

## **How Reality TV Demands the Body.**

### **Eliciting and Exploiting Emotions in the Staging of Self-Overcoming in *Germany's Next Top Model***

Daniel Klug<sup>1</sup>, Axel Schmidt<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Seminar for Media Studies, University of Basel, 4051 Basel, Switzerland; Daniel.Klug@unibas.ch

<sup>2</sup> Institute for the German Language, 68161 Mannheim, Germany; Axel.Schmidt@ids-mannheim.de

#### **Abstract**

In reality TV, the eliciting of emotions and physical expressions and displays is a key strategy to authenticate represented behavior. We follow a multimodal approach to analyze the eliciting of participants' body reactions and the exploiting of provoked emotions in the German reality show *Germany's Next Top Model*. Here, controllable and staged working situations, such as a catwalk in high altitude, become a mental or physical challenge for the contestants. These challenges trigger uncontrollable affective momentum as the participants must overcome their physical and mental resistance to master the task. We analyze how physical representations are elicited, exploited and applied stage believable images of self-overcoming. The real challenge for the contestant is to regain control of her body and to overcome her fear. Within the staging of authenticity, this illustrates that and how bodily expressions are used to verify mediated events regarding a "claim to 'the real'". The success of the contestants in *Germany's Next Topmodel* and the appeal of the show both highly depend on whether and how the representation of the evoked self-overcoming appears as credible. To achieve this, the proper staging of elicited emotions and corresponding bodily displays is crucial.

#### **Key words**

Reality TV, self-overcoming, claim to the real, bodily displays, eliciting emotions, multimodal approach

## Introduction

As a subject of academic research, reality TV has been discussed regarding realness (Ouellette & Murray, 2009), authenticity (Andrejevic, 2004), and staging (Hill, 2005) since day one. This, to some extent, results in rather paradoxical labellings, such as “Staging the Real” (Kilborn, 2003), “Performing the Real” (Corner, 2002), or “Producing “Reality”” (Hearn, 2014) which, however, illustrate the genre’s most significant feature. Reality TV is generally characterized by the ever-present tension between its documentary claim and the obviously staged nature of presented events. Yet, to distinguish reality TV from mere fictional programs, taking a pragmatic claim to the real appears to be useful. In their introduction to *Understanding Reality Television* (2004), Jermyn & Holmes propose „(...) that what unites the range of programming conceivably described as ‚Reality TV’ is primarily its discursive, visual and technological claim to ‘the real’ (...), the open and explicit sale of television programming as a representation of the real” (p. 5).

Given the fact that reality TV is pursuing a claim to show reality, there is vice versa a need to confirm said claim. This is, in general, achieved by different forms of authentication (Andrejevic, 2004; Hill, 2005; Kavka, 2014; Rasmussen, 2000) and eliciting emotions and corresponding physical expressions and displays, such as tears (Grindstaff, 2002; Dubrofsky, 2009), is a universal and effective practice for doing so. Symptoms of emotional states, for example, facial expressions, bodily postures, or bodily fluids, may function as markers of authenticity to represent physical and mental involvement of a person. These symptoms are, according to our everyday understanding, harder to produce on purpose and thus regarded as indications of a ‘true performance’ (Goffman, 1959).

So, to elicit emotional displays, reality TV producers, especially directors on set, create and stage stressful situations which for the participants of a show are generally difficult to master and therefore lead to strong and uncontrollable emotions. Within those staged situations, combining

carefully staged situational frameworks apt to elicit emotions with rather open interactions<sup>1</sup> solves the tension between documentary claim and pervasive staging.

In the following, using a multimodal extended conversation analysis approach (Deppermann, 2013; Mondada, 2008; Streeck, Goodwin & LeBaron, 2011), we analyze the eliciting of participants' body reactions, and the exploiting of provoked emotions in interactions of the German reality show *Germany's Next Top Model* (ProSieben, 2006–) (in the following: *GNTM*). We focus on the televisual product and the reconstruction of implied readings in sequential analyses of interactions to exemplify how elicited emotions are framed and represented. We do not consider production or perception processes though they provide further useful analytical perspectives.

One general strategy in *GNTM* is to stage situations, such as a catwalk in high altitude or a photo shoot with snakes, which intend to be a challenge for the candidates. The narrative concept of *GNTM* expects contestants to be able to cope with the issues evoked by the staged situation while being framed as a professional working situation within the model business. They are forced to overcome their physical and mental resistance to master the given task. In this way, successful *self-overcoming* is regarded as a key aspect to acquire as well as to demonstrate professionalism and is therefore highly valued within the show. This arrangement creates a dilemma for the contestants: If they refuse the given task, they will appear unprofessional; however, if they are willing to take the challenge, they must overcome their physical and mental resistance.

