning in context (participatory frameworks) versus invoking a context to control meaning (omnirelevance). Omnirelevant devices would seem to be part of the ‘language’ aspect of Goodwin’s (2007: 60) proposed tripartite structure of ‘embodied action – language – structure in environment’ that constitutes a participation framework, but I will leave that possible integration for the reader’s contemplation. For the purpose of this chapter the analytic value comes in the unpacking the methodical reasoning used by participants to markedly invoke organisational recognisability by using

category devices that draw power from an occasioned reflexive oscillation between interaction and context (Fitzgerald and Rintel, 2013).

Technologised Interaction

I turn, then, to introducing the analysis of ‘technologised interaction’ and how it fits with omnirelevance. An interest in what Hutchby (2001a, 2001b, 2003) treats as technologised interaction is a subset of the wider sociological interest in the interdependence of technology and society (Button 1993b; Castells; 2001). The classic theoretical debate at the heart of that interest is the direction of the flow of causation. As Hutchby (2001a: 16) explains, technological determinism holds that the inherent characteristics of a technology are thought to have determinate causal effects on social structures (e.g. Bimber, 1990; Ceruzzi, 2005). The opposing position of social constructivism holds that precisely what the characteristics of the technology are, as well as their relationship with social structures, are both seen to be negotiated outcomes of a whole range of social factors and processes (e.g., Bijker and Law, 1992; Grint and Woolgar, 1997; Hutchby, 2001a: 16; MacKenzie and Wajcman 1999).

Although Ethnomethodology, Conversation Analysis, and Membership Categorisation Analysis (EM/CA/MCA) tend to stay out of the wider debate, the interdependence of technology and society is well known in the fields. The technology of the tape recorder was part of the impetus for Sacks’s (1984a) decision to treat naturally occurring interaction as a data source for sociological investigation. Further, both Sacks’s earliest lecture (1995: Vol, 1, 3) and Schegloff’s (1968) ‘Sequencing in conversational openings’ specifically rested on the sequential and categorical implications of the telephone as a medium. Both noted that telephone interaction involves the technologically-instantiated role categories of caller and recipient and that these categories were oriented to by the participants as having a degree of control over the interaction.

Later researchers following in their footsteps went on to show that there are many practices of telephone interaction that orient to the *technology*. Telephone users have quite sophisticated orientations to the fragility of maintaining mutual engagement with a voice-only connection, as demonstrated by numerous practices for asking others to ‘hold on’ in circumstances such as transferring calls, switching between two calls, and leaving and returning mid-call (Hopper, 1992). Hutchby and Barnett (2005) and a range of research from Arminen and colleagues (Arminen, 2005, 2007; Arminen and Leinonen, 2006; Arminen and Weilenmann, 2009) has shown that the mobile phone has sparked a range of practices for dealing with location-sensitivity, a mobile intersection of time and space, and being present in the talk while also doing other activities. Unique practices have also been explored in related audio contexts. Sanders (2003), for example, found users of marine radio adapting laughter for situations in which transmission blocked reception and vice versa. Nevile (2004) has explored the careful coordination of pilot and co-pilot with air traffic controllers via radio. Much that is not directly acknowledged by all parties is nevertheless treated as understood through

overhearing and there is a crucial skill in understanding who is on and off air at any given time.

As we have moved into the age of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), EM/CA/MCA and allied approaches were initially interested in comparing and contrasting spoken conversation with the typographic quasi-synchronous Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) systems, exploring issues such as response coherence (Garcia and Jacobs, 1999; Herring, 1999), openings (Rintel and Pittam, 1997; Rintel et al., 2001), and non-responses (Rintel et al., 2003) in Internet Relay Chat (IRC). Critics of this approach have argued that such research treats the specifically scope-limited conversational turn-taking model of Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (1974) as a gold standard rather than seeing how members endogenously make sense of, with, and within each given medium on its own terms (see Dourish et al. (1996) and Greiffenhagen and Watson (2005), cf. Reed and Ashmore's (2000) methodological critique that CA mythologises its analytic artefacts as being 'unmediated'). The critique is fairly made, although it leaves open the question of how to treat technology analytically.

MCA's interest in ICT interaction initially started with similar orientations, such as Paul ten Have's (2000) investigation of the use of the specifically categorically oriented 'a/s/l' (standing for 'age/sex/location') as an opening device in IRC interactions. MCA research has concentrated on how communities of practice are enacted in category references (e.g. Stommel and Koole, 2010). Perhaps somewhat ironically, omnirelevance has been a background issue in such work, rarely directly addressed but visible in, for example, Vallis's (1999, 2001a, 2001b) excellent demonstrations of IRC users' devices that orientate to the rights and obligations of 'interacting in a chat room'. The EM 'Studies of Work' programme concentrates less on the mediation of interaction within ICTs and more on the coordination of interaction in technological contexts or with technological artefacts (see overviews in Button, 1993a; Harper, 2010; Heath et al., 2000; Rouncefield et al., 2011; Sharrock and Button, 2011).

While the research above is tied together thematically and through the general methods of the fields, it is highly variable in both the vocabulary and analytic principles by which claims are made about the interdependence of technology and interaction. I follow Hutchby's (2001a, 2001b) approach in using Gibson's (1979) concept of affordances to provide a sufficiently clear but flexible analytic vocabulary.

Gibson's (1979) concept of affordances was first popularised in Human Computer Interaction (HCI) by Donald Norman (1999, 2013) and William Gaver (1992) to explain how designs suggest, or fail to suggest, actions to users (e.g. McGrenere and Ho, 2000). Gibson asserted that actors engage with their environment through making use of the stable actionable material properties of objects. He termed those actionable properties affordances. Affordances that enable action are 'enablements', while affordances that limit action are 'constraints'. Hutchby (2001b, 448) notes that 'for Gibson, the *affordance* of something is assumed *not* to change as the need of the observer changes'... but in Norman's (1999, 2013) extension of the concept, he contends that not all engagement with an object is related to its material properties. Objects also have social affordances (Norman calls them 'perceived affordances') that relate to logical,

cultural or conventional enablements or constraints. For example, the field of view of a web camera is limited and participants can often be found urging one another to move around so that one another's face is visible. The technology has no stake in whether a face is in view or not, only people do. The social affordances are thus bound up with the human purposes for using a technology; the material and the social are 'laminated and compounded' upon one another:

For example, a young child may become interested in a camera found around the house. The camera may be found to have a catch, which affords undoing, and a hinged door, which affords opening. Yet carrying out these actions will lead to problems if the camera contains a roll of film, which is a material affording the development of still photographic images but only if exposed to light under highly restricted conditions. The child may thus learn that there are both social and technological rules delimiting the affordances of the camera's door: namely, that you do not open it while a film is inside unless you want to destroy the film (and incur the wrath of the adult camera-owners). (Hutchby 2001a: 448–9)

In sum, Hutchby argues (2001a: 450), 'When people interact through, around or with technologies, it is necessary for them to find ways of managing the constraints on their possibilities for action that emerge from those artefacts' affordances'. This approach thus accepts a realist but not determinist position because it explores how participants treat materiality as an interactional resource.

