Ticket-to-Talk-Television: Designing for the circumstantial nature of everyday social interaction

Marcus Sanchez Svensson  
Blekinge Institute of Technology  
Box 520  
37225 Ronneby, Sweden  
+46457385000  
msn@bth.se

Tomas Sokoler  
IT University of Copenhagen  
Rued Langgards vej 7  
2300 Copenhagen, Denmark  
+4572185174  
sokoler@itu.dk

ABSTRACT
In this paper we discuss a particular perspective on interactivity and sociability in the design of new TV technologies for social interaction. We will argue that current research on Social TV builds on a too narrow conception of interaction in everyday social life. In consequence, rather than turning the TV media itself into an arena for peer-to-peer synchronous interaction amongst TV viewers we will discuss the idea of Social TV as a resource that when part of a larger socio-material fabric can help accommodate the circumstantial nature of social interactions as they emerge and play out on a moment-to-moment basis throughout everyday life beyond the TV screens. We take the phenomenon of ticket-to-talk as our point of departure when analyzing observations made during a study of the ways senior citizens go about socializing in everyday face-to-face situations. We then discuss how this analysis in combination with a series of design-oriented workshops with a group of senior citizens, have guided the design of our Ticket-to-Talk-Television example concept. We will reflect upon the overall approach as well as the design activities that were undertaken in relation to the concept developed.

Categories and Subject Descriptors
H5.m. Information interfaces and presentation (e.g., HCI): Miscellaneous.

General Terms
Design, Human Factors, Theory

Keywords
Senior citizens, social interaction, ambiguity, interaction design, social television

Permission to make digital or hard copies of all or part of this work for personal or classroom use is granted without fee provided that copies are not made or distributed for profit or commercial advantage and that copies bear this notice and the full citation on the first page. To copy otherwise, or republish, to post on servers or to redistribute to lists, requires prior specific permission and/or a fee.

NordICHI 2008: Using Bridges, 18-22 October, Lund, Sweden  
Copyright 2008 ACM ISBN 978-1-59593-704-9. $5.00

1. INTRODUCTION
In the past few years we have witnessed how the character, development and use of systems and technologies have changed in many areas of technology. In both popular press and in academic forums, there is an interesting debate about how new emerging technologies will change people’s everyday activities and how these new technologies are put into use. It is recognized, for example, how the introduction of new media technology is changing the ways in which people will listen to music, watch television, and engage in the organization, distribution and sharing of this media. Interestingly, the design, deployment and use of these technologies seem to call for a reconsideration of conventional concepts such as “user”, “designer” and “interactivity” [19, 14]. It has recently been suggested that we need to understand the design and use of technology as the materialization of emerging relationships between people and artifacts as part of ongoing socio-material practices [19]. In this paper we would like to discuss how we have encountered related issues in the development of television technology to become a resource for extended socialites among groups of people – known as Social Television (Social TV). In this discussion we argue for a particular perspective on interactivity and sociability that we believe takes into account an important aspect of how people would be able and willing to use and recognize technology for such social and interactional purposes. As such, this paper seeks to frame an otherwise somewhat abstract and theoretical discussion of overall concepts describing the relationship between emerging social practices and the design of new technologies, within the specifics of a concrete design project. We like to think that both our reflections on how the abstract concepts are grounded, by example, within the concrete, as well as our specific suggestions on how to rethink the design for social TV are valuable contributions to the discourse on where to take the design for human interaction with digital technology.

2. BACKGROUND: SOCIAL TELEVISION
It is widely recognized that new television technology will change the ways in which people watch television and use TV technology for various social and practical purposes. One such relatively new technology is the Internet Protocol TeleVision (IPTV) platform. When IPTV is promoted the selling points are most often expressed as an appraisal of a more individualized TV experience such as Video-On-Demand, Time shifted TV-viewing, advanced onscreen information about your favorite shows, and in general,
new ways for you to plan your own personal TV night across time and channels. While these all are fascinating new possibilities concerning personalization of the TV-watching experience, the technology of IPTV even makes new and more community-oriented social experiences possible. Using the Internet as backbone, IPTV basically sits on top of a ‘peer-to-peer’ network. As such, IPTV not only enables the exchange of data between a TV content provider and a TV viewer but even allows for interaction and exchange of data between individual TV viewers. IPTV thereby readily relates to the notion of interconnected homes/living rooms, the virtual sharing of experiences within a community of TV viewers, and in general the electronic mediation of social interaction across geographical distance. However, these opportunities raise the question about what kind of openings for social interaction IPTV can, should and will enable.

