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## ***Encounters in public space. How acquainted vs. unacquainted persons establish social and spatial arrangements***

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### **Abstract**

This article studies how people enter into interaction in public space by examining casual encounters initiated either by strangers or acquainted persons. It contributes to the study of openings of interactions in public space from a conversation analytic perspective. The analysis reveals systematic similarities and differences between these two kinds of encounters, with regard to the prospective participants' recognition, identification and categorization, their spatial approach, the absence vs. presence of greetings, the delivery of a reason for the encounter vs. the manifestation of the social relation, and the shaping of the embodied participation framework. Data are in French and Italian, with English translations.

## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1. Aims of the Study**

Focusing on how people converge and jointly initiate a new encounter in public space, this article combines the study of mobility with research on conversational openings. How people interact in public space is a foundational question Goffman addresses (1963, 1971) in accurate observations of everyday interactions, and has also inspired ethnomethodologists (e.g. Sudnow, 1972; Livingston, 1987; Watson, 2005). However, multimodal sequential analyses based on video recordings of encounters occurring in public space are still lacking. The present article fills this lacuna by demonstrating the methodic nature of how people approach each other. A further originality of this contribution consists in its focus on openings of casual face-to-face encounters emerging from the convergence of two “vehicular units” previously engaged in their respective autonomous trajectories. These trajectories are shaped through mobility, a further dimension of human behavior in public space that Goffman highlights by addressing pedestrians' navigational practices. On the whole, this article discusses fundamental features of face-to-face openings in public space, including previously neglected aspects, such as the mutual categorization of the interactants-to-be (Sacks, 1972; Schegloff, 1979), and aspects which are constitutive of face-to-face encounters, such as the assembling and positioning of interacting bodies in a participation framework (Goffman,

1981; Goodwin & Goodwin, 2004), with a special emphasis on embodied participation (Goodwin, 2007). The article confronts two kinds of activities that occur ordinarily in public space: itinerary requests to strangers and chance encounters between acquainted persons. If “[...] ‘acquaintanceship’ is one major basis for the undertaking of an interaction” (Schegloff, 1979, p. 26), then we may expect that individuals have different ways of engaging in interaction with acquainted vs. unacquainted persons and that this has organizational consequences for the openings.

## 1.2. Literature

Within the social sciences, different models address the way in which individuals use public space in urban settings (Amin & Thrift, 2002). People co-present in public space are variously described as “citizens,” “anonymous” persons, “flâneurs” or “strangers” (Simmel, 1908; Benjamin, 1929; Schuetz, 1944; Amin, 2012). These models and categories reveal the rich and diverse social opportunities for co-presence offered by modern cities. Goffman’s observation of public gatherings allows him to show how people notice and categorize each other as they move in public space. People identify others as “being together” in temporary units, which Goffman describes as “withs” (1971). These may also be conceptualized as “participation units” (1963) or “vehicular units” (1971) moving in space. Goffman observes that individuals moving in public space respect each other’s territory by displaying “civil inattention” – e.g. by not staring at others – while tacitly and precisely coordinating their trajectories in order to avoid collisions. The individuals’ awareness of others is particularly visible when they engage in interaction with co-present people, thereby creating a common interactional space (Mondada, 2009).

With respect to openings, conversation analysis has initially focused on telephone conversations (Schegloff, 1968, 1979, 1986), where openings show recurrent components – such as greetings, identification sequences, and how-are-yous. In openings of face-to-face encounters in public space, people can be seen to adjust to architected spaces, material constraints, and to (im)mobilities of other co-present (human and nonhuman) entities. How these features impact the multimodal organization of openings has only recently emerged as a research question (Mondada & Schmitt, 2010). Most of the studies of openings focus on individuals entering either private territories or institutional places (Duranti, 1997; Pillet-Shore, 2008, 2012; Mortensen & Hazel, 2014; Mondada, 2018; De Stefani, forthcoming) and describe the recurrent actions parties carry out to build their face-to-face openings in this diversity of contexts (e.g. Pillet-Shore, 2008: ch.1). Other studies focus on how technological devices (mobile phones, location-sensitive applications) are used in the establishment of co-presence (Licoppe, 2009). Such social occasions differ from the chance encounters we analyze in this contribution – which involve two *technologically unequipped* mobile parties *in public space*, who mutually adjust their trajectories in order to create a common interactional space. Hence, our article contributes to the analysis of mobility in social interaction, thereby overcoming a more traditional bias towards sedentary activities in conversation analysis (Haddington, Mondada, & Nevile, 2013).

## 2. Data and Their Specificities

According to Goffman, “[...] acquainted persons in a social situation require a reason not to enter into a face engagement with each other, while unacquainted persons require a reason to do so” (1963, p. 124). Our comparison of video data collected in two kinds of situations addresses this issue: initiations of interactions between acquainted persons (ACQ-encounters)

vs. strangers (STR-encounters). Because they occur accidentally, without any previous arrangement, such encounters are particularly difficult to document.

The ACQ-encounters include activities taking place in public and semi-public spaces. For the former, we explored four guided tours lasting between 60 and 180 minutes recorded in Naples, Italy, and Bellinzona, Switzerland (see De Stefani, 2010; De Stefani & Mondada 2014, 2017) and found three unplanned encounters. For the latter, we reviewed data of three couples shopping in a supermarket in Southern Switzerland (about 60 minutes per couple; see De Stefani, 2011) and found four chance encounters. The STR-encounters document pedestrians asking other passers-by for route directions. The corpus comprises more than 30 itinerary requests, video-recorded in a small French town by Barbéris & Manes-Gallo (2007): two confederates approach pedestrians who are accidentally passing by and ask them directions (see Mondada, 2009). This peculiar situation produces “ecologically provoked” interactions, which are also naturally occurring fieldwork interactions, in that the requesters are confronted with the same practical problems experienced by individuals seeking to contact strangers in public space, such as establishing an incipient social relationship, opening a new encounter, achieving reciprocity, etc.