As should now be clear, there is a striking relationship between Sacks's observations about the operation of omnirelevant categorisation devices and how the concept of affordances provides a vocabulary for analysing the manner in which people observably orient to ICT features in their interactional practices. Both are ways of pointing to practices of organising behaviour that are always available to frame behaviour but are not necessarily always treated as relevant. Further, I think it is plausible to argue that the reflexive oscillation between interaction and context from which omnirelevance draws its power as an organisational device is the mechanism by which users laminate and compound the material and social possibilities of technology to produce technologised interaction.

Video Calling in Relational Contexts

Video calling has had one of the longest journeys to mainstream use of any post Industrial Revolution communication technology. Much early video calling research was focused on task achievement in institutional settings and conducted experimentally in laboratory settings (see overviews in Finn et al. 1997; Harrison, 2009), largely because of infrastructural requirements. At the turn of the 21st century, domestic video calling has become a near-mainstream reality with the rise in cheap video calling hardware and software for personal computers, improved compression algorithms, and widespread

take-up of broadband internet access. However, while it is approaching a level of technological maturity, fitting video calling into domestic life is still normatively unsettled.

Domestic video calling field research has focused initially on two areas. One area of interest is how video calling is the kind of techno-social infrastructural work required to initiate, run and troubleshoot domestic video calls (Ames et al., 2010; Kirk et al., 2010). More interactionally-focused research has explored how the sense of intimacy is re-imagined in relational video calling (Neustaedter and Greenberg, 2011) and the management of different expectations about the purpose of video calls and the relative value of visual and audio access in overcoming family separation (Judge et al., 2011; Yarosh and Abowd, 2011; Yarosh et al., 2009), mediated play (Follmer et al. 2010; Yarosh and Kwikkers, 2011), and how always-on video windows between the office and home or between two homes enables and constrains practices for interaction that are quite different to temporally bounded video calls (Judge and Neustaedter, 2010; Neustaedter, 2013).

An oversight in socially focused ICT research, including video calling research, is that researchers concentrate on investigating mediation with respect to the designed *features* of ICTs (e.g. see overviews in Herring, 1996; Jones, 1998; Walther, 2011, 2012). The mediating effects of *distortions* tend to be left either to the engineering-oriented telecommunication paradigm of Quality of Service (QoS) (e.g. Hashimoto and Ishibashi, 2006; Lu et al., 2010; Watson and Sasse, 2000) or the usability paradigm of perceptual thresholds and task effects (Horn et al., 2002; Isaacs and Tang, 2003; Monk and Watts, 1995; Watson and Sasse, 2000). However, there is far less research about how users actually manage such distortions as part of the interaction.

There has been much interest in how media spaces introduce asymmetries into interaction that impact upon getting and keeping an interlocutor's attention (Dourish, 2001; Dourish et al., 1996; Harper, 2010; Harrison 2009 Heath and Luff, 1991), but these are the result of design constraints of the media spaces rather than distortions. More recent EM/CA research on video calling tends to focus on how video enablements and constraints are entwined with participants' turn-by-turn actions (e.g. Licoppe, Verdier and Dumoulin, 2013; Licoppe et al., 2013; Mondada, 2007b), but again the research focus is on the designed features of the video not distortions. Ruhleder and Jordan's (2001) study is one of the few to have investigated the turn-by-turn results of how network latency distorts the interactional timing associated with preference organisation of turns at talk. However, their study focused on business video call meetings and deliberately set out to investigate distortions that could be shown to effect interaction but were not directly a participant concern due to the subtlety of the distortion.

In terms of the affordances approach, operational problems such as audio/video distortions have rarely been treated as directly considered constraints, perhaps because they result from computational infrastructure issues (e.g. the packet-switched nature of the internet or the complexities of audio/video codecs) rather than user-level design issues, and because they are idiosyncratic mistakes, errors, and in other ways not intended. However, while they are not design features, operational problems are a

fundamental material part of the experience of using CTs and, as such, can be considered within the frame of affordances. By employing the technologised interaction approach I am arguing against treating operational problems as mere noise or threshold issues and instead exploring what we might find out about technology, interaction, and society by attending to how operational problems are a participant's concern. Such an argument, of course, depends a great deal on the context in which participants are interacting. In this chapter my illustrations are drawn from the interdependence of technological and relational omnirelevance, especially with respect to couples' talk and teasing (Fitzgerald and Rintel, 2013).

Couples' Talk and Teasing

In contrast to psychologically oriented research into interpersonal communication and relationships (e.g. Knapp and Daly, 2011, cf. Sanders, 1997), EM/CA/MCA research has a long history of arguing that the interpersonal intimacy of being a couple does not consist solely of reciprocal cognitive attitudes nor *a priori*, fixed and stable contexts for action. Sacks noticed early on that intimacy is typically indexed by the absence of ceremonials (1995: Vol. 1, 14–19) and invitations (1995: Vol. 1, 73), but also that on occasion the very absence of ceremonials between married partners might come to be an accountable dilemma which itself indexes intimacy (1995: Vol. 1, 18). Since then many studies have demonstrated that doing being a couple must be accomplished with observable-reportable phenomena between couple members and is as much an interactional achievement as any other social fact (Benwell and Stokoe, 2006; De Stefani, 2013; Edwards, 1995b; Mandelbaum, 1987, 2003; Pomerantz and Mandelbaum, 2004; Staske, 1996, 1998; Stokoe, 2010a; Svennevig, 1999).

Caller and call-recipients have also been shown to orient to the nature of their relationship as enacted via the technology. Two early classic studies on telephone interaction found practices specifically built around the ability to call intimates and family members at a distance. Button (1991) found practices for telephone closings that propose a 'standing relationship'. Drew and Chilton (2000) found that differences to the canonical telephone opening propose relational maintenance calls as habitualised and 'doing relating'.