Looking to research on the notion of social TV it seems to be implied that there is willingness or maybe even a desire amongst TV viewers to turn the serene ‘lean-back’ experience of watching TV into a ‘lean-forward’ activity emphasizing the synchronous interaction between the inhabitants of interconnected living rooms. One excellent example, among others [4, 20], of this move towards ‘lean-forward’ TV experiences, is Alcatel’s AmigoTV [2, 13] that takes advantage of the full potential of the triple play platform to enable a more interactive and engaging TV experience – an experience that to some extend resembles the kind of experience that one finds in online gaming. The Amigo system enables synchronous communication amongst group members watching the same TV channel and hence, revolves around the notion of remote presence and a highly dynamic and intensive interaction between group members as they exchange comments on the TV content they are currently watching. The opportunity to engage TV viewers in virtually shared experiences across electronically connected living rooms is intriguing. It is not clear, however, that turning TV viewers into participants in an almost game-like setup is an appropriate way of enabling social interaction for all groups of viewers. In fact, as we will discuss, in our studies of the potential use of IPTV as a resource for social interaction we identified strong concerns regarding this radical change of the TV watching experience and the ways in which it builds on a rather simplified conception of interactivity and sociability.

While most research in the realm of Social TV focus on direct forms of interaction and sociability there are a number of important exceptions, interesting studies and examples showing how television can be a resource for less direct so

interaction within a local neighborhood. Our study was driven by a series of observations and visits at three senior housing facilities and a design-oriented approach involving the creation of and evaluation of a series of design sketches. During these visits we had the opportunity to conduct interviews with people in their own homes including being guided through the facilities. We interviewed both people on organizational level and ten elderly people living in the facilities we visited. We supported our observations of everyday interactions with the writings and observations of others [7, 8, 9, 17, 20]. The research and developmental work was undertaken in collaboration with partners from university, industry, city council and general public. The purpose of our project was to support and contribute to a larger initiative concerned with developing digital products and services for senior citizens using broadband-network.

In the following we will point out how this study has guided the way we approach the design of Social TV - an approach that builds on the ways in which people take advantage of the circumstantial nature of everyday activities in social interactions throughout daily life. We will describe how we through our home visit observations and design work was reminded about how strong the concern is among people for maintaining a social image in the encounters with others and the challenges it entails for the design of technology supporting social relations. We will reflect upon the overall approach as well as the evaluation activities that were undertaken in relation to an example concept developed.

3. ANALYSING THE INTERACTIONAL AND THE SOCIAL

We wish to begin our examination by discussing a particular analytical orientation to an understanding of social interaction and sociability influenced by ideas and ways of thinking about the individual in the social world found in the writings of influential social thinkers such as Harold Garfinkel [6], Erving Goffman [7], and Harvey Sacks [17]. We believe that this analytical orientation may have an impact on how we can think about and develop television technology as a resource for social engagement. Our observation is that the phenomenon of sociability and interactivity as referred to in the development and discussions of Social TV so far has tended to be characterized as something already in place and “just happening” in a social encounter. However, when considering how people, as members of a community, actually reason about and manage their social life it becomes evident that people engage in and contribute to a more subtle and emerging form of social interaction – a kind of interaction that builds both on the assumptions that people make of each other and situations they find themselves in and on the everyday procedures of recognizing and subtly displaying and managing such understandings. We will argue that we need to view social relations and moments of social encounters as emergent, managed and made to happen appropriately and practically for whatever purposes it may entail for the participants rather than something that is already in place and that can be assumed to happen when turning on your television to engage with friends and family. As everyone knows, for many people it involves some deliberations over when and what to say when calling a friend in the evening or whose door to knock when you need an ingredient for cooking or just want to meet up to have a chat about things. Is it too late?
Maybe they are watching the news or their favorite sitcom? What would we talk about?