Both sets of data have been recorded by following one party navigating through space, enabling us to document how these parties initiate encounters in public space: hence, these emergent encounters are documented from the perspective of the *approaching* party.<sup>1</sup> This party is a couple in the itinerary requests and in the supermarket data; in the guided tour data, it is an individual as part of a larger group of persons.<sup>2</sup>

Both kinds of encounters share similarities: individuals sight potential interactants-to-be, they subsequently approach them by modifying their initial trajectories, and then establish contact, thereby becoming co-participants in interaction. The initiations of these encounters also show fundamental differences: An STR-encounter is a “first for these parties,” whereas an ACQ-encounter is a “next encounter with a history to it” (Schegloff, 1986, p. 113). This entails, among other things, that the selection of the interactant(s)-to-be is achieved on the basis of diverse means of categorization and description. Whereas in the itinerary requests the relevant categories of the targeted interactants-to-be are their being “locals” (vs. “tourists”), in ACQ-encounters, interactants-to-be are first and foremost recognized as acquaintanceships, making expectable at least a “minimal proper conversation.”<sup>3</sup> In either case, categorizations and descriptions are based on the scrutiny of “inspectables” (Schegloff 1979, p. 64), available, e.g. through individuals’ appearance. Whereas mutual display of personal recognition is paramount in ACQ-encounters, in STR-encounters requesters identify and select a relevant category putatively possessing the necessary knowledge to show the way. Moreover, in the STR-encounters documented here, the approaching party’s initiation of the encounter is goal-oriented, where “asking the way” constitutes the practical reason for approaching a stranger. In ACQ-encounters, instead, there is no proper reason for the encounter apart from accidental co-presence in the same place; participants can be seen to emphasize the unexpected occasion of sociability – e.g. in greetings – whereas the selection of an adequate first topic appears to be of secondary importance. By contrast, in STR-encounters, the initiators of the encounter produce the reason for the approach as early as possible, thereby accounting for the encounter

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<sup>1</sup> On occasion, parties engage only in “distant salutations” and no reciprocal approaching occurs (see exc. 11).

<sup>2</sup> Names have been anonymized in all the excerpts and the authors have permission to show the persons’ faces.

<sup>3</sup> In public space, a mere exchange of greetings may be treated as a complete social encounter: “an exchange of greetings is a minimal proper conversation” (Sacks, 1992, I, pp. 553–554). Interestingly, whereas Sacks considers an exchange of greetings as a potentially complete conversation, Schegloff (1979) sees greetings as closing down what he calls the “pre-beginning” of an encounter: “Greetings [are] the end phase of incipient interaction – what I referred to earlier as ‘pre-beginnings’” (Schegloff, 1979, pp. 33–34). One aim of this contribution is precisely to show how “incipient interaction” is achieved.

as legitimate (and safe). Greetings are often absent, whereas the first topic, i.e. the reason for the approach, is forefronted (Sacks, 1992, I, p. 553; De Stefani & Mondada, 2010). Although, in the two encounters, the approaching parties pursue different kinds of activities, they face similar practical problems, consisting in a) selecting and displaying the relevant social categories for the encounter at hand, and b) converging in a spatial face-to-face arrangement with the other party. It is precisely on the basis of these similarities that we compare STR-encounters and ACQ-encounters in this contribution. Using multimodal conversation analysis, the study explores and compares the different phases of ACQ- and STR-openings: their preparation, the identification, recognition, and categorization of the imminent co-participants, their approach, the greetings and how-are-yous, until the establishment of the interactional space and participation framework of the encounter.

### **3. Preparing the Encounter: Identification and Recognition of Potential Interactants**

In the absence of a specific “summons,” which has been described as initiating telephone openings (Schegloff, 1968, 1979, 1986), the precise delimitation of the beginning of an encounter in public space might be challenging. Such encounters emerge from initial unilateral or reciprocal sighting of a potential interactant-to-be. This allows recognition and identification of the other, which, in the case of unilateral sighting, can occur even before the latter is aware of the imminent encounter. The relevance of sighting when people approach each other as they engage in face-to-face encounters has previously been discussed from a multimodal perspective (e.g. Kendon, 1990; Mondada, 2009; Pillet-Shore, 2008, pp. 78ff.). Schegloff’s (1979) notion of “pre-beginning,” ending with reciprocal greetings, or Mondada’s (2010) notion of “pre-opening,” referring to preparatory activities that precede the publicly recognizable entry of all parties into the encounter, capture these prefatory actions. Whereas (display of) recognition and identification occur as fundamental practices in any kind of social interaction (Duranti, 1997; Schegloff, 1979; Zimmerman, 1992), the literature has only marginally discussed the distinction between recognition and identification, and both practices are often treated as related (Schegloff, 1986; Pillet-Shore, 2008, 2012). Our data enable us to differentiate between practices of recognition (e.g. displayed by change-of-state tokens; Heritage, 1984) and identification, displayed through descriptions and use of membership categories relevant for the encounter at hand. In STR-encounters, the other is *identified* as a potential interactional partner for the project at hand, whereas, in ACQ-encounters, *recognition* of the person is at stake, which obliges individuals to decide whether to engage in interaction or to “hide” (Sudnow, 1972).

#### **3.1. Identifying Unknown Persons**

In the itinerary requests analyzed here, the requesting party is constituted by two members (Nora, NOR, and Blanche, BLA). The requesters, thus, face a double issue: on the one hand, the components of such a vehicular unit have to jointly refer to possible targets on the basis of membership categories that have *visible* shared accountability; on the other hand, they have to select categories of passers-by possibly fitting with the task: people knowing the local geography, able to provide directions – excluding other categories, such as “tourists,” “foreigners,” “children,” etc. Hence, identification practices refer both to the reflexively displayed “identification work” that members of the requesting party undertake and to the actual singling out of what is going to be the second party of the encounter. Obviously, both dimensions are contingent upon each other.

##### **3.1.1. Visible categories**

Within the crowd of pedestrians, the persons searching for help have to select whom to address. This occasions an activity of singling out, differentiating, and identifying possible persons in the crowd, in a shared way with the co-participant. The following fragments show how descriptive and categorizing practices feature in this pre-opening phase:

Excerpt 1 (STR/MPT\_iti28\_17.35)

```

#(1.0)
01 NOR    on deman#de aux messieurs# qui# arrivent là?
           we ask the gentlemen who are arriving there?
           bla          fwalks-----fsteps twd men-->>
           nor          €one step-----€lateral step-->>
           fig          #fig.1
02 BLA    oui
           yes

```



Fig. 1: Nora (left) and Blanche (right) looking at two men before them

Excerpt 2 (STR/MPT\_iti5)

```

01 NOR    celui-#ci?
           this one?
           $changes trajectory-->>
02 BLA    ah oui d'ac#cord fc'lui-là    f
           oh yes okay that one
           fchanges trajfwalks faster twd man-->>
           fig          #fig.2

```



Fig. 2: Nora and Blanche walking towards passer-by

In these cases, either a category or a demonstrative is used, which is referring to the visible recognizability of the target persons, and which may occur (exc. 1) with the explicit formulation of the action to be done (*demande*/'ask'; 1). Moreover, both participants reorient the trajectory of their walk towards the target as they adjust to the ongoing identification, while either the turn (exc. 1) or the sequence (exc. 2) is not yet completed. The target's identifiability is achieved with a remarkable verbal economy, showing not only the efficiency of categories for identifying persons (Sacks, 1972), but also the contribution of embodied mobile trajectories, achieving their evidence through the convergent orientation of the bodies. The successful identification is consequential for the organization of the requesters' movement towards the target, which is reflexively shaped with the emerging talk.