Overall, the success of the contestants in *GNTM*, as well as the appeal of the show in general, greatly depends on whether and how the representation of the evoked self-overcoming appears to be credible. To achieve this, the proper staging of emotions and bodily displays is crucial because the body and related affective reactions usually imply authenticity. Our main research question, therefore, is: How are bodily expressions and physical representations elicited, exploited and applied to stage believable images of self-overcoming? We are analyzing two scenes from different seasons

---

<sup>1</sup> For example, the fact of a missing dialogue script is an indicator for openness in interactions. Therefore, speech is usually produced spontaneously in own words. Following Goffman (1981a), talking people are animators, authors and principals of their spoken words. In a theatrical sense, the way participants react may be aimed or expected but not preplanned. Spontaneous talk and the basic contingency of events both fundamentally distinguish reality TV formats from fictional ones.

of *GNTM* to present one successful and one failed attempt. All of the depicted narratives of self-overcoming include *key events* of emotional display (for example, outburst of tears, screams of fear) and different forms of *verbal framing* (for example, voice over, comments of the contestant or other persons) of the staged situation which define its meaning. As examples, the two case studies focus on significant individual aspects in the staging of the overall event.

### Case Study I: High-altitude Catwalk

In our first example, taken from *GNTM* season 6 in 2011, contestant Anna-Lena (AL) has to perform a high-altitude catwalk. In this scene, the key events are the bodily display of fear as well as the displayed efforts to overcome fear. Anna-Lena's attempts and her struggle in fulfilling the task are key aspects of representation which are in detail presented in her physical expressions and behavior. At the beginning of this scene, Anna-Lena is in starting position for her catwalk. Here, her strained face and her heavy breathing and gulping indicate fear. She sways her arms back and forth trying to regain her motor skills as she hesitates to move closer to the edge. With a close-up of her facial expressions, the focus changes from the actual catwalk to visual evidence of her inner fight of mentally wanting but physically not being able to step on the catwalk (Fig. 1). In addition, after being instructed by the choreographer (CO) to start the task, her verbal conduct provides yet another account for the initially visually displayed state. Excerpt 1 shows in which way these aspects reinforce the impression of struggling with the task<sup>2</sup>.

---

<sup>2</sup> We illustrate both cases, *catwalk* and *balloon*, using excerpts of the full-scene transcriptions. The *catwalk* scene takes 3.30 minutes consisting of 62 shots, the *balloon* scene takes 2.40 minutes with a total of 40 shots. The transcriptions follow the German GAT 2 convention (Selting et al., 2011) for transcribing verbal parts. Aspects of embodied conduct are transcribed according to multimodal conventions by Mondada (2014). For transcribing audiovisual products and modes of staging (for example, camera angle, music) we followed Keppler (2006). The first column of each transcript indicates the number of the shot and its duration and time interval. Each new line indicates a new and chronologically numbered shot (*shot 1, 2*, etc.). The second column of the transcript specifies and aligns the verbal and the embodied conduct using special characters (\*, %, & etc.). Each verbal unit is given a line number (*line 01, 02*, etc.). The third column indicates the activities of staging and the rough content of the images. The fourth column represents sound, music and/or noise. A full record of used conventions and abbreviations can be found in the appendix of the article.