Teasing has long been identified as one of the practices used by couples to enact their intimacy (Alberts, 1992; Alberts et al., 1996, 2005; Campbell et al., 2008; Keltner et al., 1998; Pawluk, 1989; Radcliff-Brown, 1940), from younger couples dating (Keltner et al., 1998) to newlyweds (Driver and Gottman, 2004), old married couples (Ingersoll-Dayton et al., 1998) and across cultures (Brown, 1991; Campos et al., 2007; Schiefflin and Ochs, 1986).

Teasing is an ambiguous (Alberts, 1992: 154), paradoxical (Keltner et al., 1998: 1231) blend of 'playfulness with derogation' (Hopper et al., 1981: 28). Campos et al. (2007: 4) define teasing as:

playful provocation that comments on something of relevance to the target (Keltner et al., 2001). The provocation can be verbal ... or nonverbal ... but is commonly a non-literal verbal communication that calls negative attention to another as part of play (Keltner et al., 2001; Wyer and Collins, 1992).

From a social psychological perspective, teasing is interesting because of the relational consequences of its ambiguity: whether teasing will be treated as affiliative or disaffiliative (Alberts et al., 1996; Campos et al., 2007). From an EM/CA/MCA perspective, the interest is more in charting members' methods of recognisably deploying and responding to teases. The method that Drew (1987: 244) finds members using to construct teases is a membership categorisation procedure, 'whereby a kind of innocent activity or category membership which is occasioned, usually in the teased person's prior turn(s), is then transformed in the tease into a deviant activity or category. Something which is normal, unremarkable, etc., is turned into something abnormal.'

This brings us back to couples' talk. Aside from psychological concepts such as affiliation or language in/as context, (Alberts, 1992: 168), teases are a valuable part of doing being a couple because they are one of the more special ways of displaying who-we-are-and-what-we-are-doing. In the language of MCA, couple-ness is an omnipresent device for teasing because the attendant category-bound activities, category predicates, duplicative organisations, and positioned categories have special relevance and organisational control with respect to 'we as a couple'.

Methods and Data

The data for this chapter were collected with the goal of exploring whether and how participants oriented to endogenously arising distortions as an interactional issue in long-distance relational maintenance. As noted above, the limitations of consumer-level internet connectivity make video calling a perspicuous setting² for exploring the intersection of technological and relational omnirelevance.

Couples in distance relationships were recruited via online and physical flyers in the North-eastern USA and supplied with webcams and the Wave Three Inc. Session video calling software. The couples were asked to try video calling from home to supplement any other regular interaction. They were set a usage goal of video calling for at least 20 minutes per week over a two-month period, but this goal was not strictly enforced. No tasks were required and there were no other controls apart from minimum technology standards. With the couples' consent, an automated remote recording system captured all video calls (see Figure 6.1).

Since the recording system relied on establishing a three-member group call rather than having recording systems at each end of a two-member call, it did not allow for direct or measurable analysis of asymmetrical transmission/reception such as audio/visual latency or clarity in the manner of some prior video-mediated

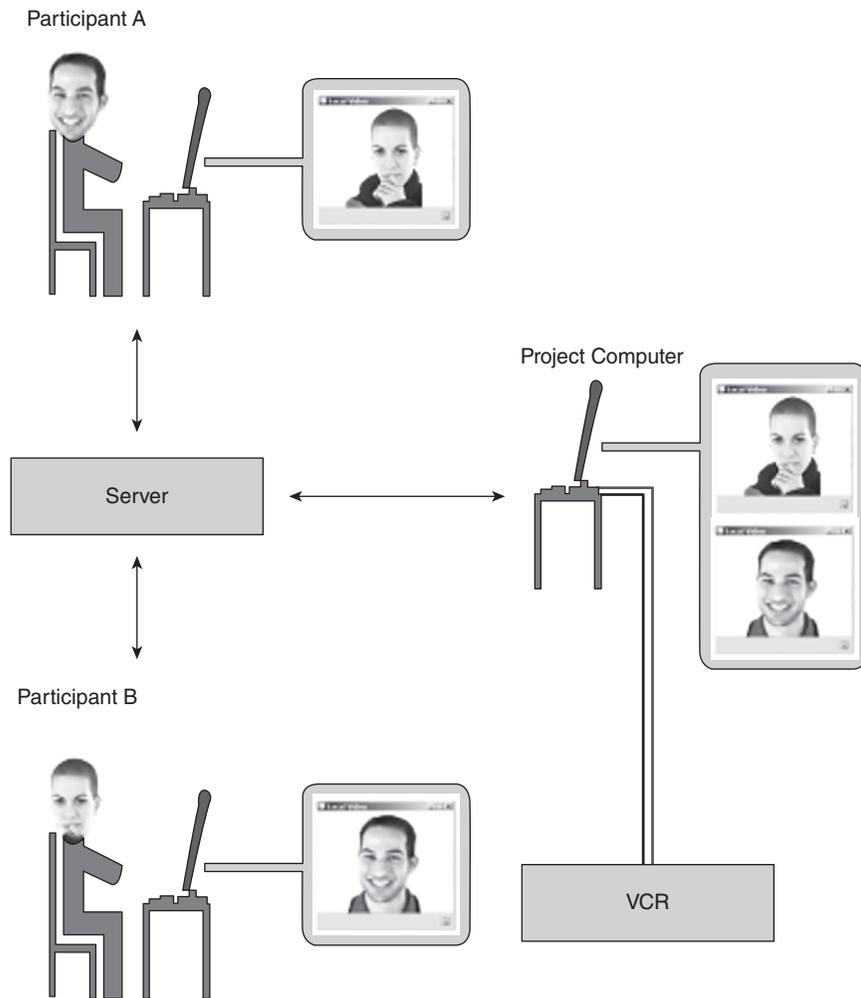


Figure 6.1 Automated remote recording system for video calling data collection.

interaction research (e.g. Harrison, 2009; Ruhleder and Jordan, 2001). However, given the interpersonal context it would have been extremely difficult to recruit participants and record naturalistic intimate relational talk had there been recording devices at either end of the call. Unlike the above-mentioned prior research, the goal of this project was to explore how participants explicitly treated audio/visual distortions as conversationally relevant, so precision timing was not as important as sequential and categorical accountability. Further, the recording system did not capture the entirety of participants' screens, nor their interaction in other media, so it is not claimed that this data represents the entirety of online relational maintenance

(e.g. the participants reported talk about distortions on mobile telephones and text-based chat in exit interviews). Again, however, this was a trade-off so that participants did not feel that they were under total surveillance. As such, the system was adequate for the task and this combination of task and technological freedom maximised the ecological validity of the recordings and afforded very naturalistic experiences (see Rintel (2007) for details).