### 3.1.2. Relevant categories

Whereas the above mentioned identifications, relying on visible features, are uttered in service of the organization of joint attention and possible approach of the persons targeted for the subsequent request, other kinds of descriptions display inferences about the targets' knowledgeability, as a condition and relevant issue for the successful completion of the projected request sequence:

Excerpt 3 (STR/MPT\_iti16)

01 NOR **la dame, \*(0.2) connaîtra peut-être?**  
*the lady, (0.2) will know perhaps?*  
 bla \*looks at the lady and walks twd her-->  
 02 (0.4)  
 03 BLA **l'église saint-roch, vous savez pas où elle est?**  
*the Saint Roch church, you don't know where it is?*

Excerpt 4 (STR/MPT\_iti31)

01 # (0.6) \$ (0.6) \$#  
 bla >>walks-->  
 nor >>walks-->  
 bla >>gz fwd\$gz NOR\$gz fwd at BEA/RIC-->  
 fig #fig.3 #fig.4



Fig. 3-5: Nora and Blanche identify and walk towards Béatrice and Rick

02 BLA **ceux-là?**  
*those ones?*  
 03 (0.3)  
 04 NOR **oui. j'sais€ pas s'ils sont de fmontpell#ier,**  
*yes:. I don't know if they're from Montpellier,*  
 nor -->€changes traj, twd BEA/RIC-->  
 bla €changes traj-->  
 fig #fig.5  
 05 **on va leur demander.**  
*we're gonna ask them.*  
 06 (0.4)  
 07 NOR **eu\*+[h:::**  
*uh:::*  
 08 BLA **[vous connaissez l'église saint-ro†ch?**  
*do you know the Saint Roch church?*  
 bea \*gz at BLA/NOR-->  
 ric +gz at BLA/NOR-->  
 bea >>walks-----•stops-->  
 ric >>walks-----†stops-->

In exc. 3, Nora's identification of a passer-by with the category *dame*/'lady' (1) is enough to direct Blanche's gaze towards the latter, as well as to prompt her to ask the target person if she knows the requested location. A verb of knowledge is used in both turns, and shows the relevance of the epistemic category "knowing person" for the task at hand. In exc. 4, the

requesters' trajectory (1; Figure 3) makes the demonstrative understandable: note how Blanche turns towards Nora (Figure 4) before saying *ceux-là?*/'those ones?' (2), relying on the orientation of her body as a warrant to use the demonstrative and deictic element. Nora's embodied response is visible in the immediate reorientation of her trajectory towards the referred to couple (here named Béatrice, BEA, and Rick, RIC), so that they both walk towards them in an aligned way (Figure 5). Her verbal response first confirms the identification, and then treats the issue of whether the targets are locals or not. Blanche's question (8) explicitly mentions the issue of knowledgeability and links the attribution of the epistemic authority necessary for the itinerary description to the previously mentioned category *de montpellier*/'from Montpellier' (4). The fact that, in these data, the requesting party is constituted by more than one person, makes the verbal categorization work observable for us. This work would also be accomplished by single way-seekers, in silent visual practices, such as "looking around" for potential helpers.

### 3.2. Recognizing Acquainted Persons

ACQ-encounters enable us to differentiate between displays of recognition and identification. The former is visible in the use of tokens by which individuals display their recognizing an acquainted person and the unexpectedness of that event – typically with change-of-state tokens. The latter is done through descriptions of the targeted person, addressed, for instance, to the co-member of the vehicular unit. Both are observable in the following excerpt. Teresa (TER) and Maria (MAR) are shopping together in a supermarket. At a certain point, Maria sights another lady:

Excerpt 5 (ACQ/cons45111/24:38-24:52)

01 (4.5)  
 mar >>moving forward-->>  
 ter >>moving forward-->>  
 02 MAR AH:  
 OH:  
 03 (1.1)  
 04 MAR **qui un'altra ( ).**  
*here another one ( ).*  
 05 (1.0)  
 06 TER hm  
 hm  
 07 (3.0)  
 08 MAR **di suh.**  
*from uphill.*  
 09 TER **lì un quarto la ro[ba costa là quei mucchi.**  
*there the things cost a fourth there on those piles.*  
 10 MAR [di s:u.  
*from uphi:ll.*

Whereas Teresa is engaged in visually assessing the merchandise (see also l. 9), Maria first produces a change-of-state token (2), displaying recognition of an unexpected person. She subsequently identifies that person as *un'altra*/'another one' (4), addressing Teresa. This categorization has a situated relevance, since Maria and Teresa have just bumped into two other persons they knew minutes before, all of whom are living in the same area. Maria subsequently categorizes the interactant-to-be as someone from 'uphill' (8, 10). The categorization of the other is done in the pre-opening of the encounter. Differently from STR-encounters, this categorization is not related to any specific task at hand. It does, however, foreshadow the imminence of a new course of action, which is different from what Maria and Teresa are doing right now (i.e. browsing the supermarket) and which will consist of engaging in interaction with the person that has just been categorized (see exc. 8). Note that,

while Maria's categorization of the person as *un'altra*/'another one' and *di suh*./'from uphill' is witnessable by Teresa, the latter does not treat Maria's discovery of an acquaintance as noteworthy. In fact, she maintains her orientation to the shopping activity by commenting on the price of some products located nearby (9). And, indeed, as the analysis of exc. 8 will show, it is Maria who will open the encounter.

#### 4. Approaching Co-present Persons: the First Contact

The previous literature on initiations of face-to-face encounters highlights the importance of the interactants' mutual approaching, leading them to adopt a vis-à-vis positioning (Kendon & Ferber, 1973; Duranti, 1992; Mondada, 2009) and to establish (physical) contact. The complexity of public space – concerning both architectural features and innumerable simultaneously co-occurring mobile activities and trajectories – provides restrictions and resources for members attempting to initiate interaction with co-present persons.

##### 4.1. Establishing Contact and the Constitution of a Common Interactional Space in Itinerary Requests

Having “prepared” the approach (see § 3.1), the requesters' vehicular unit approaches the target person(s). The convergence of the vehicular units is organized in a systematic way. The establishment of mutual gaze, the format of the first turn, and the pace of the walk are reflexively organized: the request is adjusted in real time to the (embodied) response of the passers-by and the latter's conduct is responsive to the emergent multimodal design of the request (including the steps and glances of the requester). Here are some examples that show the systematics of this (see also Mondada, 2009):

Excerpt 6 (STR/MPT\_iti6)

01 **BLA**     **excusez-nous?\***  
                   *excuse us?*  
       lea                             \*gaze at BLA-->  
 02             **(0.3)**  
 03 **BLA**     **euh::hh l'église Saint Roch s'il• vous plaît.**  
                   *uh::hh the Saint Roch church please.*  
       lea   •stops-->  
 04             **vous savez où c'est?**  
                   *do you know where it is?*  
 05             **(0.4)**

Excerpt 7 (STR/MPT\_iti18)