Let us consider some observations from our study of senior housing communities to begin highlight some of the subtle but mundane ways in which people reason about and manage their social life. One of the central observations in our study of the everyday social encounters between people, including situations where people avoided contact, was how people put a great deal of effort into managing appearances and the social image of themselves and others. This relates to what Goffman [7, 9] has described as ‘impression management’ and ‘face-work’:

“The term face may be defined as the positive value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact. Face is an image of self delineated in terms of approved social attributes – albeit an image that others may share, as when a person makes a good showing for his profession or religion by making a good showing of himself … By face-work I mean to designate the actions taken by a person to make whatever he is doing consistent with face. Face-work serves to counteract “incidents” – that is, events whose effective symbolic implications threaten face. Thus poise is one important type of face-work, for through poise the person controls his embarrassment and hence the embarrassment that he and others might have over his embarrassment … Each person, subculture, and society seems to have its own characteristic repertoire of face-saving practices” ([8], p. 5-12)

One of the most central ideas of this is the way in which people maintain particular appearances and sustain and manipulate the definition of situations in which they find themselves. In his writings Goffman develops a discussion about impression management – how people fashion themselves and engineer convincing appearances to give others appropriate and relevant impressions of themselves in particular situations. While admitting that there is a distinction between the person and the role a person has in particular situations, and that individuals cannot control all information about themselves, Goffman argues that people often distance themselves from some of the activities, events and roles in which they are involved to “[sustain] a definition of the situation that is stable and consistent with his image of himself” ([8], p. 104).

In our study of the everyday life in senior housing communities we noticed many of these aspects of managing a social world in common with others. Even though senior housing communities are not much different to other social establishments, it revealed itself to us as a fascinating arena for understanding how people manage social engagements. The people living there were a diverse group with different backgrounds and interests who are in a stage of life that in no way can be characterized as a well-defined final state only defined by age. Some of those who have moved into these living facilities are maybe still working, some getting ready to retire and some already retired, some living alone and some living with a partner. This element of diversity combined with the ongoing process of aging appeared to us as an additional social attribute that people are experiencing and dealing with on an everyday basis in interaction with others.

Among other observations, we noticed how people reasoned about themselves and others in relation to such ordinary and concrete aspects of life as how they dressed, how they exercised, how the played card:

“I discovered that I did not fit in. One man told me: 'You are walking to fast, it is impossible to talk to you'. At another time, I had jogging shoes and someone looked at me from top to toe. People do not like my because I am active.”

“My neighbors are well-dressed when taking the garbage out”

“I play bridge in town. I do not want to participate here because they are professionals. They play cards, they do not speak”

As can be noticed in the way people described these matters, they were very much deriving from occasions people had experienced in the past and encounters they felt bad about and tried to avoid.

Another important issue we came across was the issue of loneliness – a majority of people in the senior housing communities we visited was living on their own. It seems almost unavoidable that the stage of life when deciding to retire and maybe move to a new place will involve issues of loneliness. People who have lost their partner may also have lost contact with family members and old friends. The issue seemed to be not only that people are living alone and in some cases are feeling lonely, but that loneliness is something people do not explicitly talk about and something they do not want to be associated with because it is experienced as a particular social identity or individual character/attribute that singles out him/her as negatively different in relation to others in the community. We learned that many people are perfectly fine being alone and living on their own but appear to be more concerned with the social image of them as being sad and lonely – an image that people do not want to participate in conveying and that sometimes leads to people hiding
and disengaging from social relations (figure 1).

Everyday problems like these were, of course, dealt with in various implicit and explicit ways. One of the ways in which we have seen how community areas are dealing with problems of loneliness and disengaged social relations is to create and sustain an active social environment involving community dinners and interest groups. However, again we learned that formally arranged community dinners for singles or being invited as a single to couples-only dinners are often filled with anxiety and shame because people do not simply want to be associated with these aspects – it may be embarrassing for everyone if a particular situation or social status becomes the topic of discussion:

“It is not easy being on your own and getting to know new people. One of the reasons is that around here only couples meet couples. Couples never appear very often at the social gatherings. It would be awkward being invited to such an event as an individual without a partner.”

In general, we must realize that interactions in social gatherings are not simply a stabilized structure of relations and roles but an emerging enterprise of actions and appearances that are recognized and displayed in the co-presence of individuals and temporary interactions. We have tried to give a brief sense of the ways in which this involves a great deal of work on the part of people participating in these social gatherings. A more detailed analysis of the interaction would reveal more about the ways in which the interactants use various techniques and aspects of activities to make contact, control impressions and strategically manage the conduct of others.