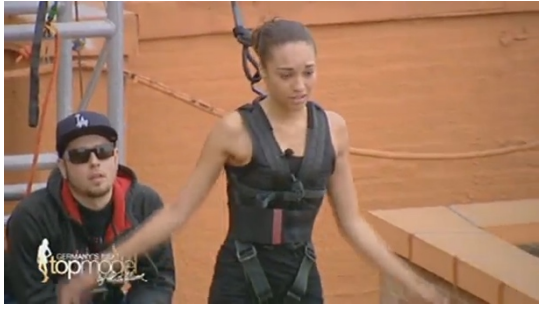


Fig. 1: strained face and loss of balance

Excerpt 1: *I can't do that*

| Shot/<br>Duration                              | Verbal and embodied conduct |  | Image content and<br>televisual staging  | Sound                        |
|--|-----------------------------|--|--|------------------------------|
| <b>06</b><br>2,64 Sec<br>00:11:40-<br>00:14:04 | 12                          | <b>CO</b> <i>*(.) EIne noch-<br/>One more<br/>(0.3)<br/>LAuf;<br/>go<br/>al *strained face ---&gt;</i>                                     | Medium close up/ center of<br>image: <b>AL's face</b>  | Music:<br>tense,<br>dramatic |
|  | 15                          | <b>AL</b> <i>=oh ich KANN das nich mann;*<br/>oh I can't do that<br/>---&gt;*</i>  |  |                              |
| <b>07</b><br>2,8 Sec<br>00:14:04-<br>00:16:84  | 16                          | <b>AL</b> <i>&lt;&lt;weinerlich&gt; das GEHT ni::ch;&gt;<br/>&lt;&lt;tearful&gt;&gt; that's not possible<br/>JA:::,&gt;<br/>yes&gt;</i>    | Long shot, high-angle<br>framing, <b>view from<br/>skyscraper down to the<br/>ground</b> ;<br>Special effects: moving and<br>blurry image,     | Music:<br>tense,<br>dramatic |
|  | 17                          |  |  |                              |
| <b>08</b><br>2,6 Sec<br>00:16:84-<br>00:19:44  | 18                          | <i>* (2.6)<br/>al *holds hand against forehead, strained<br/>face,<br/>eyebrows together</i>   | Medium close up/ AL left<br>side of image  | Music:<br>tense,<br>dramatic |
| <b>09</b><br>1,72 Sec<br>00:19:44-<br>00:21:16 | 19                          | <i>+(1.7)<br/>ml +worried face</i>   | Close-up, center of image:<br><b>ML's face</b>   | Music:<br>tense,<br>dramatic |
| <b>10</b><br>3,12 Sec<br>00:21:16-<br>00:24:28 | 20                          | <b>AL</b> <i>*&lt;&lt;tearful&gt; °hh hh°<br/>*weint<br/>(0.5)<br/>ich KANN das ni::ch*,&gt;<br/>I can't do that<br/>*wipes away tears</i> | Medium close up/ center of<br>image: <b>AL, walks<br/>backwards</b> , camera follows<br>by slightly panning                                    | Music:<br>tense,<br>dramatic |
|  | 21                          |  |  |                              |
|  | 22                          |  |  |                              |
| <b>11</b><br>2,16 Sec<br>00:24:28-<br>00:26:44 | 23                          | <b>AL</b> <i>+&lt;&lt;tearful&gt; m m:::??&gt;<br/>ml +worried face</i>  | Close-up, center of image:<br><b>ML's face</b> , begins to look in<br>the direction of AL, camera<br>follows her glance by slightly<br>panning | Music:<br>tense,<br>dramatic |

The choreographer gives the signal to start (line 12–14) by demanding or even pressuring Anna-Lena to continue another or one last time (*“one more... go”*). However, she does not start to walk, therefore she does not perform as expected, but instead produces a response cry (Goffman, 1981b) (*“oh”*, line 15) followed by several verbal accounts (*“I can't do that”*, lines 15, 16, 22) expressing her inability to master the task. Vocal displays of fear, such as a whiny voice, response

cries, or sighing, as well as gestural (putting her hand against her forehead) and physical displays (heavy breathing, distressed facial expression, tears) pervade her verbal and vocal conduct. Anna-Lena furthermore expands the argumentative foundation for her failure by shifting her accounts from a personal inability (*"I can't do that"*, line 15) to the external quality of the task itself (*"that's not possible"*, line 16). Here, the staging of her attempts to cope with the challenge follows a repetitive pattern: Her *concentration* on managing the task and visible efforts of starting to walk, such as her straight look, her body tension, and her minimal forward movements (Fig. 2), switch to immediate *aborts of the task*. Anna-Lena closes her eyes, lowers her head, and loses her body tension and focus (Fig. 3, 4). These physical actions illustrate how the self-dynamic of the body counteracts the intended action impulse to start walking and how her initial concentration turns into resignation.

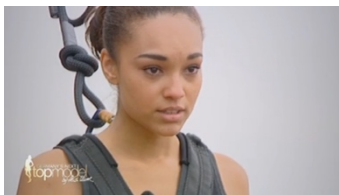


Fig. 2: concentration

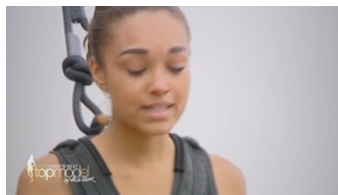
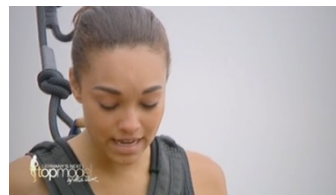


Fig. 3/4: loss of concentration



Throughout the scene, visual depictions of significant bodily reactions serve to authenticate the verbal claims of being afraid and desperate. We can 'see' Anna-Lena's struggling and suffering because she believably delivers a cluster of symptomatologically readable expressions (Fig. 5–7). However, Anna-Lena's visible fight against her physical symptoms and emotions between self-control and losing control of herself is the primary focus of staging. While she stays focused on the task, the staging highlights her attempts to regain control. Many of her gestures indicate that she is trying to hide her current mental and physical state. For example, she tries to suppress her crying with an eager face (Fig. 8), she covers her face (Fig. 9), or she tries to control her breathing (Fig. 10). As another side effect of physical tension, her verbal expressions shift from reasoning with herself to whining, moaning, and to a pressed high-pitched voice, all combined with apparent heavy breathing.



Fig. 5-7: crying, desperation, worrying



Fig. 8-10: suppressed crying, covering face, breathing through pursed lips

Following the dramaturgical concept of *GNTM*, the show (or rather the production) frames and as well adds numerous meanings to the presentation of Anna-Lena's internal fight. Anna-Lena's catwalk scene initially starts with the *voice-over* commentary "*in about sixty meters Anna-Lena's nerves are raw.*" This adds information and specifies visually inaccessible and ambiguous aspects, such as the exact height and the inner state of the contestant. The commentary as well serves as an opener for a story about struggling and self-overcoming. Moreover, the scene alternates between representations of Anna-Lena's struggle and *other people* taking specific stances towards it. The other contestants either appear as co-present participants within the actual situation or in montaged shots, filmed after the catwalk, to give their impressions of this past situation.