Altogether the six couples each had between five and 11 calls, in which a median of around 8% of their time was spent coping with endogenously arising distortions of varying disruptiveness. One hundred and forty-five total cases of coping with distortions were collected, broadly separable into technology-oriented remedies (57 cases; 39.3%), content-oriented remedies (42 cases; 29.7%) and non-remedial accounts (46 cases; 31%) (Rintel, 2010). This chapter draws on examples from the content-oriented remedies and non-remedial accounts of five of the couples. Some of these examples have appeared in prior analyses (Rintel, 2010, 2013a, 2013b) but not drawn together as in this chapter to demonstrate the analytic value of omnirelevance and its links to technologised interaction.

Distortion and the Omnirelevance of Technology and Relationship

Responses to Distorted Audio

One reason for invoking an omnirelevant device is that it can be used to resolve interactional ambiguities, such as the need for and manner of a repair, because the work of an omnirelevant device is to provide a point of organisational recognisability by reflexively oscillating between interaction and context to produce an observable-reportable account of one's point of view for the other.

Audio distortions can lead to missing or garbled words or phrases, obviously creating the conditions for repair. However, repair is a special issue in video calling because the asymmetrical access to production and reception of audio and video (Heath and Luff, 1991, 1992, 2000; Ruhleder and Jordan, 2001) means that, unlike physically co-present interaction, neither end knows that the other is actually seeing or hearing. In audio distortion cases, then, speakers cannot hear their own distorted sound so self-initiated repair is rare, the onus to initiate repair almost always falls to hearers.

In many cases in the data repair of audio distortions occurred without ambiguity and even without mention of the technological cause of the distortion. As in co-present interaction, a common repair format involved a hearer initiating repair by indicating a problem and some form of content location, and speakers simply producing the located content (usually a total repetition of the prior turn), as shown in Extracts 1 and 2. In both examples below the repair initiator was treated as unambiguous and the repair was accepted without explanation.

EXTRACT 1 HAL AND EVA 1.

1. HAL: She um broke out the- uh t{*SOUND CUTS OUT(0.5)*}cake
2. EVA: The what?
3. HAL: She broke out the cheesecake
4. EVA: H↑oh↓ ((laugh)) that's[nice]
5. HAL: [yeah]

[Case079-p02-c05of05-f11p5307]

EXTRACT 2 CAM AND KIM 1.

1. CAM: And I know-] I know that for the entire month
2. you eat no real food
3. KIM: .h [no]
4. CAM: [A-] and don't tell me don't tell
5. {*SOUND CUTS OUT(2.0)*}
6. (1.0)
7. KIM: What I didn't hear you
8. CAM: Don't tell me pancakes and toast count as real food
9. KIM: I didn't say that. What I will say is tha:t
10. when I don't eat that I don't eat anything

[Case139-p05-c11of11-t04p2452]

In both of these cases the only device required for organisational recognisability is the ordinary orientation to conversational repair as part of the turn-taking system itself (Schegloff et al., 1977). No further organisational device that indicates the relational or technological context is made relevant to accomplishing the repair.

However, just as in co-present interaction, open-class repairs (Drew, 1997) may allow for ambiguity – is a repair being initiated because of a hearing problem or some trouble with meaning (something disjunctive, inapposite, possibly indicating a moral problem etc.)? While it is obvious that one or other recipient could point to a technological distortion if it is indeed the cause of trouble, in this data technology was an *omnirelevant* device when it was used to instantiate the technological context as recognisably organisational in the context of an open-class repair of an audio distortion, and thus used to rule out non-technological production or hearing problems, understanding problems, or moral problems. Extract 3 illustrates the simplest sense of the omnirelevant value of the technology for organisational recognisability in repair. After quite a long stretch of talk from Des (lines 1–4), Kay interruptively initiates repair by calling a halt and indicating a problem. With an open-class ‘wait what?’ (line 5) she does not locate the specifically missed content as Eva’s ‘The what?’ does in Extract 1.

EXTRACT 3 DES AND KAY 1.

1. DES: And the wh- most hilarious part was:
 2. Lizzie was on the phone with John when
 3. we discovered this and he's like
 4. {SOUND CUTS OUT(1.0)} -m(h)m s(h) [o-]
 5. KAY: [Wa]it what?
 6. (1.5)
 7. DES: What do you mean what
 8. KAY: You cut out I didn't [hear that la-]
 9. DES: [{Oh you mean li-}]
 10. Oh- ah the part that Lizzie was on the phone with?
 11. KAY: Y[eah and then]
 12. DES: [John]
 13. KAY: What after that?
 14. DES: And then he was like oh yeah Jan I remember her
 15. so: then I talked to Ann some more

[Case019-p01-c03of09-f11p2959]

Since Des does not know his speech has been distorted, he has the job of determining the nature of Kay's need to repair. His solution is to directly ask Kay about the nature of the repair initiation ('what do you mean what', line 7). Kay's response is to report the technological distortion ('You cut out', line 8) and then begin to locate the problematic content. Having heard the nature of the repair as involving a technologically-caused hearing problem, Des is able to begin offering a candidate check on the missing content to repair (line 9–10) in overlap with Kay (line 6). The repair flows without further problem (lines 11–15).

Extract 4 is more complex, Des finishes a story with an upshot (lines 1–2) that Kay does not quite follow (line 3). She does not understand why the protagonist of the story was angry, but repairing this involves some tension between Des and Kay.

EXTRACT 4 DES AND KAY 2.

1. DES: He was kinda mad I think it was funny
 2. ((lau[gh]))
 3. KAY: [Why w]as he mad?
 4. DES: Coz she was {SOUND CUTS OUT(1.5)} sausage
 5. and he was like just trying to eat
 6. and she wouldn't leave him alone it was just funny
 7. KAY: Coz what?
 8. DES: ((Deliberate and annoyed intonation)) She was trying

also counterparts – they must both be relevant for one to be foregrounded while the other is backgrounded.

A significantly longer example of such disambiguation can be found in Rintel (2013a: 3346–8), in which Des repeatedly casts Kay's inattention (she is watching a movie while video calling) as technological trouble despite her very obvious inattention. Ironically, ruling out technological unresponsiveness may be relationally awkward in mediated interaction because the asymmetrical constraints of the technology mean that technological unresponsiveness is uncomfortably close – perhaps having almost the same apparent form – to interpersonal unresponsiveness. Treating technology as omnirelevant, then, provides for a level of organisational flexibility for overcoming difficulties.