01             **(2.5)**  
       tom             >>walks-->  
 02 **NOR**     **euh, pardon ma\*dame, ex\*cusez-moi,**  
                   *uh, sorry madam, excuse me,*  
       tom                             \*.....\*hand raised to shield-->  
 03             **(0.4)**  
 04 **NOR**     **l'église saint Roch s'il vous plaît.**  
                   *the Saint Roch church please.*  
 05             **vous\* connai•ss[ez?\***  
                   *do you know?*  
 06 **PAS**                             **[oui\*.h**  
   *yes .h*  
       tom             ->\*looks fwd-----\*H down-->>  
       tom                             -->•stops-->>



The collection consistently shows a recurrent and methodical multimodal Gestalt, composed by the following resources: First, the request is verbally structured around three TCUs: the sound *euh* (exc. 6, 3; exc. 7, 2) working as an attention-getting device, apologies and address terms, then the request proper, which often begins with the name of the searched-for place, followed by a ‘please’ (see also exc. 9, 2). A verb of knowledge can follow, of which the place name is the syntactic object (exc. 6, 4; exc. 7, 4). This Gestalt accomplishes what Sacks calls a *ticket*: “[T]here is a class of *non-proper* conversationalists. And while they can come up and talk to you, they do it in a special way. That is, they announce that they know they’re not proper conversationalists but they’re beginning anyway, and for good reason. The kind of thing they use is a ‘*ticket*.’ That is, they announce in their first utterance how come they started to talk to you even though they shouldn’t: ‘Excuse me, I’m lost,’ etc.” (1992, I, p. 553).

The first component of this multimodal format is uttered as the “requester” is approaching the “requested”; at the end of the first component, mutual gaze is systematically established. Possible expansions of this component adjust to delays in gaze response (Mondada, 2009). The second component is launched only after mutual gaze is secured. At its completion, the addressed participants stop walking, and align the lower part of their bodies within the emergent interactional space. The turn format is designed in a way to both occasion the response of the passers-by and reflexively adjust to its emergent temporality. The fact that the answer to the request presupposes geographical knowledge is visible not only in the preparation of the approach, but also in the format of the request and later in the transformations of the participation framework, indexing the participants’ social and epistemic relations.

#### 4.2. Establishing Contact between Acquainted People

In ACQ-encounters, the initial recognition and identification may be unilateral (exc. 8) or reciprocal and concomitant (exc. 11). Whereas in STR-encounters the actual opening is characterized by a neutral (i.e. nonemotional) stance and the rapid introduction of the reason for the approach, when acquainted people fortuitously meet, they emphasize the very opening of the encounter in different ways, e.g. by using embodied resources (like intentionally bumping into the other party, exc. 8), among which what Pillet-Shore (2012) calls “large greetings” (see § 5). The following excerpt is the continuation of excerpt 5: Maria has identified another customer (Gianna, GIA) in the supermarket as an acquaintance and categorized her on the basis of her place of residence. She now directs her shopping cart towards that customer (Figure 6), while Teresa is commenting on the sales (12), thereby displaying her engagement in a different activity. A few seconds later, Maria physically bumps into Gianna with her shopping cart (Figure 7).

Excerpt 8 (ACQ/cons45111/24:52-25:04)

```

11      (1.0)#+(0.5)*
mar      -->#+walks towards GIA-->
ter      -->*stands still-->
          #fig.6
12 TER   ci son sempre azioni anche qui neh?*
          there are always promotions here too huh?
          -->*
13      *(3.0)±#(0.3)±#(0.2) #
ter      *walks forwards-->
gia      ±.....±looks at MAR-->
          #fig.7 #fig.8 #fig.9
14 GIA   citao:: tehi*là lì[±:]
          hello:: hey there::
ter      -->*stands still

```

```

gia      -->±gz TER±gz MAR----±gz camera-->
15 MAR      [((laughs))
16 TER      *[(la±ughs)]*con±tinuiamo a
              we keep
              *.....*walks forwards-->
              -->±,,,,,,±gz camera-->

gia
17 TER      incon[trar-
              meeting
18 GIA      [(          ) al filma giù?±=
              is he recording?
              -->±

```



Fig. 6-7: Maria approaches Gianna

Maria’s change in her trajectory modifies the current participation framework. Whereas, previously, Maria and Teresa were recognizable as forming a vehicular unit jointly moving in space (Figure 6), now Maria passes before Teresa as she is heading towards Gianna (Figure 7). In this case, Teresa (rather than an additional party, as in exc. 9) is herself an obstacle that Maria has to circumvent in order to approach Gianna. In other words, Maria designs her approach as “individual” rather than “collective.” Teresa, on the other hand, pursues straight ahead on her trajectory, thereby bodily displaying only marginal engagement in the encounter. As Maria bumps into Gianna with her shopping cart, it is very likely that Gianna can sense the physical proximity of another person. And such a conduct is accountable. Gianna subsequently turns towards Maria (Figure 8) and smiles immediately after (Figure 9), which is, at the same time, a first display of recognition.



Fig. 8-9: Gianna first looks and then smiles at Maria (hidden by Teresa’s body)

Immediately following that, Gianna produces an emphatic greeting (14), thereby providing an additional display of mutual recognition.<sup>4</sup> Both Maria and Teresa start laughing (15, 16) and subsequently Gianna introduces a first topic of conversation as she spots the camera that is recording the scene (18). By entering into interaction in this way, the participants display that this is going to be an interaction between persons who know each other and who literally bump into each other unexpectedly in a semi-public space. This embodied way of initiating an encounter, by immediately establishing physical contact, is consonant with the emphasized greetings that are typically found in ACQ-encounters (see § 5).

### 4.3. Approaching as an Issue for Third Parties

Approaching and establishing contact with another vehicular unit is not only an issue for the approaching party. As a movement in public space, it occasions vehicular units to tacitly coordinate in a regime of “civil inattention” (Goffman, 1971). This is based not only on the subtle monitoring of others’ trajectories, but also on normative expectations, related to the ordered progression of flows of pedestrians (Watson, 2005). The next excerpt shows how third parties can be concerned by the approach and convergence of two “withs”:

Excerpt 9 (STR/MTP\_iti15\_itin7\_9.00)

```
01      (1.0)          %# (1.5) ∫ (0.3)
a  bla  >>walks ahead towards MIA/FRA-->
b  nor  >>follows BLA towards MIA/FRA-->
c  pas  >>walks behind BLA%overtakes BLA on her L-->
d  pas  >>looks down-----∫looks up-->
e  fig  #fig.10
```



Fig. 10: Blanche and Nora with a passer-by slightly behind them

```
02  BLA  ex€cu+sez-√moi:,√# $ l'€*glise •saint-ro±#ch€ s'il√ vous plaît.•#
      excuse me:, the Saint Roch church please.
a  bla  ->€one lateral step twds MIA/FRA-----€stops-->
b  bla  >>looks at couple$gazes at MIA-->
c  fra  +changes traj avoiding BLA-->
d  mia  •changes traj avoiding BLA--•stops->
e  fra  ±gazes at BLA-->
f  mia  *gazes at BLA-->
g  pas  ->√stops√abrupt big lateral step betw BLA/NOR√walks away-->
h  fig  #fig.11 #fig.12 fig.13#
```

<sup>4</sup> For a similar observation, see Pillet-Shore (2012, p. 377): “Participants to incipient encounters visibly hold off doing the action of greeting until they see ‘who’s there,’ displaying their orientation to identification/recognition via visual inspection as prerequisite to producing a copresent greeting.”