Therefore, several other people are involved in Anna-Lena's struggle to master her catwalk challenge as they (verbally) interact with her in different ways. First, the *choreographer*, who is not visible, imperatively signals Anna-Lena to start the walk ("*one more,*" extract 1, line 12). In this situation, his request represents the institutional enforcement because for Anna-Lena not moving would mean failing and refusing to work. Her statements, which, as mentioned above, can be understood as accounts, illustrate that she feels committed to follow the choreographer's request. Second, *co-present other contestants* are advising Anna-Lena while she is struggling to fulfill the task.

Excerpt 2: *just walk*

| Shot/<br>Duration                              | Verbal and embodied conduct |  | Image content and televisual<br>staging   | Sound                |
|--|-----------------------------|--|---|----------------------|
| <b>02</b><br>2,04 Sec<br>00:04:04-<br>00:06:08 | 02                          | (1.6)  | Long shot, two of <b>the judges</b> (TR, TH) in the center of the image, sitting on a couch on a roof top, watching AL  | barely audible music |
|  | 03                          | <b>AL</b> hh° °hh hh° °hh  |   |                      |
|  | 04                          | <b>L</b> guck nach<br><b>look to</b>                               |   |                      |
| <b>03</b><br>2,08 Sec<br>00:06:08-<br>00:08:16 |                             | <b>L</b> [vorn un STOPP nich; ]<br><b>the front and don't stop</b> | Medium long shot, <b>three other contestants</b> in the center of the image, shown sideways from the front, standing on the roof top, shouting and gesturing in the direction of AL | barely audible music |
|  | 05                          | <b>ML</b> [((incomprehensible, 1.8 sec))]                          |   |                      |
|  | 06                          | <b>L</b> LAUF einfach;<br><b>just walk</b>                         |   |                      |
|  | 07                          | <b>L</b> TU es-]<br><b>do it</b>                                   |   |                      |
| <b>04</b><br>1,76 Sec<br>00:08:16-<br>00:09:22 | 08                          | <b>L</b> und SCHNELL;<br><b>and fast</b>                           | Long shot, AL in the center, standing at the beginning of the catwalk   | barely audible music |
|  | 09                          | (0.7)  |   |                      |
| <b>05</b><br>1,48 Sec<br>00:09:22-<br>00:11:40 | 10                          | <b>ML</b> tu es einfach ANna;<br><b>just do it Anna</b>            | Medium shot, <b>three other contestants</b> in the center of the image  | barely audible music |
|  | 11                          | (0.3)  |   |                      |

The three other contestants are spectators placed on the opposite side of the rooftop (Fig. 11). While watching the scene from afar, they advise Anna-Lena to start her walk quickly and without thinking about it. Meanwhile, the other contestants are mirroring Anna-Lena's emotions (Fig. 12). Their behavior conveys emotional involvement and empathy supported by close-ups of their facial expressions which function as sincere authentication in between the depictions of Anna-Lena's hesitation to start the challenge. However, their apparent empathy and well-intentioned advice obviously contrast with Anna-Lena's experience of a high-altitude catwalk. Because of these juxtaposed attitudes and the modes of staging in this scene, the advices of the other contestants could as well be read as blaming Anna-Lena for not having enough self-control to accomplish the task more easily. Likewise, their advices frame Anna-Lena's challenge as easy and a potential failure as particularly humiliating. Their immediate reactions thus remain ambivalent oscillating between empathy especially expressed through the facial expressions and rivalry. Their *verbal comments*, which were filmed afterward but montaged in between showing Anna-Lena's struggle, further specify the ambivalence of their reactions (extract 3).