Responses to Distorted Video

Coping with video or combined audio/video distortions was quite different to coping with audio-only distortions in the data. None of the video or audio/video cases involved *disambiguation* of technological distortion versus a potential relational problem (or, more broadly, any problem of understanding). Rather, what did occur was development of an orientation to technological and relational omnirelevance with respect to the *expressive* needs of the couples' talk. That is, users worked to distinguish frequent low-level operational visual constraints (missing frames, blurriness, etc.) from acute operational problems (long freezes, lack of video), and actively engaged in working out how to treat such distortions as an ongoing part of who-we-are-and-what-we-are-doing-in-this-medium. An acute problem may or may not materially cause interactional perturbation, depending on the relevance of visuals for the activity at hand, but it can be *treated* as relevant – and that, of course, is what it means to be engaged in technologised interaction.

Extracts 6 to 8 show that as the orientation to conversational continuity in the face of visual technological distortion increased, so too did an accompanying mutual expressive orientation to the relationship as enacted through the technology.

EXTRACT 6 HAL AND EVA 2.

1. EVA: Joey's pitbull played with Rex the other day (.)
2. um, cuz he brought him over, and ever since
3. Rex has been limping.
4. We think he hurt his l- his uh knee again
5. HAL: (({NO SOUND}@Mouths one word@))
6. {FREEZES(3.5) UNFREEZES}
7. h. So: uh: how was your day?
8. EVA: ((Small laugh)) D(h)id you hear about my dog?

9. HAL: Yeah you said y- your dog was limping
 10. EVA: Oh yeah okay=I don't-
 11. I couldn't tell if you could hear or not,
 12. coz it keeps going in and out
 13. HAL: {FREEZES (5.0)}
 14. EVA: ((laugh)) And now you're frozen.
 15. HAL: {UNFREEZES}
 16. EVA: There you go you're moving again
 17. HAL: ((@Smiles@)) How was your day?
 18. EVA: It was good u:m (@looks up@) tk what did I do (.)
 19. Oh yeah Lisa's baby I went and saw it, it's so: cute

[Case081-p02-c05of05-t11p5418]

In Extract 6 Eva experiences both audio and visual distortions of Hal during a mutual news-of-the-day exchange. The first time Hal's video and audio freezes (line 6), Eva ignores the visual issue and works on ensuring reception and understanding of her news (lines 8). The pair make their way through a repair only for Eva to experience Hal as frozen once again (line 13), after which Eva reports him as 'frozen again' (line 14), even as he unfreezes, thus she updates her report on the status of his video as 'now you're moving again' (line 16). Neither Eva nor Hal orient to the visual distortion as relevantly repairable or mutually topicalisable, thus the insertion of these reports without response demonstrates a version of an achieved 'let it pass' omnirelevance in which technological distortion is reportable but not acted upon because it does not trouble conversational continuity.

EXTRACT 7 RAY AND SUN 1.

1. RAY: Actually I wanna watch, uh- {FREEZES (2.0)}
 2. (2.0)
 3. SUN: >Okay now you're frozen<
 4. RAY: {UNFREEZES} ((@Rapidly moves from side to side@))
 5. Am I out?
 6. RAY: ((@Rubs lotion [on hands@]))
 7. SUN: [Yeah. Unfrozen.]
 8. RAY: ((@Rubs lotion on hands(6.0) Turns away@))
 9. {FREEZES (1.0)}
 10. SUN: ((Laugh)) You froze again
 11. RAY: {UNFREEZES} ((@Shakes head from side to side@))
 12. Does it look cool when I freeze
 13. with these stripes on my face.
 14. SUN: Doesn't ma[ke] a difference

[Case122-p04-c07of10-t11p0905]

Extract 7 is similar to Extract 6 in that frozen video is reported as not affecting conversational continuity. The pair orient to reporting on whether Ray is ‘frozen’ or ‘out’ of being frozen (lines 1–7, 9–14), with limited topicalisation of what Ray’s being frozen looks like to Sun (lines 11–13). Having heard the report of being frozen Ray attempts a limited re-framing of the constraint as a resource, shaking his head from side to side and asking Sun ‘Does it look cool when I freeze with these stripes on my face’. Although Sun reports that it ‘Doesn’t ma[ke] a difference’ (line 14), in terms of omnirelevance there are some quite important achievements in this example. First, being frozen, is initially reportable enough to warrant interruption, despite later being treated as not making a difference (line 3). The ambient sound from Ray’s end in this recording indicated that his audio was still functioning correctly (i.e. that this was a production cut-off not a technical reception cut-off) when Ray’s visual froze. This coincidence is an apparent perturbation of conversational continuity, which is imminently reportable. However, when Ray resumes speaking and then asks about whether it looks ‘cool’, Sun reverts immediately to letting it pass. This is crucial, as it indicates the omnirelevance of technology as organisationally recognisable, but that different forms of distortion are to be treated as differently relevant depending on conversational continuity.

EXTRACT 8 ORA AND JED 1.

1. ORA: ((@Arranging her wet hair@))
 2. JED: Is my video blurry on your screen
 3. or does it look nice?
 4. ORA: Um:::::[:]
 5. JED: [D]oes it look pixelated?
 6. ORA: Yeah
 7. JED: Oh okay
 8. ORA: ((@Looks away towards door@))
 9. JED: [So does yours]
 10. ORA: [It’s fine] It doesn’t- it doesn’t bother me
it’s fine.
 11. As long as I can see your beautiful face @smiles@
 12. JED: The pixelated version of it @raises eyebrow@
 13. ORA: Turn into a dragon again- a dinosaur! ((laug[hs]))
 14. JED: [((laughs))]
- [Case142-p06-c04of07-t09p5558]

Ora and Jed take this ‘let it pass’ agreement that visual distortion is prevalent but not disruptive one step further in Extract 8 Ora is arranging her wet hair in a conversational lull, which Jed takes as an opportunity to topicalise a check similarity of video quality

(lines 2–3). Unlike in the previous examples, Jed does not report his view of Ora, rather he asks Ora to report on her view of him. He provides Ora with a choice between two candidates, a view that is negatively valenced via a report of a view state of ‘blurry’, or the exclusive candidate view that is positively valenced via a report of Ora’s evaluative feeling about the video as ‘nice’. Ora’s first response is a long marker of taking the offered floor but being unsure about the response (‘Um:::::[:]’, line 4). Ora’s difficulty in responding immediately to this question indicates the potential problems with topicalising non-disruptive technological constraints: Ora may be somewhat absorbed in her own activity of hair brushing, or the candidates may not be mutually exclusive for her, or ‘let it pass’ may already be operative and thus a change of attention is needed to evaluate the view, or the descriptors may not be as self-evidently representative to her as they are to Jed.