We would now like to turn to a slightly different observation made during our study. As we conducted our investigation we came across more subtle forms or ritual element of making contact and manage social relations with others. We discovered that there are ways in which people find openings for social interaction that helps them avoid losing their face and be singled out because of their identity or particular social situation. What we noticed was the importance of creating openings for social interaction as an integrated part of everyday activities. For example, one of the social events that many people talk about with great joy in one of the senior housing communities we visited is the gardening activity. For many, gardening is not only something they like to do because they enjoy growing flowers and plants - garden lots are places for meeting your neighbors. Gardening opens opportunities to meet people while exchanging plants and equipment. It is a place where other people pass by on their daily walk, which may involve a rest on a nearby bench and perhaps a brief conversation with the gardeners or other bystanders. This was particularly evident to us in the ways in which one lady talked about the marvelous flower she grows every summer and how everyone wants to come and have a look. For her, and in particular for others, the business of growing the Hibiscus can be an opening for talking with another person - between the gardener and the admirer or between admirers of the growing flower:

“We sometimes meet at the garden lots. We exchange plants, borrow equipment, and people stop by asking ‘what kind of flowers is that’?"

“The garden lots are very social. There is a bench near the lots where people sit, watch and talk; very social!”

This way of engaging socially in relation to everyday activities, events and concerns involved similar activities such as exchanging newspaper or regularly chatting about yesterday’s television program:

“I usually pay regular visit at an old ladies apartment; just to check that everything is alright. In return, on her regular walks, she picks up the newspaper and hands it to me - she does not want to be indebted to me.”

“Yesterday, I told my neighbors that they should watch a particular television program. We give each other tips. But we do not want to meet up to watch television together. We want to keep that part private. But we love to talk about it”

Interestingly, these activities or routines, in particular that of swapping newspapers, seemed to be concerned with and orientation to the importance of being noticed and notice others. Confirming the presence/existence of others and (re)-establishing the fact that everything seems to be as usual was often expressed as being a very important part of the daily routines amongst our interviewees. However, the existing ways of doing so were not expressed as activities with the explicit purpose of checking in on each other but expressed as part of some other activity like pseudo chance-encounters on the daily tour (figure 2), the daily swapping of news papers in the afternoon, or other daily routines where it was kept unsaid but quite evident that the routines to a large extend really was about reconfirming that people in your network of friends where doing all right.

These observations made us turn to the writing of Harvey Sacks [17]. He talks about the ways in which everyday activities, events, and objects such as going on a walk, the daily swapping of newspaper or doing gardening provide the possibility of a ‘ticket-to-talk’. He makes the observation that people do not tend to start talking to people they are unacquainted with unless there are legitimate circumstances which provide an excuse or a basis for opening a conversation. Sacks writes about the ways in which the dog, when walking the dog in the park, or as in our example, the Hibiscus when growing flowers and doing gardening, is a ‘ticket’ to start having a conversation with people who they are previously unacquainted without it being treated as an unwelcome advance. We believe that the ways in which people present themselves and interact with others in everyday life builds on an inherent ambiguity of intentions and purposeful actions. People tend to say and do things less explicitly in order to save them from embarrassments and give room for managing their own appearance in the face of others [7, 9]. We are arguing here that many everyday activities in public or semi-public places provide opportunities for social interaction due to the ambiguities and unspoken non-explicit intentions inherent to those activities. We have observed how people embrace this ambiguity of situations, actions and meanings to make contact without revealing actual intents and thereby seek to avoid potential embarrassments or uncertainty about how the encounter will develop. This view on the circumstantial nature of social interaction and the phenomenon
of ‘ticket-to-talk’ have informed our way of thinking about how television technology can become a resource for the sociability among groups of older adults.

4. TOWARDS DESIGN – THE TICKET-TO-TALK-TELEVISION CONCEPT

Entering the field of ‘designing for senior citizens’ we immediately identified a tremendous yet to be explored potential, for digital technology that can support the social and emotional aspects of growing older. While much existing technology for this part of life is directed towards health care and in general helping the seniors live independent lives despite of reduced physical abilities we early on decided to direct our explorations to the design for social well-being and the independence that comes from being part of a strong social network within your local neighborhood. Furthermore, we wanted to induce a change of perspective on senior citizens in our design – a change from the notion that design for senior citizens as per definition equals the design for patients. Rather than looking at senior citizens as patients we wanted to nourish the much broader notion of senior citizens as a highly diverse group of people who in many cases have decided to leave the labor market not because they were force to by health problems but because they wanted to, and not the least were able to, due to their savings in retirement funds. This in turn points to a change from the traditional task oriented focus on the needs and requirements of senior citizens to a much broader notion of designing for the wishes and aspirations held by senior citizens, not as a homogenous group of patients in need of care, but as mature and diverse group of citizens entering a third stage of life full of opportunities.