Fig. 11: the other contestants



Fig. 12: reverse-shot: empathy, mirroring emotions

Excerpt 3: *I wouldn't have expected that either*

| Shot/<br>Duration                              | Verbal and embodied conduct |  | Image content and<br>televisual staging   | Sound                        |
|--|-----------------------------|--|---|------------------------------|
| <b>12</b><br>4 Sec<br>00:26:44-<br>00:30:44    | 24 <b>AL</b>                | <b>*&lt;&lt;voiced&gt; °h hhh°&gt;</b><br><b>*cries-----&gt;</b>   | Medium Shot, center <b>AL</b> ,<br><b>struggling with tears</b>   | Music:<br>tense,<br>dramatic |
|  | 25 <b>ML</b>                | (.) anna hat mir total LEidgetan-<br><b>I felt so sorry for Anna</b>   |   |                              |
|  | 26                          | wie sie da oben stand und geWEInt hat;*<br><b>how she stood up there crying</b><br><b>al -----&gt;*</b>  |   |                              |
| <b>13</b><br>2,16 Sec<br>00:30:44-<br>00:32:60 | 27 <b>ML</b>                | und mit einem mal LOSgeweint hat;<br><b>and suddenly started crying</b>  | Medium shot, <b>ML</b> left in<br>the image, <b>gives a</b><br><b>statement</b><br>Insert: <i>Marie Luise, 21</i>   | Music:<br>tense,<br>dramatic |
|  | 28                          | °h hat mir so LEID<br><b>I felt so</b>   |   |                              |
| <b>14</b><br>3,96 Sec<br>00:32:60-<br>00:35:56 | <b>ML</b>                   | <b>*getan;</b><br><b>sorry</b>   | Medium shot, <b>AL</b> left in the<br>image, <b>struggling with</b><br><b>tears</b>   | Music:<br>tense,<br>dramatic |
|  | <b>al</b>                   | <b>*cries---&gt;</b>   |   |                              |
|  | 29                          | ich hätt auch nich damit geRECHnet;<br><b>I wouldn't have expected that either</b>   |   |                              |
|  | 30                          | (0.5)  |   |                              |
|  | 31                          | dass dass anna*<br><b>that that Anna</b><br><b>al ---&gt;*</b>   |   |                              |
| <b>15</b><br>1,12 Sec<br>00:35:56-<br>00:36:68 | <b>ML</b>                   | (0.3) da so so ANGST hat;<br><b>would be so so afraid</b>  | Medium shot, <b>ML</b> left in<br>the image, <b>gives a</b><br><b>statement</b>   | Music:<br>tense,<br>dramatic |
| <b>16</b><br>2,76 Sec<br>00:36:68-<br>00:39:44 | 32 <b>AL</b>                | <b>*&lt;&lt;tearful&gt; °h hh° °h&gt;*</b><br><b>*contracted body posture*</b>   | Long shot, <b>AL</b> <b>standing</b><br><b>on catwalk</b> ; struggling<br>with tears, <b>trying to start</b><br>the walk; a technician<br>sitting behind her              | Music:<br>tense,<br>dramatic |
| <b>17</b><br>3,32 Sec<br>00:39:44-<br>00:42:76 | 33 <b>AL</b>                | <b>*&lt;&lt;tearful&gt; hhh°*</b><br><b>*cries-----&gt;*</b>   | Medium shot, <b>AL</b> in the<br>center, <b>struggling with</b><br><b>tears</b>   | Music:<br>tense,<br>dramatic |
|  | 34                          | <b>*(0.8)</b>  |   |                              |
|  | 35                          | <b>*covers mouth with hand, eyes closed*</b><br><b>*°hh &lt;&lt;blowing&gt; hhh°&gt;*</b>  |   |                              |
|  | 36 <b>L</b>                 | <b>*deeply breathes in and out*</b><br>also s war wie so ne blockAde eigentlich<br>bei ihr;<br><b>well it was like she couldn't bring</b><br><b>herself to do it</b> |   |                              |
| <b>18</b><br>2,4 Sec<br>00:42:76-<br>00:45:16  | 37                          | sie HAT;<br><b>she has</b>   | <b>L</b> left in the image, <b>gives a</b><br><b>statement</b><br>Insert: <i>Lisa, 16</i>   | Music:<br>tense,<br>dramatic |
|  | 38                          | (0.3)  |   |                              |
|  | 39                          | es GING einfach nich-<br><b>it just didn't work</b>  |   |                              |
|  | 40                          | egal wie sie sich (0.3)<br><b>no matter how she</b>  |   |                              |
| <b>19</b><br>4,88 Sec<br>00:45:16-<br>00:50:04 | <b>L</b>                    | <b>*beMÜHT,</b><br><b>tries</b>  | Medium shot, <b>AL</b> <b>trying</b><br><b>to start the walk</b> ; a<br>technician standing behind<br>her   | Music:<br>tense,<br>dramatic |
|  | <b>al</b>                   | <b>*resolute face---&gt;</b>   |   |                              |
|  | 41 <b>L</b>                 | es KLAPPT nich-<br><b>it doesn't work</b>  |   |                              |
|  | 42 <b>AL</b>                | <b>(1.9)*</b><br><b>----&gt;*</b>  |   |                              |
|  | 43                          | <b>*&lt;&lt;f&gt; °oh:: GO::tt-&gt; °h*</b><br><b>oh god</b><br><b>*stops angrily</b>  |   |                              |
|  | 44 <b>A</b>                 | (.) ich glaub man<br><b>I think you</b>  |   |                              |
| <b>20</b><br>1,56 Sec<br>00:50:04-<br>00:51:60 | <b>A</b>                    | kriegt einfach so ne blockAde im kopf,<br><b>just can't bring yourself to do it</b>  | <b>A</b> left in the image, <b>gives a</b><br><b>statement</b>  | Music:<br>tense,<br>dramatic |
| <b>21</b><br>4,72 Sec<br>00:51:60-<br>00:56:32 | 45 <b>A</b>                 | <b>*un das kann ma einfach dann nich mehr</b><br><b>Lösen;</b><br><b>and you just can't do anything about it</b>   | Extreme Close-up: <b>Feet in</b><br><b>high heels</b> , taking a<br>cautious step forwards, and<br>then again backwards<br>Camera tracks upwards<br>along the <b>legs</b> | Music:<br>tense,<br>dramatic |
|  | <b>al</b>                   | <b>*trembling legs, step forward ---&gt;</b>   |   |                              |
|  | 46                          | dann laufen die BEIne nicht °hh,<br><b>then the legs don't walk</b>  |   |                              |
|  | 47                          | und es GEHT* nich;*<br><b>and it doesn't work</b><br><b>al ---&gt;*</b> <b>*step backwards</b>   |   |                              |