Jed starts a turn in overlap that treats this hesitation as difficulty answering the question by reformulating his check to the simpler proposition of a single negative candidate ‘pixelated’ that is both more precisely described and can be confirmed or disconfirmed (line 5). Ora’s confirmation (line 6) treats Jed’s reformulation as answerable and does not mention content perturbation or any form of remedy for the distortion. Jed acknowledges this confirmation (line 7) in the same manner and then reports that the view is mutual (line 9). The floor is thus left open at a point where organisational recognisability of who-we-are-and-what-we-are-doing-in-this-medium’ is at issue *translucently*. That is, the issue can be let pass or not, but while there has been no perturbation of conversational continuity to overcome, Jed has directed the pair into state of mutual consideration of the technologised view of one another and to a parallel state of mutual consideration of *why* they would want to look at one another. This is a now explicitly relevant and *omnirelevant* orientation to the *interdependence* of the technology and the relationship.

Thus in overlap with Jed’s report, Ora orients to this device as organisationally relevant to the next turn. She self-selects and specifically casts the relevance of the pixelation in several ways (lines 10–11): first as not causing trouble (‘it’s fine’), then as a choice to normalise the distortion by showing that she has accepted its potentially negative valence (‘It doesn’t- it doesn’t bother me it’s fine’; line 9). But most importantly, third, Ora follows up her normalisation with relational reasoning, proposing that the warrant for her assessment is that the technological constraints are to be judged against their relational enablements (‘As long as I can see your beautiful face’, line 11). Such accounts are crucial to long-distance relational maintenance via video calling because they become part of a couple’s collaborative standard for conversational continuity based on expressive practices.

Teases

This brings us, then, to teases. As discussed in the literature review above, teases are common in many forms of intimate relationships, even though – or perhaps

because – they involve playing with the ambiguity of affiliation and disaffiliation. It is worth noting that while teases delicately play on the knife-edge of derogation, for these young couples none of the recorded teases misfired or backfired in such a way as to cause a problem. Indeed, even ‘po-faced receipts’ (Drew, 1987) were not found. Rather, teases were very much part of the expressive fabric of ‘doing being couples’.

Some teases in response to video distortions were quite straightforward in their orientation to interweaving the omnirelevance of the relationship and technology.

EXTRACT 9 DES AND KAY 4.

1. DES: ((@Open mouth smile@))
2. KAY: ((laugh)) You have no teeth ((laugh))
3. DES: ((@Opens mouth with lips over teeth@))
4. DES: [((@Closes mouth turns left@))]
5. KAY: [Your mouth is like so blurry]
6. it looks like it’s sewed shut ((la[ughs])]
7. DES: [Alright]
8. I’ll turn up my quality
9. it’s still choppy I wish it was better
10. KAY: M:e too but it’s not
11. DES: [Yeah I know]
12. KAY: [. this is why] you can’t date people far away
13. KAY: [(@Open mouth smile and raised eyebrows@)]
14. DES: [((choked laugh))]

[Case021-p01-c03of09-t11p3852-18m57in-02m19s]

In Extract 9, Kay reports that Des’s video is distorted in a limited but amusing fashion (he looks as if he ‘has no teeth’ or his mouth is ‘sewed shut’, lines 2, 5–6). Des’s response is to report that he will undertake a technical solution (‘Alright I’ll turn up my quality’, line 7–8). In this software, the technical solution to move the slider that increases video quality make his mouth more clearly visible, but there may be a trade off in more audio distortion as the system attempts to push more data even though the bandwidth has not increased. The pair have experienced this trade-off before (in this and prior conversations) hence his complaint about the poor audio quality and reported desire for the technology to be ‘better’ (line 9).

It is at this point that Kay produces both an initial agreement ‘M:e too but it’s not’ (line 10) followed by a teasing upshot ‘[. this is why] you can’t date people far away’ (line 12). The tease relies directly on the omnirelevant orientation between the technology and the relationship as an organisational device: that attempting to maintain a distance relationship via video calling is made more difficult when the technology

does not live up to the promise of its primary affordance. That being said, the technological distortion is clearly not a barrier to understanding. It is framing what is said but it has not simply caused trouble, rather it has been treated as a resource. The fact of the distortion has been actively converted from a complaint resource into a relational resource for recognising that they are a couple maintaining their relationship via video calling.

While Extract 9 demonstrates quite a straightforward foregrounding of the technologised interaction through an explicit *telling* of the reflexive oscillation between context and content. Extract 10, involves explicitly *enacting* this reflexive oscillation that involves each partner accomplishing quite a feat of intersubjectivity with respect to the organising features of the relationship and technology.

EXTRACT 10 HAL AND EVA 3.

---EVA and HAL have been experimenting with cartoon video overlays---

1. HAL: Maybe I'll put a picture of a dinosaur in my wallet
2. ((@Wink@)) it's prettier
3. (1.5)
4. EVA: Oh: you jer:k
5. HAL: ((laughs)) It's great waiting for the delay
6. coz .h you're like
7. @Acts out waiting then very animated@
8. Oh: you jer:k
9. EVA: ((laug[hs])]+
10. HAL: [((laughs))]
11. EVA: +((laughs)) Weirdo

[Case056-p02-c01of05-t06p5811]

Eva and Hal have been experimenting with a feature of the supplied webcams that affords them the ability to overlay motion-tracking cartoon characters over their own video. A number of characters are available, including a dinosaur, which Eva has been using. As part of this play, Hal's first tease proposes an alteration of the typical relational practice of putting a picture of a partner or desirable other in a wallet/purse. He proposes that he might put a picture of the cartoon dinosaur overlay into his wallet as opposed to a real photograph of Eva (line 1), and follows this up with a tagged tease that the picture would be prettier (line 2). Eva's response to this tease is to laughingly insult Hal ('Oh: you jerk', line 4), but this comes after a delay of 1.5 seconds. It is to this delay that Hal addresses a second linked tease, this one addressed directly to the context of the technologised interaction.

Instead of responding directly to Eva's insult, Hal further teases Eva through reporting his amused reaction to the fact that Eva's response was delayed. He jokingly positively evaluates the fact of Eva's delay after the first tease and then exaggeratedly re-enacts his view of the response ('It's great waiting for the delay' 'coz .h you're like' 'Oh you jerk', lines 5–8). The reflexive oscillations between the contents of the first and second teases and their contextual considerations are quite dizzying.