Fig. 11-13: Bla and Nor approach Mia and Fra; passer-by circumvents them

**03 MIA**    *l'égglise tsaint-roch?ɛ* [euh \*(elle est où?)  
*the Saint Roch church? uh (where is it?)*

**04 BLA**                                    [oui:,  
   yes:,

a fra                                    +stops-->  
 b nor                                    †stops behind BLA-->>  
 c fra                                    †gazes at MIA-->  
 d mia                                    -->\*looks away-->  
 e pas                                    -->†looks back-->

**05 MIA**    *alors† attendez euh: (.) † euh::*  
*okay wait uh: (.) euh::*  
 pas                                    -->†looks straight----†looks back-->

**06 FRA**    *øc'e\$st:\* c'est °au:°\$ †*  
*it's: it's at:*  
 øpoints back-->>

bla                                    -->\$gazes at FRA----\$at the pointed at direction-->>  
 mia                                    -->\*gazes at FRA-->>  
 pas                                    -->†looks straight-->>

Blanche and Nora approach a couple (Mia, MIA and François, FRA) coming with a stroller from the opposite direction. Blanche walks ahead, Nora follows her (1; Figure 10). Blanche utters the request (2) while making a lateral step in the middle of their trajectory and stopping in front of the couple (2a) and looking at Mia (2b).

The couple progressively reorients to the requester: at turn-beginning, as Blanche moves towards them, François modifies the trajectory of his walk – and of the stroller – by moving to the right (2c). Mia aligns with this change a bit later on (2d). This redirection constitutes a response to Blanche positioning herself in the middle of their trajectory. It reveals the obstructive character of Blanche's last step and responds to it in terms of avoidance of collision – a major practice for managing co-presence in public space (Goffman, 1971). Mia and François treat Blanche as invading their space – and Blanche's turn, which begins with an apology, also orients to that. However, shortly after, the couple reorients to her as an imminent “co-interactant,” by gazing at her (2e, 2f; Figure 12). At the completion of the request, Mia stops walking (2d; Figure 13) and definitively aligns with this new action and encounter. François stops a bit later (4a): the interactional space for the encounter is stabilized.

The establishment of this interactional space happens in the middle of the street populated by other pedestrians. One pedestrian pays special attention to what is happening. At the beginning of the fragment, a woman in a yellow coat (passer-by, PAS) is walking behind Nora and Blanche (1a). As they slow down and orient to the couple, she starts overtaking Blanche on her left (1a; Figure 10), while looking down and manifesting civil inattention. She does not look at other pedestrians, but orients to them and actively takes into consideration their position, progression, and pace for designing her own walk. Shortly after, however, the woman looks up (1d), in her first publicly visible orientation towards what is happening ahead. Her practical problem is now to avoid a collision with the couple. When Blanche makes a further lateral step on her left, and stops in front of the couple (2a), who also slightly

deviate to their right, the passer-by is suddenly confronted with a stationary group exactly before her (Figure 11). She first responds to this by stopping, then by making a big lateral step (Figure 12): she moves between Nora and Blanche and changes to the other side of the street. She then continues straight, walking away from the group.

The way she avoids an imminent collision manifests her local identification of these vehicular units and their respective trajectories. As a competent member of public space, she adjusts her trajectory to these units. But she could not foresee the sudden conjunction of two autonomous vehicular units converging one with another and then merging. The fortuity of this event is visible in her abrupt trajectory change and also in her looking back at the scene (4e; Figure 13) several times (5), once the near-accident is overcome. Her repeated retrospective visual and embodied orientation shows the normative dimension of trajectories in public space: pedestrians are supposed to stay in their “lanes” (Goffman, 1971; Livingston, 1987; Liberman, 2013) while walking, without disrupting the tacit order of the sidewalk. In this respect, itinerary requests constitute a kind of natural breaching experiment, in which normative expectations, crucially relying on civil inattention, are being violated or at least revisited. Thus, this fragment reveals underlying assumptions, tacit practices, and practical reasoning that organize the intelligibility of social events in public space. Concerning the organization of the openings, it highlights not only how the parties coming together emergently and situatedly manage their coordinated entry into a new encounter, but also how this is witnessed from a *third party perspective* – a perspective rarely considered in conversation analysis, but highly relevant for the understanding of encounters in public space, where people share the space with others.

## 5. Greetings and How-are-yous and the Stabilization of Social Identities

Early on, Kendon and Ferber (1973) provided a detailed description of the practices of individuals converging before greeting each other. They identify practices for sighting (catching the eye, mutually seeing each other), followed by “distant salutations” (head toss, waving, eyebrow flash), mutual approaching, and, finally, “close salutations” (smiles, nods, verbal greetings, body contact). Duranti investigates greetings as “constitutive of the interactants’ public recognition of each other’s presence in the same perceptual field” (1997, p. 68), thereby corroborating the interrelationship between greeting, (display of) recognition, and the organization of the interactional space. Recent research on greetings in face-to-face encounters has differentiated between “small greetings” and “large greetings” (Pillet-Shore, 2012, p. 383). Whereas the former are spoken softly, without any prosodic emphasis, the latter are lengthened, louder, and accompanied by audible smiling. By using “small greetings,” speakers display a neutral stance – and this is precisely what we find in the STR-encounters documented here. Conversely, “large greetings,” typically found in ACQ-encounters, are used to display a positive stance towards encountering a prospective interactant and depict the social occasion as unusual or unexpected. Excerpt 8 has provided a first instance of the “approached” greeting with a lengthened *ciao*:: followed by an idiomatic *ehilà lì*::/‘hey there’ (14). Here is a further illustration:

Excerpt 10 (ACQ/cons45111/20:23-20:45)

01 (19.0)  
 02 TER CI[A:O  
 HELLO:  
 03 MAR [((laughs))  
 04 (0.2)  
 05 TIN (ah bo[n]  
 (oh okay)

Teresa and Maria sight an acquaintance (Tina, TIN): Teresa greets her with a loudly spoken, lengthened *CIA:O* (2), and Maria starts laughing (3). Tina acknowledges her being sighted with *ah bon* (which we render in English as ‘oh okay’), after which the three ladies converge in a brief encounter.

The following excerpt shows a reduplicated greeting in a “minimal proper conversation” occurring between a guide (Giada, GIA), who is escorting a school class through a city of Southern Switzerland, and a couple getting out of a car (Franco, FRA, and Pia, PIA).