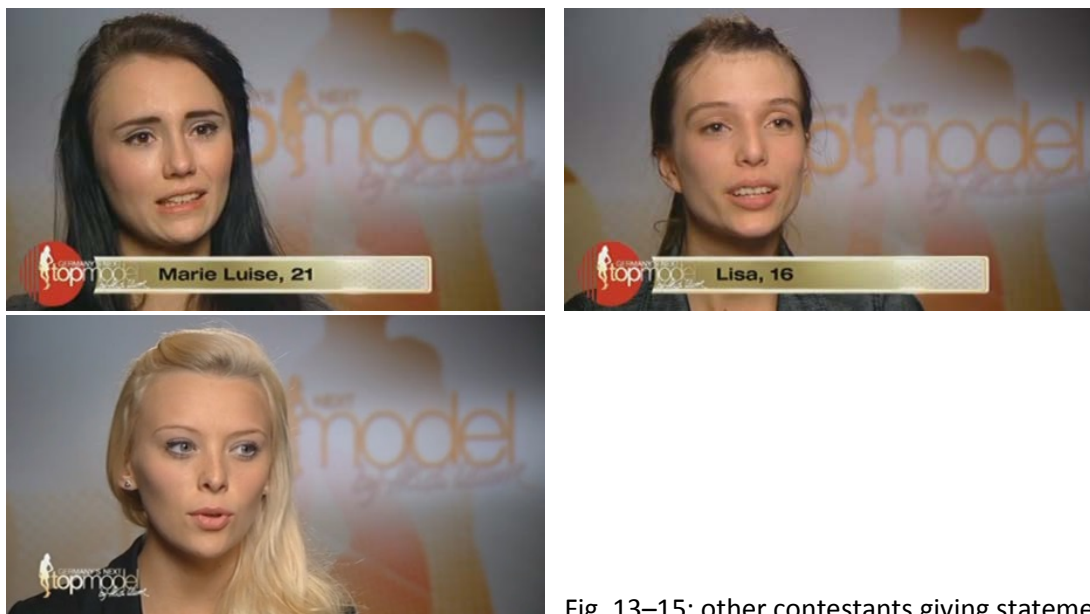


Fig. 13–15: other contestants giving statements

In the interview scenes, portray-like shots present the verbal statements of the other contestants in a typical reality-TV-style. They are filmed against a neutral background showing the significant *GNTM*-logo, the insert, again showing the logo, identifies each contestant by name and age (Fig. 13–15). Marie-Luise (ML) describes her wonder about Anna-Lena because, regarding Anna-Lena's attitude, she did not expect her having to struggle in completing the task (line 29–31). In this way, Marie-Luise's statement highlights a discrepancy between Anna-Lena's self-presentation (in the past) and her actual performance in the catwalk challenge. The statement as well indicates that Anna-Lena is not able to live up to her previously displayed self-image, the later comments of the judges put even more emphasis on this aspect (extract 4, lines 72–75). Furthermore, the other contestants disambiguate the visually conveyed events in their verbal statements. They label Anna-Lena's state as either being afraid (line 31), her visible conduct as "*crying*" (lines 26, 27), or their personal attitude towards her as empathy (lines 25, 28).

The other contestants as well introduce explanatory key concepts, such as "*just can't bring yourself to do it*" (lines 36, 44) or the metaphor of "*the legs don't walk*" (line 46). Corresponding shots (Fig. 16, 17) amplify these statements and subsequently create an (audio-)visual leitmotif for the complete *GNTM*-episode which is particularly evident in contestant Alex's (A) two-time use of

*“just can’t bring herself/yourself to do it”* (lines 36, 44). Here, the German expression *‘eine Blockade im Kopf haben’* means ‘having something actively blocking you in your head’, or literally ‘having a blockade.’ Anna-Lena as well uses this metaphorical expression in her retrospective statement when looking back on her experience of the high-altitude catwalk (not part of the excerpts). The final comments of the other contestants address Anna-Lena’s struggling within a discourse of body control emphasizing a resistance of the body or body parts (the legs) against its ‘owner’ (Anna-Lena).