While the homes and lives of the senior citizens we visited obviously were very different they had at least one thing in common – the TV as a central piece of furniture in the living room and TV watching as a much enjoyed activity at night. In general, our interviewees talked about the hours spend watching TV in positive terms as a time of relaxation - ‘curling up on the couch’ with TV as company.

With the perspective on senior citizens outlined above in mind, our observations made during home visits, and taking the everyday phenomena of “ticket-to-talk” as our analytical perspective, we set out to develop an example concept in the area of social TV. Through this example concept we wanted to explore how the activity of TV watching could be turned into a potential ticket-to-talk – a resource of information about the state of affairs within a community that may help turn a casual encounter into an opening for social interaction. In the following sections we will discuss how our example concept of Ticket-to-Talk-TV seeks to meet this challenge. Furthermore, we will discuss the design process and how the concept touches upon general questions regarding the design and use of digital technology in emerging social-material practices.

4.1 Early sketches of a remote control

As discussed above it is not clear how IPTV and the so-called triple-play platform for the combined delivery of data, voice, and video over broadband networks can be designed to accommodate the specific challenges of managing social engagement in the everyday life of elderly people. Moving from home visits and observation towards the early phases of design the main question guiding our efforts was the question of how to turn the everyday activity of TV watching activity into a ticket-to-talk – a supplementary resource that may or may not be drawn upon as an opening for social interaction.

We moved forward by the means of a series of workshops involving a group of seniors as well as representatives from industry and local government. When setting up the workshops we deliberately took into consideration that the idea of having digital technology take on the role as tickets-to-talk is very different from the more prevalent understanding of digital technology as task oriented systems and tools.

Hence, in this first part of our meeting with the group of senior citizens our aim was simply to introduce the notion of ticket-to-talk. Based on our observations we gave a brief presentation of our previous study and in particular the ways in which people seems to exploit everyday activities, and their inherent qualities or characteristics as more informal openings and opportunities for social interaction.

We then asked the participants to bring forward and reflect, with no specific technology in mind, on everyday situations that came to their minds as ticket-to-talk situations (figure 3). The outcome was a range of different examples of situations, occasions, and activities that the participants recognized as providing opportunities for more informal and spontaneous interaction with other people, including: Grocery shopping, elevator ride, standing in a queue, hospital waiting rooms, park benches, washing room etc. In this way, having introduced the notion of tickets-to-talk as a phenomenon now recognized by the seniors as playing an important role in everyday informal interaction with friends and
neighbors in the local neighborhood we were ready to introduce some of the technological possibilities brought forward by IPTV.

Moving towards IPTV technology and to help bridge the gap between the phenomena of ticket-to-talk and the idea of turning TV watching into such a ticket we introduced two design artifacts. Inspired by Buxton [1] and his way of distinguishing between prototypes and sketches we will talk about the design artifacts we brought to the workshops as sketches. Buxton points out how sketching is a fundamental design activity where the design artifacts produced – the sketches – are characterized by how they by intent emphasizes the evocative rather than didactic nature of design artifacts in the early stages of a design process. We find that the notion of sketches is highly appropriate for the intent we had when bringing the artifacts to the workshops. The sketches presented at the workshops - a sketch on paper and a hardware sketch using off-the-shelf technology (figure 4 and 5) – were meant to help stimulate conversation on how TV watching and TV technology may be turned into a ticket-to-talk. More specifically the sketches in each their way brought forward the functionality of an IPTV remote control. We will talk about the concept sketched as the ‘PresenceRemote’ (PR).

Referring to our observations and the notion of ‘face-work’, and as we will discuss further, the PR as a concept seeks to embrace the kind of ambiguity and un-explicitness that people already experience and take advantage of in face to face social interactions. Hence, we wanted to sketch a kind of technology and interaction that allows people to leave their intentions of use unarticulated and thereby, avoid the demand for explicitness that we so often experience when using digital technology. In terms of design this implies a rather eccentric challenge of seeking to bring forward a technology that even though it is meant to bring people together and support social engagement it cannot reveal that this is why people would use it. Moving further into the details of the PR it is important not to confuse our suggestion to leave room for unarticulated intentions of use with a lack of explicitness in the concrete interaction between humans and digital technology. Our goal is to leave room for multiple interpretations as to why a person would choose to use a particular technology but not as to how the technology is to be operated.

Below follows a brief description of the PR as it was introduced at the workshops.