Excerpt 11 (ACQ/M2U00008/25:17-25:24)

```

01      (5.6) * (0.1) * # (0.1) * (0.2) *
      fra      *.....*waves hand-->
      gia      *head nod----*
              #fig. 14

02 FRA      ci*ao.*=
              hello.
              -->*,,, *

03 GIA      =cia:[:o
              hello

04 FRA      [ciao ciao.
              hello hello.
  
```

The encounter starts with Franco and Giada looking at each other (Figure 14) and reciprocally addressing silent displays of recognition: Franco waves his hand, and Giada nods her head. Franco then greets Giada with an unstressed *ciao*. (1), to which Giada replies with a lengthened greeting (3). Slightly in overlap, Franco then produces a reduplicated version of the greeting token *ciao* (4). In Italian, such reduplicated occurrences of greetings are one way of displaying a positive stance towards the encounter (see Pillet-Shore, 2012 and Mondada, 2018; Harjunpää, Mondada, & Svinhufvud, this issue, about double greetings). By exchanging only greetings, without further talking, participants manage the multiple courses of action in which they are concurrently engaged. Indeed, Giada is walking ahead of a group of tourists, visibly identifiable as a guide. At this point, she prioritizes her work of guiding tourists through the city – by only minimally engaging with the couple. By staying on her initial walking trajectory, she further displays her unavailability.



Fig. 14: Giada gazes at the couple; Franco lifts right hand to wave

This excerpt also shows that (verbal and embodied) greetings are a readily available resource for displaying mutual recognition, which is the minimal requirement for an ACQ-encounter to be achieved as *just that*.

If ACQ-encounters continue beyond the greetings, participants may exchange how-are-yous, as in the following excerpt. Laura (LAU) is a teacher who is visiting a castle in Naples together with a guide and a school class. As she exits a lift, she inadvertently advances

towards a young man (Paolo, PAO), who happens to visit the same place. This initiates the following interaction:

Excerpt 12 (ACQ/vg9202\_3a/10:12-10:21)

01 PAO **salve professoressa.**  
*hello teacher.*  
 02 (0.9)  
 03 LAU **UEH:: bel[lo:**  
*WOUEH:: good looking:*  
 04 PAO **[come sta(te).**  
*how are you doing.*  
 05 (0.3)  
 06 LAU **tutto a pos[to:?**  
*everything okay:?*  
 07 PAO **[tutto bene.**  
*everything okay.*  
 08 (0.4)  
 09 LAU **che stai [facendo?**  
*what are you doing?*  
 10 PAO **[fate una gita?**  
*are you doing an excursion?*  
 11 (0.2)  
 12 PAO **farmacia io.**  
*pharmacy me.*  
 13 (0.2)  
 14 LAU **ah: farmac[ia.**  
*oh: pharmacy.*  
 15 PAO **[sì.**  
*yes.*

Paolo greets Laura with a slightly accentuated *salve* ‘hello’ (1) and then addresses her with the category *professoressa* ‘teacher.’ This categorization is an accountable display of recognition. Additionally, it provides Laura with the necessary resource to allow her to identify Paolo’s membership category and possibly recognize who has just addressed her – as having with her a relation within a “standardized relational pair” (Sacks, 1972), such as “teacher”/“(ex-)student.” Laura replies with an emphatic and loud *UEH::* – which in Italian is a common greeting among friends – and with the adjective *bello:* ‘good looking’ (3). However, Laura provides neither an overt categorization nor any display of recognition (e.g. a proper name) – and this may account for why, in this case, it is Paolo who is initiating the encounter, rather than Laura (who was moving towards him without displaying any recognition). The relevance of the categories “teacher”/“(ex-)student” is also visible in the verb forms used. Whereas Paolo uses the *voi*-form (*sta(te)*, *fate*, 3, 10), Laura uses the *tu*-form (l. 9). This categorization is also the basis on which the participants find a topic of conversation (9-15).

After the greeting, the participants engage in a how-are-you sequence (4-6). Both participants initiate possible topics once the how-are-you sequence has been completed, and both use questions to do so, partly in overlap. Laura asks Paolo ‘what he is doing’ (9), whereas the latter asks Laura whether she is doing an excursion (10). The following excerpt shows a further case in point (see also exc. 15):

Excerpt 13 (ACQ/cons45111/20:05-20:15)

01 (5.5)  
 02 TER **ciao**  
*hello*  
 03 (1.1)  
 04 ANN **ciao [(scusa)((laughs)) come va?**  
*hello [(sorry) how is it going?*  
 05 TER **[((laughs))**

06 TER **be:[ne e tua mamma?**  
*goo:d and your mum?*

07 ANN **[eh? vi siete (abbassati) un po'- sì:: [sì sì bene.**  
*huh? have you (come down) a bit- yes:: yes yes good.*

08 TER **[sì (.) un momento.**  
*yes (.) for a moment.*

Here, Anna (ANN) initiates a how-are-you sequence right after mutual greetings (4). Teresa replies with *be:ne/*‘good’ and then inquires about how Anna’s ‘mum’ (6) is doing – thereby showing that the acquaintanceship extends to other members of Anna’s family. Clearly, how-are-yous are useful resources in ACQ-encounters: on the one hand, they allow participants to further display that they are engaging in an ordinary encounter with an acquainted person (whereas they are completely absent in the STR-encounters analyzed here); on the other hand, they provide the possibility of extending the opening sequence in search of a first topic (Schegloff, 1968). Consequently, participants have more time to achieve a stationary disposition of their bodies, which exhibits the participation status they adopt for the encounter at hand. The latter aspect is visible in the analysis of the subsequent excerpts.

## **6. Adjusting the Interactional Space and Transforming the Participation Framework**

Once the contact is established, and the interactional space stabilized, the openings can be considered as completed and the encounter progresses further. However, the initial interactional space and participation framework is further dynamically adjusted to the emerging activities. The transformations of embodied participation display specific social, categorical, and epistemic relationships between the participants, including within the vehicular unit itself. As the encounter progresses, the components of the “with” engage in the interaction in different ways, occasioning visible differentiations among them, displayed through their positioning in the interactional space – within inclusive vs. exclusive, central vs. peripheral forms of participation.