Both partners need to understand the general constraint of asymmetrical access to audio and video and thus imagine themselves in one another's position seeing how the technological constraint of delay stretches out three points of reciprocity and response. The tease target does not know what is coming, the tease target is unlikely to be able to interdict the tease mid-production, and the tease target's response will also be delayed thus increasing the duration of the lived experience of the tease. Then, the original tease, the distortion, and the teasing report of the distortion all need to be treated as part of deliberate meaning production, even though the distortion itself was not deliberate and the meanings that are being enacted reflect back on the situation of doing being a couple via video calling. It would seem crucial that the engine of this understanding, accomplished in just seconds, is an intertwined omnirelevant orientation to the technology and relationship-fundamental organisational devices.

Extract 11 shows another version of this kind of elaborate intersubjectivity. Hal's video has been frozen for some minutes prior to the couple's call-closing sequence. Clearly, given that this is an intimate couple, closing a call is an activity replete with the omnirelevance of the relationship as an organisational device. Distortion during a close, then, is almost inescapably bound up with the relationship. For the purpose of this chapter the relevant analysis begins with line 9, when Hal is able to see Eva blow him a kiss as a relationship-relevant parting gesture, but Hal uses the visual distortion of frozen video to enact a teasing response.

EXTRACT 11 HAL AND EVA 4.

1. HAL: {FROZEN (@Pulling skin around eyes@)}
2. EVA: Alrighty
3. HAL: O[kay]
4. EVA: [I love] you:
5. HAL: I love you t-*{SOUND CUTS OUT}*
6. EVA: {FRAMES MISSING(@Hand flash@)}
7. EVA: Did you get that
8. HAL: No do it again
9. EVA: @Blows a kiss@
10. HAL: Oo::h
11. EVA: ((laughs))
12. HAL: Look I caught it I dunno if you can see that

13. EVA: I can't see it (laugh)
 14. HAL: Wow that's too bad
 15. EVA: [I know]
 16. HAL: [In that] case I threw it in the garbage
 17. EVA: Oh: you bastard ((la[ughs]))
 18. HAL: [((laughs))]
 19. EVA: Alrighty, I [love you]
 20. HAL: [okay]
 21. HAL: I love you too
 22. EVA: Bye sweetie
 23. HAL: Mbye \Logs off\
 24. EVA: \Logs off\
 [Case076-p02-c04of05-t08p1320-25m03in-00m33s]

In responding to the blown kiss, Hal builds on his initial appreciation (line 10) by describing a physical – but unseeable – performance of catching the kiss, which is a typical second-pair part to the blown kiss. Hal suspects that he is frozen, so he checks Eva's reception ('Look I caught it I dunno if you can see that', line 12). Eva verifies that she did not see Hal's action (line 13).

With this information, Hal could give up on video and rely on audio, which is demonstrably operative. However, Hal chooses instead to capitalise on the concept of an unseeable performance to tease Eva in a specifically relational manner. He claims that since Eva cannot see his 'catch', in that case he 'threw it in the garbage' (line 16). As noted in Rintel (2013b), this physical performance is unlikely to have actually occurred, but that is irrelevant to the tease itself because of the value that couples ascribe to blowing and catching kisses. In terms of omnirelevance, Hal changes his conversational continuity orientation from distortion as repairable to distortion as an interactional resource for an intimate tease. This form of technologised interaction might be said to almost fully embrace both the enablements and constraints of the video calling into one fluid interdependence that affords mutual orientation to an omnipresent technological and relational sense of *who-we-are-and-what-we-are-doing-in-this-medium*.

This fluid interdependence within one medium can be taken even further. Example 12, also taken from a call-close, shows Ray teasing Sun through an omnirelevant orientation to technology and the relationship as displayable – and teasable – across multiple media. When Sun's image begins freezing and unfreezing, Ray claims to be able to take a picture of Sun's frozen image and that he will put it up on Facebook (lines 17, 30). While Sun objects violently in between asking him how it can be done (25, 35, 37), the fact of the connection trouble of frozen video in video calling itself is completely subsumed by the possibility of an unflattering picture being publically available across media other than the one in which the couple are currently enacting their relationship in private.

EXTRACT 12 RAY AND SUN 2.

---RAY has been teasing SUN by not telling her the name of someone who called him. SUN is frozen.---

1. RAY: It's your bedtime
2. SUN: No:
3. RAY: Alright so uh
4. SUN: Wait so tell me who called {UNFREEZES}
5. ((@Wipes moisturizer on face@)) {FREEZES}
6. (5.0)
7. RAY: Gotta go [((@Raises hand very high and then back down))@]
8. SUN: [Ra:y! N(h)(h)o! Don't you dare]
9. RAY: I'm gonna push that button [((@Hand hovers@))]
10. SUN: [{UNFREEZES} No {FREEZES} Ray]
11. RAY: ((@Hand drops below field of view@))
12. (8.0)
13. RAY: You're frozen=
14. SUN: =Don't. No:!=
15. RAY: =You're frozen with your eyes closed and your mouth open
16. and your face coming towards the camera. Eeya[hh:!]]
17. SUN: [((laughs))]
18. RAY: Oh I'm going gonna take a picture of this
19. SUN: {UNFREEZES}
20. RAY: ((High 'silly' intonation)) Yeah!
21. SUN: How do you do that?
22. RAY: Print[screen]
23. SUN: [How do you take-] Wait we can take pictures?
24. RAY: .hYup!
25. SUN: {FREEZES} How?
26. RAY: ((laughs)) Na- [print screen!]
27. SUN: [Ra:y!] {UNFREEZES}
28. No:[:]
29. RAY: [Tha]t's the button you press
30. SUN: Where?
31. RAY: On your keyboard
32. (1.5)
33. I'm putting this up on Fa:ceboo:k
34. (4.0)

35. SUN: This doesn't work you l(h)i(h)ed to me!
 36. RAY: ((laughs)) [This picture is you:!]]
 37. SUN: [{UNFREEZES} ((laughs))] {FREEZES}
 38. SUN: N(h)o(h)o(h) !
 39. RAY: ((High 'silly' intonation)) Oo:h Sun baby ((laughs))
 40. SUN: ↑No↓! {UNFREEZES} {FREEZES}
 41. RAY: That's what I'm saving it as
 42. SUN: You're a liar
 43. RAY: ((High 'silly' intonation))
 44. You'll see what you get it in your [email]
 45. SUN: [{UNFREEZES}]
 46. RAY: ((laughs))
 47. SUN: ((laughs)) When are we gonna take pictures?
 48. RAY: Never I'm doing that this weekend, so I don't need
 your help

[Case123-p04-c07of10-t11p1752-49m54in-02m01s]