4.1.1 The Presence Remote
The PR is basically a TV remote control with the addition of a colour display and three extra buttons. The PR makes it possible for you to notice others and be noticed within your community as you watch TV (figure 4 and 5).

Below follows a brief description of the PR functionality:

- When the PR is OFF it works as your ordinary TV remote control with no extra functionality and no information about TV activities, yours or others, flowing to or from the PR.
- The ‘Take me to the most popular channel button’ is a simple push button that takes you to the channel currently watched by the majority of people within your community with their PRs turned ON.
- When your PR is ON the PR display and the functionality offered depends on whether your TV is ON or OFF. If your TV is OFF the display shows a pulsating red color indicating how many people in your community has their TV turned ON. Hence, you may notice the community TV activity as you walk by the PR even when your TV is OFF. This may in turn lead you to turn on your TV on and press the ‘take me to the most popular channel’ button.
- When your PR as well as your TV is ON the PR display will show the names of those of your buddies that currently have their TV and PR turned ON. We referred to this mode as ‘Buddy Mode’. When in Buddy Mode the PR will display the names of your buddies watching TV. It will however not display which channel(s) the buddies are watching. We imagine that the Buddies available to the PR are a subset of the people that you already decided to include in your list of contacts on your cell phone.
Finally, the transition from noticing that a Buddy of yours is watching TV to actually establishing contact is done by a handover to your cell phone. Handover meaning that you select your Buddy on the list of active buddies displayed on the PR and by pressing the ‘Handover to cell phone button’ the PR (using Bluetooth for example) sends the Buddy ID to your cell phone. The cell phone in turn now enables you to make a regular call or send a SMS whichever you find more appropriate.

Figure 5. A hardware sketch of the PresenceRemote using off-the-shelf technology

4.1.2 Design Rationale

With the PR we want allow people to leave it unarticulated whether they in fact are watching TV as an excuse to meet others. First, by design, having and using a PR should not be perceived by others as an invitation but rather as a way of saying: ‘I have a PR, and like other people in this community, I don’t mind that you know that my TV is on’. Second, by design, when in Buddy mode it is not possible to distinguish whether a) you are looking for company b) you are simply watching TV or c) both! Also, if you do not show up on your buddies PR display there is no way for them to know whether this is due to a) your TV is off or b) you have chosen to watch TV ‘in secret’.

We choose not to reveal the channel watched by buddies. By not displaying the choice of channel we serve some obvious privacy concerns but just as important by not making the channel explicit we seek to bring forward openings for conversation. We speculate that this mode will stimulate communication along the lines of conversation starters such as “what are you watching?” and “is it any good?” or a simple “hi”. That is, conversation starters that seem to be about the TV activity but in fact may be much more about extending a greeting - about noticing others and making oneself noticed. This would indeed resemble a pattern observed during our observations such as the daily swapping of newspapers that we described earlier. In the same way we speculate that simply noticing a Buddy on the PR and letting her notice you may be sufficient for you and her to feel that people caring for you are within reach should something happen. Also, the ‘offer’ made to a person entering a buddy relationship is one of reciprocity in terms of the information that is accessible to you and the information you provide. The PR does not allow lurking on your buddies’ TV activities without, at the same time, giving them a chance to notice you. This of course emphasizes that we are dealing with a relationship between peers.

Furthermore, with the pulsating red color we were looking to serve two different purposes. First, we envisioned that this display of community wide TV activity may provide you with a sense of community belonging even without actually turning on your TV. Second, if combining the activity indicator with the ‘Take me to the most popular channel button’ we speculated that watching the same TV show as the majority of people in your neighborhood could increase the chance to strike up a casual conversation about last nights TV show with people that you run into the next day.

Finally, an important feature of the PR is that it only detects and reports information that is directly related to the single activity of watching TV and by simply turning off the PR all detection and exchange of information regarding your TV activities stops. By strictly tying the information exchanged to a well-defined activity we aim to keep a strong sense of control. Hence, even though we return to many of the same issues and inherent challenges, not the least regarding privacy, that we see in research on systems for remote awareness from the early and mid 1990’s (i.e [16], [3]) we approach these issues differently guided by the notion of a tight coupling between awareness and activity - the conception of awareness as an interactional achievement and a feature of the activities people actually engage in [11].

In general, with our PR we aimed to bring forward a strictly non-techno centric perspective on the role of digital technology emphasizing its role as nothing but one of many resources that in concert may enable openings for social interaction during everyday activities. Thus, emphasizing the emerging and circumstantial rather than preplanned nature of social interaction.

