Closer to far away: transcending the spatial in transnational families’ online video calling

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## Sample

Children aged 3–9 in three transnational and multilingual families residing in China with their adult relatives located in Europe.

## Implications For Stakeholders About

Researchers

# Abstract

This paper studies how transnational children and their distantly located but emotionally close family members recreate their relationship using applications for online video calling. The focus is on the interaction of bodies and language, and if/how proximity of any kind is enabled. A critical posthumanist applied linguistics is embraced and communication is viewed as a bodily coordination ocurring in real time. This includes a material and dynamic view of language in constant transformation. Video captures are produced with three transnational, multilingual families in China and their adult relatives residing abroad (Europe). Moment analysis informs the processing of data. The analysis includes multipart semiotic assemblages of critical/creative moments and applies the Deleuzian concept of sense. The results suggest, the multi-local analogue/digital situation in online calling transcends conventionally imagined spatial ‘boundaries’. Furthermore, a bodily, multisensory proximity emerge as simultaneously critical to and created by this transcending spatiality. Multi-local communicative practices shed light on the multiple, material and semiotic components of the human senses, and how a rational understanding of proximity might be twisted. Proximity constantly emerges ‘in new copies' transcending the far away and close.

# Outcome

"[C]onventional language and a rooted understanding of binary spatial categories (here as opposed to there; far away in contrast to close; absent and not present; virtual as definitely not real) functions poorly to describe how communication occurs and transforms in OVC. Rather, the different categories need to be rethought of as overlapping segments of a spatial continua when bodies and expressions appear multilocally: both here and there at the same time; absent, while also present; virtual as well as real; uncomfortably far away but at once closer than ever. The mundane, everyday normality by which the call events appear alongside this ‘alternative’ spatiality and multilocality, shows, we argue, spatiality being never so much about fixed positions and boundaries, but more of a dynamic phenomenon with differing conventions. Furthermore, the bodily, multisensory and to great extent non-verbal engagement of the call-events is emphasised." (Authors, in concluding section)