The tease of interest is 'Oh I'm going gonna take a picture of this' (line 18), initiated as an offshoot Ray to already teasingly threatening to unilaterally end the conversation by hanging up the call (lines 1–14). Both participants, then, are in a state of heightened sense of awareness about the view of the other and, indeed, mutual (if asymmetrical) awareness about how they might be viewed by the other. While the frozen video reported by Ray (lines 13, 15–16) is neither especially strange nor funny in and of itself, it can be treated as *now teasingable*. Taking a picture of frozen video becomes an excellent resource for a teasing project because it is both something that Sun cannot herself control or even see, and because taking a screenshot is not an affordance of the video calling application itself but an external function of the keyboard and operating system. So when Sun asks Ray how pictures can be taken (line 21, 23, 25), Ray's short answer 'Print screen' (line 22, 26) literally provides her the correct answer, but in a manner that she cannot make use of without more knowledge. Sun's frustration at both the unflattering frozen video image and inability to know how Ray is taking the picture are fuel for Ray's fire. This, then, is not just interaction about multiple technologies but technologised interaction treated as a relevant organisational feature of relationships that are enacted across a skein of both public and private technological spaces.

Conclusions

This chapter has explored how couples cope with audio and video distortions when video calling to maintain their long-distance relationship. I have argued that while video calling couples are engaged first and foremost to the social activity of doing

being couples, their orientation is to conversational continuity. As such, re-establishing conversational continuity in the face of technological distortion involves active appeal to organisational devices that focus on attention to the talk in context; omnirelevant devices. These omnirelevant devices are more than simply opportunistically appealed to in the moment because they are returned to, again and again, in specific moments of interactional difficulty, and are invoked deliberately as controlling the participants shared understandings.

I have shown that couples use a fluidly interdependent sense of both the relationship itself and the technology as omnirelevant devices for such appeals. The devices central to technologised interaction: the technology is not treated simply as a static and determinative conduit or container and the distortions are not treated simply as threshold issues to repair, undifferentiated negatives, or deviant noise to be remedied. Rather, the technology's enablements and constraints are treated as fundamentally expressive resources that frame but do not determine both the enactment of the relationship and the enactment of coping with distortion. Participants invoke a reflexive oscillation between the local interactional content and the technological and relational context as a controlling organisational practice for understanding the current activity.

I have illustrated that couples treat audio and video distortions differently in terms of the use of omnirelevance organisational. . When couples cope with audio distortions, audio is treated as the primary channel of information and repair. Omnirelevance is the organisational engine for disambiguating a potential source of trouble on the basis that the recognisability of technology is part of the problem and solution. Video is treated as either a subsidiary channel to audio or the channel of performance. When visual action matters, the literally framing field-of-view proposes an omni-relevant performance space and, even when distorted, is open to accounting for in a creative dramatic manner. Thus when coping with video distortions, the orientation is to relational and technological omnirelevance as the engine for expressive possibilities. Couples can opportunistically use audio and video distortions as a relational resource rather than simply treating them as perturbing or outside of relational talk. Distortions of audio and video are anything but epiphenomenal sources of repairable noise in the business of couples maintaining long-distance relationships. They can, and do, become interdependent organisational devices, let pass or made use of, but always contingently crucial to achieving conversational continuity.

Remarkably, some of the most creative methods for achieving conversational continuity involve couples using distortion as the spark of trouble to set up relational teasing. Relational teasing is especially useful in moments of distortion because teasing itself is a practice that relies on omnirelevance. As discussed in the introduction, teases are valuable for doing being a couple because they involve invoking trouble (through taboo, deviance, ambiguity, provocations, etc.) in a manner that reflexively proposes the we-ness of relational intimacy. As Housley and Fitzgerald (2002a) explain, the core principle of omnirelevance is that categories are omni-relevant

when they can be seen to operate at both an organisational level and at an immediate level. In the case of video calling, distortions are an immediately inescapable and troubling material fact of mediation. However, as materially inescapable as distortions may be, unless they render interaction completely impossible they draw attention to the activity of talk via technology and thus become very obvious candidates for omnirelevance as a resolution process that involves framing who-we-are-and-what-we-are-doing-in-this-medium.

Couples are not necessarily interested in doing technologized interaction, they are looking to act in social ways. Technology is part of that action, but it is as much a creative moral resource (Jayyusi, 1984) used to account for social actions as it is the container or conduit. The reflexive oscillation between content and context from which omnirelevance draws its organisational power is, I would argue, the mechanism by which users intertwine the material and social possibilities of technology to produce technologised interaction. The concepts of omnirelevance and affordances, wound together such that one provides the method for the other, provides a fruitful approach to exploring the practices through which interaction is technologised and thus the wider sociological interest in the interdependence of technology and society.

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Notes

- 1 A note on terminology: in Fitzgerald and Rintel (2013), based on a comment from Rod Gardner, we note that Sacks's use of the term 'omnirelevant', and the later descriptive gloss of controlling, suggests that they are *always* relevant rather than always *possibly* relevant. For that reason we used the term 'omnipresence' in that article to capture the sense that 'such devices are available (present) but not always made relevant within the interaction'. In Rintel (2013a), following Schegloff, Jefferson, and Sacks (1977), I used the term omnipresent in relation to the fundamental orientation to repair that is bound up with turn-taking. These two variations indicate that the term 'omnipresent' is useful but overly broad. 'Omni-available' might be a more accurate term, but rather than introduce a new term I am reverting to the original – omnirelevance – for several reasons. First, it has its historical MCA roots, which makes it easier to trace. Second, while omnipresence connotes availability and downplays that a device is always relevant, omnirelevance still connotes the very important aspects of activity, choice and agency better than 'omnipresence'. Third, the omnirelevance concept also ties to the affordances approach taken to the technology in this analysis.
- 2 A perspicuous setting is one which 'in its specificity and uniqueness allows us to highlight methodic and systematic features' (Mondada, 2007b: 198). This links to the point that while EM/CA research does have some examples of very large corpus studies (e.g. Stivers, 2005), and Stokoe (2012a) has

advocated for similar practices for MCA research, Fitzgerald (2012: 309) has argued that while such studies have value for showing the regularities of membership categorisation practices, those ‘... principles regarding data collection and building collections are irrelevant to an ad hoc collection or an ethnomethodologically grounded thick description of a single case in which the layered depth and texture of members’ category work is explored.’ EM/CA/MCA oriented video calling research has tended to take the rich descriptive route of small data sets (e.g. Heath and Luff, 1992; Licoppe, Verdier and Dumoulin, 2013; Mondada, 2007b; Ruhleder and Jordan, 2001), intended, to borrow a phrase describing Erving Goffman’s work, to produce ‘a shudder of recognition’ (Lemert, 1997).