4.1.3 Input from seniors

When discussing how the seniors reacted to the PR it is of course important to point out the ‘sketchy’ nature of the PR. For example, clearly no one would seriously introduce a PDA as complex as the one we used for our sketch if they were asked to produce a prototype of an IPTV remote. However as a sketch the PDA seemed appropriate and in fact proved so judging by the quality of the discussion it spurred. When introducing the PR we made sure to emphasize that it was meant as nothing but a design artifact that should help the seniors and us start talking about how TV technology of the near future could relate to the phenomenon of ‘ticket-to-talk’. While introducing the PR we would pass it around and have the seniors comment on the overall idea rather than the actual look and feel. This took place while sitting in the living room of an experiment apartment equipped with a commercial flat-screen TV actually displaying content that was delivered using an IPTV platform (figure 6). Hence, suggesting that the base technology needed to realize the functionality envisioned by our PR was already in place.
In general, the group of seniors willingly played along and started speculating about how a PR would fit into their TV habits and lives in general. The comments and reactions during this session were plenty and as such the PR certainly demonstrated its evocative quality as a sketch. First of all the seniors fully recognized the potential of having a technology like the PR to mediate a sense of belonging and connectedness with neighbors and friends in the local neighborhood. Second, they seemed to implicitly accept that the phenomenon of ticket-to-talk could be accommodated by IPTV technology and that a device with functionality like the PR could be a candidate when looking to move tickets-to-talk across the boundary between activities in the digital and physical.

Besides the positive recognition of the concept the seniors expressed a wish for stronger mechanisms in support of the coordination of TV activities amongst TV viewers. The seniors pointed to the wish for mechanisms such as: Not only knowing about the current TV-activity but also having some kind of record of earlier TV-watching; the need for ways of planning and coordinating activities or awareness about upcoming television programs; or ways of meeting or having opportunities to engage or get together after rather than during shows and movies.

4.1.4 Meeting with industry

After our design work with the senior citizens we brought our sketches to a meeting with a company providing middleware systems for the development of custom designed IPTV portals. Our intentions were to investigate how the idea of ticket-to-talk-television would find its place within the industry vision of future TV technologies and practices surrounding TV watching.

In our discussions with the company it became clear that their vision of future TV watching was centered around the move away from today’s synchronized collective mode of TV watching (people are watching a particular program are watching it at the same time) towards a much more diverse and dynamic asynchronous mode putting the individual TV viewer in a state of almost complete control of ‘when and how to watch what’. This development is interesting to observe given the ways in which TV, as a mass medium, for long has constituted an important resource for social engagement – almost as a campfire around which people, in particular in the Nordic countries, have gathered to talk and tell their stories [15]. To us the challenge is to further explore how TV can continue to act as a resource for social interactions despite this development towards the individualization of TV watching.

4.1.5 Synthesizing expectations and suggestions

We have begun a renewed round of sketching trying to synthesize the three lines of expectations and suggestions that we have met in our work so far: 1) Suggestions made by the seniors to expand/improve the functionality of the PresenceRemote; 2) The more overall technologically driven expectations of a move towards an individualization of the TV watching experience put forward by industry; and 3) Our own academic interests and inclinations toward the design of digital technology that thrives on and supports the circumstantial nature of everyday social interactions. At first, these different expectations and suggestions introduce an apparent tension between the move towards individualization and an idea of designing television technology for sociability. However, we speculate/suggest, that we can resolve this tension by redefining what we mean by the TV watching activity, to have this activity include entirely new elements that a) takes advantage of the new possibilities presented by IPTV and b) allows us to piggyback on this new activity in accordance with the overarching Ticket-To-Talk perspective on enabling openings for social interaction that guides our work. By including these we believe that we at the same time can reward the suggestions, made by the senior citizens during our workshop, to include mechanism allowing for the coordination and planning of TV activities amongst a group of peers.

As an initial result from this process of synthesization across stakeholder expectations we have, for now, identified three new elements in the TV watching activity of the future that we would like to explore further:

- Noting: the ability to make notations as part of the TV-watching. This could include tagging favorite programs or channels and saving different kinds of bookmarks tied to the activity of watching TV.
- Planning: the ability to engage in different planning activities such as the making of play lists as the basis for inviting neighbors to join you and the possibilities of theme nights in your neighborhood.
- Sharing: the ability to share information and materials collected or generated through the activities ofnoting and planning.