### **6.1. STR-encounters: Epistemic Authority and Progression in the Activity**

There can be different grounds for transforming an interactional space. First, the participants can immediately orient to the task at hand, e.g. moving from a face-to-face formation to a bodily orientation towards the landmarks relevant for the itinerary description. Second, whereas the first contact is often established with all the members of the parties/withs, requesters may address the reason for the approach to one participant in particular – similarly, the “approached” may address only one requester. In itinerary requests, when the target passers-by form a couple, they may collaboratively engage in providing directions, or, more frequently, one of them carries out the task. The latter case transforms the previous participation framework, by focusing on one person, and ascribing a more peripheral role to the other. Transformations of the just established interactional space and participation framework emerge in relation to *who knows better* and, therefore, qualifies to respond to the itinerary request. How changes in participation are implemented within the interactional space is shown in the next excerpt, where Blanche and Nora address a couple, Pascale and Pablo. The couple first responds together, constituting a first interactional space; but then Pablo literally leaves the space, disengaging from the activity on the grounds of “not being from here” and, therefore, “not knowing”:

Excerpt 14 (STR/MPT\_E9\_iti9)

01 # (1.8) \* (0.3) \*



pas >>walks forward-->  
 pab >>walks\*avoids\*smaller steps-->  
 fig #fig.15



Fig. 15: Blanche/Nora and Pascale/Pablo on opposite trajectories

02 NOR euh::t: par•don l'é- euh+ l'église saint-roch\* s'il vous tplait?#  
 ehm::: sorry the ch- ehm the church of Saint Roch please?  
 pab t gazes at NOR->  
 pas •gazes at NOR-----twd PAS->  
 pab -->+stops-->>  
 pas -->\*stops-->>  
 fig fig.16#

03 (3.2)  
 04 PAS euh::: alors, #  
 ehm::: so,  
 ->•turns back-->  
 pab ->tat NOR-->  
 fig #fig.17



Fig. 16-17: Establishment of the interactional space

05 (1.0)  
 06 PAB ah moi j'suis pas d'ici, øalorsø °j'sais pas [du +t[out°  
 oh myself I'm not from here, so °I don't know at all°  
 øshrugs shouldersø  
 pab +walks aw-->  
 07 NOR [aha#[h #  
 08 BLA [ah#  
 fig fig.18# #fig.19  
 09 (0.5) \* (0.3) + (0.2)  
 pas -->\*turns again to NOR-->  
 pab -->+positions behind his wife-->>  
 10 PAS i me \*semble qu'i faut çque vous# repartçiez par là ((continues))  
 I think you have to start from there ((continues))  
 ç.....çpoints front-->>  
 pas -->\*looks in front of her-->>  
 fig #fig.20



Fig. 18-20: Pablo repositions behind Pascale

The participants walk towards each other from two opposite directions (Figure 15). Pablo and Pascale first adjust their walk to the imminent obstacle, trying to avoid it (1), but then immediately look at Nora as she launches her turn (2). They stop shortly after, and, at the end of Nora's request, the interactional space for the encounter is established, with the four participants facing each other (Figure 16). With some delay (2), Pascale starts responding to the request (4), thereby displaying her recognition of the activity and projecting a description-to-come, with the connective *alors*, /'so' (4). By turning back, she orients towards possibly relevant directions within the local environment (Figure 17). Before she produces her projected, but delayed (5), description, Pablo shifts his gaze to Nora and produces an account (6). By disclosing *j'suis pas d'ici*, /'I am not from here' (6) he formulates his identity in terms of the negation of a membership category, which would be relevant for accomplishing the task at hand. Thereby, he de-selects himself as someone who could grant the request; he explicitly formulates his inadequacy by claiming 'not to know at all' and embodies it with a shoulder shrug. Furthermore, while Nora and Blanche acknowledge this with change-of-state tokens (7-8), he begins to walk away, repositioning himself behind Pascale (Figures 18-20). As a consequence, when she turns back to Nora, Pascale is *de facto* the only member of the party still selected to respond, and she delivers directions. This negative epistemic claim, related to a category-bound activity, radically reconfigures the interactional space and participation framework, from a face-to-face formation between two couples to a formation where three people are facing each other (Figure 20).

## 6.2. ACQ-encounters: Prolonging the Occasion of Sociability

In the absence of a practical task at hand, in ACQ-encounters, the participation framework is adjusted to the type of sociability and interpersonal relations emerging between the participants, as the following excerpts show. Nina, a tour guide, is walking down a hill, which the group has just visited. She has already ended the tour and the group of tourists can be seen to have split: two ladies walk next to Nina, the rest of the group follows from a distance, as Figure 21 shows (six seconds before the beginning of excerpt 15):



Fig. 21: Nina and two ladies walk side-by-side; the rest of the group behind

Excerpt 15 (ACQ/vg9222\_3/30:40-30:54)

```

SAL    >>walks-->
nin    >>walks-->
01 NIN  S#ALve.
        HELlo.
fig    #fig.22
02      (0.3)*%(0.6)          *(0.2)
nin    *waves at SAL*
lad    %gazes at SAL-->
03 NIN  cia:o:.#
        hell:o:.
fig    #fig.23
04      (0.4)
05 SAL  *ciao.*
        hello.
salnin *.....*-->
06      *(0.8)
salnin -->*shake hands-->
07 NIN  #come stai?*
        how are you?
nin    -->*stands still
sal    -->*stands still
fig    #fig.24
08      (0.3)%
lad    -->%
09 SAL  bene* aspetta: non mi ri*cor[do
        fine wait: I don't remember
salnin -->*,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,*
10 NIN                                     [nina.
11      (0.5)
12 SAL  ah:=
        oh:
13 NIN  =ami:- aca di pina e carmi[ne.
        frie:- nd of pina and carmine.
14 SAL                                     [ah:: bellissimo. come:::
        oh:: wonderful: how:::
15      come mai da que[ste parti.
        how come in this area.
16 NIN                                     [ho fatto fare un
        I have made a
17      gir*o::[: ad alcun*e per[sone su a mont'echia.
        tour::: with a couple of persons up at Monte Echia.
nin    *repositions---*

```

As Nina approaches a corner of the street, she sights someone (whom we will call Salvatore, SAL), whom she greets with a loudly spoken *SALve* / 'hello' (1; Figure 22). While Figure 22 shows Nina gazing in the direction of the person she is greeting, it also shows that the emergence of this encounter is not publicly visible at this point – not even for the person recording the scene, who points the camera towards the three ladies, displaying completely different orientations.