Fig. 16, 17: legs and feet



Fig. 18: the judges

Excerpt 4: *She usually has such a big mouth*

| Shot/<br>Duration                       | Verbal and embodied conduct |   | Image content and<br>televisual staging  | Sound                     |
|---|-----------------------------|---|--|---------------------------|
| 23<br>4,64 Sec<br>00:59:00-<br>01:03:64 | 50                          | TR =die hat toTale angst die anna;<br><b>Anna is totally frightened</b>   | Medium long shot, <b>judges</b> in the center, watching AL; TR takes a megaphone from TH   | Music: tense, dramatic    |
|   | 51                          | nee das (.) nee dat find ich jetzt aber grade ma grade NICH so gut;<br><b>no that no I really don't like this right now</b> |  |                           |
| 24<br>3,28 Sec<br>01:03:64-<br>01:06:92 | 52                          | <b>*(1.6)</b><br>*cries   | Medium shot, <b>AL</b> in the center, struggling with tears  | Music: tense, dramatic    |
|   | 53                          | <b>AL *(&lt;&lt;tearful&gt; hh°)*</b><br>*stops   |  |                           |
|   | 54                          | TR schatziLEI::N,<br><b>darling</b>   |  |                           |
| 25<br>4,6 Sec<br>01:06:92-<br>01:10:52  | 55                          | TR <b>(1.0)</b>   | Medium long shot, <b>judges</b> in the center, <b>TR speaks</b> to AL <b>using megaphone</b>   | Music: tense, dramatic    |
|   | 56                          | wenn du das NICH k-   |  |                           |
|   | 57                          | if you c-<br>NICH machen möchtest-  |  |                           |
|   | 58                          | <b>don't want to do this</b>  |  |                           |
|   | 59                          | dann machst du bitte NICHT;<br><b>then please don't do it (0.3)</b>   |  |                           |
| 26<br>3,04 Sec<br>01:10:52-<br>01:13:56 | 60                          | AL *ich WI:LLS ja schaffen-<br><b>I want to make it</b><br>*smiles--->  | Medium shot, <b>AL</b> in the center, <b>talking</b> to TR, points to where she dares to go up to; a technician standing behind her              | Music: tense, dramatic    |
|   | 61                          | aber ich traue mich nicht weiter als DA;*<br><b>but I don't dare to go further than up to here</b><br>----->*               |  |                           |
| 27<br>2,8 Sec<br>01:13:56-<br>01:16:36  | 62                          | <b>(2.0)</b>  | Long shot, high-angle framing, <b>view down from the skyscraper to the ground</b> ; Special effects: blurred vision; Camera tilts downwards      | Music: tense, dramatic    |
| 28<br>3,68 Sec<br>01:16:36-<br>01:20:04 | 63                          | <b>*(3.6)</b><br>al *raises hands, focuses *  | Medium long shot, <b>AL</b> semi-profile, <b>preparing for task</b> ; a technician in the background   | Music: threatening        |
| 29<br>5,76 Sec<br>01:20:04-<br>01:25:80 | 64                          | <b>AL *(5.7)</b><br>al *slowly approaching the catwalk  | Extreme long shot, <b>AL</b> left in the background, <b>starts to walk</b> onto the catwalk, Crane shot: camera zooms in along the catwalk to AL | Music: threatening        |
| 30<br>2,36 Sec<br>01:25:80-<br>01:28:16 | 65                          | <b>(0.6)</b>  | Medium shot, <b>AL</b> in the center, <b>struggling with task</b>  | Music: threatening        |
|   | 66                          | <b>AL *(&lt;&lt;voiced, fearful&gt; hhh° °hh)*</b>  |  |                           |
|   | 67                          | al *raises hands, frightens----><br><b>AL (.) &lt;&lt;pp&gt; m &gt;</b>   |  |                           |
| 31<br>6,4 Sec<br>01:28:16-<br>01:34:56  | 68                          | <b>(1.4)</b>  | Long shot, <b>AL</b> in semi-profile left in the image, slight bottom view, <b>AL stepping backwards</b> a bit                                   | Music: threatening, tense |
|   | 69                          | *m:: hh° °hh<br>*steps backwards, contracted posture--->  |  |                           |
|   | 70                          | <b>(2.3)</b>  |  |                           |
|   | 71                          | AL ich KANN das* *ni::ch;<br><b>I can't do that</b><br>al ---->* *turns around  | Crane shot: camera moves back, upwards and away from AL  |                           |
| 32<br>4,88 Sec<br>01:34:56-<br>01:39:44 | 72                          | TR <<p> also ich DENK;<br><b>well I think</b>   | Medium shot, <b>judges</b> in the center, watching AL and talking to each other  | Music: threatening, tense |
|   | 73                          | also ich hä- ich bin> ganz verWUNdert;<br><b>well I would I am really surprised</b>   |  |                           |
|   | 74                          | °h dass sie nicht MACHT;<br><b>that she won't do it</b>   |  |                           |
|   | 75                          | weil die hat sonst immer so ne große SCHNAUze,<br><b>because she usually has such a big mouth</b>                           |  |                           |
| 33<br>3,8 Sec<br>01:39:44-<br>01:43:24  | 76                          | *°hh verSTEHST du-<br><b>you know</b>   | Long shot, <b>AL</b> left in the image, <b>walking back</b><br>Crane shot: camera moves forward and to the left (following AL)                   | Music: tense, dramatic    |
|   | 77                          | al *turns around, walks back<br>und WILL immer;<br><b>and always wants to</b>   |  |                           |
|   | 78                          | un MACHT immer;<br><b>and always does</b>   |  |                           |
|   | 79                          | und ich bin<br><b>I am really</b>   |  |                           |
| 34<br>2,16 Sec<br>01:43:24-<br>01:45:40 | 80                          | ganz durcheinANder;<br><b>confused</b><br>dass sie das grad nicht MACHT;<br><b>that she won't do it right now</b>           | Medium shot, <b>judges</b> in the center, watching AL and talking to each other  | Music: tense, dramatic    |