We are particularly interested in exploring how the element of sharing may create openings for social interaction in ways that are congruent with our concept of Ticket-to-Talk-Television – that is, if and how emerging practices of sharing would create opportunities for openings to engage with other people through the activities of planning and making notations.
For now, these ideas are merely speculations to be further explored and following the general argument put forward in the paper we believe it to be important that we recognize, as a premise, for the kind of design we are exploring that it by no means is clear exactly what kind of social interaction may emerge as activities of noting, planning and sharing are made possible and may become part of the everyday routine of TV watching: What kind of tickets-to-talk may grow as part of TV watching in the future?

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

One of the most important contributions to Human-Computer Interaction during recent years has been the re-conceptualization of human-computer interaction as a social phenomenon and its consequence for system design. Recently, there have been a couple of more substantive and extended attempts to suggest alternative perspective on how to think about system design [19, 14, 5]. These important ideas have in common, though in very different ways, a general argument about the necessity to view the design and use of technology as an everyday social and practical activity in which social and material elements are contingently being reconfigured, recognized and made at home in everyday practices. The reflection upon the potential development of television technology as a medium for social interaction in senior housing communities raise issues that we believe may have bearing on this longstanding concern with the social and technical in human-computer interaction and system design. In summary we believe our contributions are twofold.

First, we demonstrate by observation and example how a particular analytical and theoretical approach to the understanding of social interaction and the relationship between the social and the material plays out in a concrete design project – an approach that takes into account the emergent and circumstantial nature of interaction. In our study of the ways senior citizens go about socializing in everyday face-to-face situations the phenomenon of ticket-to-talk became a point of departure for our thinking about a system for social interaction. We made the observation that people orientates to the circumstantial nature of everyday activities, such as growing the marvellous flower, reading the daily newspaper or seeing the popular television show, as a resource for opening a social encounter – a ‘ticket-to-talk’ [17]. In turn, this analytical observation influenced our thinking on how a technology or material construction of some kind could provide a similar resource for social interaction. For us, this became a challenge of designing a technological resource that did not explicit support the interaction but only provided the conditions or circumstances for the maintenance of appropriate subject-subject relations in and through implicit uses of the technology. In order to accomplish this we came to suggest the following: firstly, to embrace the ambiguity of intentions that seems to be inherent to many everyday activities; secondly, to piggyback on the everyday activity as a way of accomplishing the embracing of ambiguity; and thirdly, to rely on people’s social and practical intelligence in view of digital technology as one resource among others in emerging socio-material practices.

Second, being very concrete, we suggest by demonstration how the notion of ticket-to-talk can inform the design of Social TV and by doing so take the development of new TV experiences in a direction very different from the idea of a ‘lean-forward’ mode of social interaction across interconnected living rooms through the television screen. Rather than turning the TV media itself into an arena for peer-to-peer synchronous interaction amongst TV viewers we have discussed the idea of Social TV as a resource that when part of a larger socio-material fabric can help accommodate the circumstantial nature of social interactions as they emerge and play out on a moment-to-moment basis throughout everyday life beyond the TV screens. We sketched an idea of how to take advantage of the IPTV platform as a supplementary source of background information about community activities – information that the members may choose to make use of alongside the many other resources that can serve as openings for social interaction as they occur throughout everyday life within communities of senior citizens. Our reference group of senior citizens acknowledged that such a technological environment can help turn information on the otherwise invisible activity of watching TV into a resource for social engagement – a “ticket-to-talk” - without overstepping the boundaries of privacy and most important without having the use of this technology stigmatize them as lonely individuals craving the company of others.

When looking into the future the next stage of our research we would attempt identifying services and applications that could support the emergence of social relations among senior citizens exploiting new technologies and practices of watching television. This would involve continued discussions with service and application developers and service providers. In the first stage, this would a move from sketches to prototypes as the next embodiment that can help us induce a dialogue with developers and service providers. We would then set up and engage in an experiment or evaluation of new ideas and prototypes. One way of getting good results from the evaluation is to set up a large-scale experiment in which several seniors could test prototypes in more realistic situations and contexts.

6. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to thank everyone at the three senior housing facilities for their willingness to show us around and talk about their conduct and experience of everyday life. We are also grateful to our colleagues at Blekinge Institute of Technology and IT University of Copenhagen for their comments and suggestions during seminars and informal discussions about our work.

7. REFERENCES