Fig. 22: Nina looking towards Salvatore; diverging orientations of the ladies

Nina's initial greeting is not reciprocated (2). The absence of a return greeting is a first hint that the interactant-to-be may experience some sort of trouble with the fact that he is being greeted. Nina now waves her right hand at the man she is talking to (2) and then produces a further greeting, which is prosodically emphasized (3). During this time, the one lady still visible on the video starts looking in Salvatore's direction (2; Figure 23), now overtly orienting to the encounter that is about to emerge. At the end of Nina's *ciao:ò* (3), both Nina and Salvatore have established reciprocal gaze (Figure 23).<sup>5</sup>



Fig. 23-24: Nina and Salvatore converge in a face-to-face positioning

At this point, Salvatore and Nina are still walking towards each other (Figure 23). After a brief pause (4), Salvatore produces a prosodically neutral greeting – which contrasts with Nina's previous more emphatic greetings – while at the same time lifting his right arm and presenting his hand to Nina.<sup>6</sup> It is during the subsequent handshake (5-9) that the two reach a stationary position, facing each other (7; Figure 24). This position is kept throughout the following sequence, in which the participants collaboratively establish Nina's recognizability. Whereas Nina initiates a how-are-you sequence (7), Salvatore formulates his failure in recognizing the person who is talking to him (9). Nina tells her name as a "recognitional" (Sacks & Schegloff, 1979), but, although Salvatore produces a change-of-state token (12),

<sup>5</sup> The fact that Nina is using a different greeting-token in her redoing the greeting (*ciao:ò*, rather than *SALve*.) possibly addresses Salvatore's difficulty in recognizing her. Indeed, while in current Italian the token *salve* is used to address acquainted, unacquainted, or socially distant persons (see exc. 12, where Paolo greets his ex-teacher in this way), *ciao* is used between acquainted persons, friends, or among young people. In other words, by replacing *salve* with *ciao*, Nina exhibits that the encounter is involving acquainted people and that, therefore, Salvatore should display some sort of recognition.

<sup>6</sup> The fact that Salvatore initiates a handshake exhibits his difficulty in recognizing Nina as an acquainted person and in categorizing her, a handshake being a greeting that many Italians would exchange with socially distant people, rather than with closely acquainted persons.

Nina treats it as not sufficiently displaying recognition. She adds a description of herself as a ‘friend of Pina and Carmine’ (13), and Salvatore eventually recognizes and identifies her as an acquaintance, on the basis of the social relations that she putatively shares with him (14). At this point, Salvatore proposes a readily available topic of conversation by asking her ‘how come in this area?’ (15) – a topic related to the fortuity of being in the same place at the same time.

This excerpt shows how Nina gradually leaves the vehicular unit she initially formed with two other ladies, as she engages in stationary interaction with an acquainted person. The participation framework is, thus, radically transformed. Also, it is an instance in which Nina recognizes Salvatore as an acquaintance, whereas Salvatore’s recognition of Nina is based on her self-categorization as a ‘friend of common friends.’ This mutual recognition and identification occurs late, i.e. after having achieved a stationary participation framework. Finally, Salvatore’s displays of difficulty in recognizing Nina provide further evidence that recognition and categorization are at stake in the very beginning of an accidental encounter.

## 7. Discussion and Conclusions

In this article we have demonstrated not only the systematicity but also the situatedness and contingency of openings of chance encounters in public space. Our study increases our understanding of how openings of face-to-face encounters are achieved in general, and of how individuals organize sudden, accidental encounters in public space. The article contributes to the former aspect by discussing the fundamental sequential steps into the opening – sighting, identifying and recognizing, stopping, greeting, and building differentiated participation frameworks for progressing into the encounter – and their multimodal implementation. The article also provides insights into the hitherto neglected latter dimension: it articulates Goffman’s observations on encounters in public space with conversation analytic contributions on the sequential, categorical, and micro-temporal methodic organization of “vehicular units,” “civil inattention,” and “focused interactions” in a way that maximizes their mutual contributions. It discusses similarities and differences between STR-encounters, in which a party addresses an itinerary request to passers-by, and ACQ-encounters, in which the arrangement of a transient sociability is at stake. In STR-encounters, parties prepare the upcoming encounter by identifying, on the basis of social categorization, potentially knowledgeable passers-by: selecting a prospective interactant goes hand in hand with excluding other passers-by. In other words, parties previously decide with which “other” they initiate an encounter. This option is also available to persons sighting an acquaintance: they may indeed choose *not* to engage in focused interaction. Hence, overtly displaying recognition is the alternative possibility to “ignoring” in ACQ-encounters. This article, hence, provides a deeper understanding of the organizational qualities of encounters (practices for identification, recognition, and categorization; uses of greetings and how-are-yous; prominence and secondariness of the reason for the encounter). It highlights the importance of vision and the visibility of features for the organization of social interaction in public space, especially in terms of the categorization of (both acquainted and unacquainted) others and the display of social categories and relationships through (reciprocal) positioning and stepping aside. It also shows how third parties can witness and monitor what happens in finely-tuned ways, consequently readjusting their trajectories – thereby providing an original, situated perspective on the encounter. By offering a conversation analytic account of practices in public space – a terrain which remains largely uncharted given the difficulty of video-recording such unforeseeable and contingent events – this study illustrates key features of openings of chance encounters, which are sensibly different from what we observe in other types of interactions, and which require more

interactional work. For instance, the beginning of an encounter is rather straightforward in a telephone call (or even in a situation in which one party enters the territory of another party), but remains a challenging question in public space, in which the approach between two vehicular units can be initiated simultaneously by both but also unilaterally by one party, who is asymmetrically monitoring (or even surveilling) the other. We have shown that the boundaries of social interactions are not clear-cut and that preparatory moves can impinge more or less importantly on the very initial moments of the encounter. Moreover, openings in public space allow us to revisit the notions of “recognition” and “identification,” which are sometimes used indistinctly, but which our analyses prove to be distinct (although interrelated) concepts, playing a fundamental role in the casual interactions analyzed for this article – not only for the researcher, but most importantly for the participants themselves, for whom recognizing, identifying, and categorizing are practical problems, both in STR-encounters and in ACQ-encounters. They are made visible, and, hence, relevant when people orient to some co-present person as an imminently relevant co-participant, while, at the same time, displaying themselves as emerging co-participants. In this respect, the interplay between identification, recognition, and categorization not only combines Goffman’s, Sacks’s, and Schegloff’s work, but also casts light on fundamental practices for the establishment of sociality.

Public space is key in the social sciences for conceptualizing sociality in modern urban contexts. Remarkably, by initiating the encounter in specific ways, the participants also categorize the kind of “public space” in which they are navigating. Approaching passers-by while at the same time articulating the reason for the approach (rather than greetings) is what can happen in a publicly accessible, urban space, populated by innumerable co-present individuals (whereas an itinerary request taking place between parties crossing paths in the countryside is likely to be initiated differently). Similarly, producing emphatic openings as a display of recognition is one way in which participants celebrate, among other things, their being in the same place at the same time, possibly going about the same activities (e.g. shopping in the supermarket) – i.e. their navigating in an area in which bumping into an acquaintance is possible, and more or less likely. Hence, this article shows how participants orient to different kinds of “public space” precisely in the opening of the encounters, highlighting the relevance of micro-sequentiality and multimodality in the current debate on public spaces.

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### **Transcription conventions**

Talk is transcribed following Gail Jefferson’s conventions. Embodied actions are transcribed according to Lorenza Mondada’s conventions for multimodal transcription: ([https://franz.unibas.ch/fileadmin/franz/user\\_upload/redaktion/Mondada\\_conv\\_multimodality.pdf](https://franz.unibas.ch/fileadmin/franz/user_upload/redaktion/Mondada_conv_multimodality.pdf))

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