*The judges*, sitting farther away on a roof top, likewise comment on Anna-Lena's struggle with the catwalk performance. The staging suggests that they confidentially talk to each other without being heard by any of the co-present participants (Fig. 18) which is crucial as the judges can be understood as significant others having the power to decide over the success of the contestants. Before addressing Anna-Lena, the judges engage in a conspiratorial-like conversation in which they point out her possible failure. Thomas Rath (TR) describes Anna-Lena's fear as her main problem and expresses his discomfort about her struggle to Thomas Hayo (TH) (lines 50, 51). He then directly addresses Anna-Lena by talking into a megaphone. Initially his advice *"If you don't want to do this, then please don't do it"* (lines 57, 58) appears to be based on empathy. However, Thomas Rath later again expresses his surprise to co-judge Thomas Hayo about Anna-Lena refusing the task (excerpt 4, lines 72-80). In this way, by using the proverbial expression *"has such a big mouth"* (line 75), he creates a discrepancy between her earlier ambitious self-presentation and her present poor performance.

Even more interesting is Thomas Rath's shift of modal verbs while initially addressing Anna-Lena and her struggle (lines 54–59). He starts by saying *"if you c..."* (*wenn du das nich k...*, line 56), however, when he realizes that he is about to confirm Anna-Lena's mental and physical inability to start walking, he aborts his sentence. Instead of saying *"can't (do it)"* he switches to saying *"(if you) don't want to do it"* (*nich machen möchtest*, line 57). He therefore reframes Anna-Lena's struggle by exchanging the modal verb *can* with the modal verb *want*. This marks a decisive moment within this high-altitude catwalk scene because Thomas Rath redefines the motivational basis of Anna-Lena's behavior: '*can*' is a reasonable explanation of Anna-Lena blaming 'the body' for her failure, but '*want*' ascribes her struggle to her apparent lack of willpower to manage the task. Anna-Lena opposes Thomas Rath's interpretation of her behavior by emphasizing her willpower in replying *"I want to make it, but I don't dare to go further than up to here"* (lines 60, 61). This interaction between Anna-Lena and Thomas Rath demonstrates how in *GNTM* advice and help that are initially

offered by the judges turn out to be strategic moves to stage Anna-Lena's emotional and mental battle as a possible lack of her will and self-overcoming.

Overall, the actions, reactions, and comments of the other participants illustrate that this scene primarily deals with Anna-Lena overcoming her fear rather than with her exercising or performing a catwalk. The shifting of the focus from a professional working situation to a challenge-like situation happens due to the overall framing of the show as a casting format. In the end, Anna-Lena succeeds to master the challenge. In *her retrospective statements* she labels the previous staging of her inner state as 'being scared' and uses key interpretations, such as 'can't bring oneself to do it', respectively the German metaphors of literally 'being blocked' and 'the legs which refused to walk'. Her statements again indicate the momentum of the physical body and therefore oppose the interpretation of her struggle as being a motivational issue.

The *televisual staging* of Anna-Lena's catwalk mainly uses close-ups of her facial expressions to authenticate her fear and despair (fig. 1, 5–7). Point-of-view-shots, in combination with special effects, imply that Anna-Lena's perception appears to be distorted in this stressful situation (Fig. 19). Close-ups of her feet and legs highlight the momentum of an uncontrollable body (Fig. 16, 17). Slow motion technique marks Anna-Lena's aborting of her first attempt as the key aspect of the scene. Then, in the following dramatic seconds, the number of cuts increases. As one aspect of audiovisual montage, visual events and verbal comments are tied together more closely. For example, the visual event stays visible as it is commented on and close-ups present verbally articulated body parts, such as 'legs' to create audiovisual references (Fig. 16).



Fig. 19: Implying distorted perception

In addition, Anna-Lena's acousmatic<sup>3</sup> whining and heavy breathing is included in all shots to manifest her struggle in terms of tonal physical expressions of the body. The music as well significantly changes when Anna-Lena finally starts her high-altitude catwalk. The previous threatening score is replaced by the pan flute motif of *The Lonely Shepherd* by Gheorghe Zamfir & James Last (1977) which frames Anna-Lena's performance as a heroic act of overcoming her fear (not part of the excerpts).

This first case study demonstrates how the physical body opposes its 'owner', especially in moments of apparent failure, and therefore withdraws from any intended control. However, as shown in the detailed analysis of this high-altitude catwalk scene, the actual challenge is not the catwalk itself, but for the contestant to regain control of her body and to overcome her fear. In this context, the staging illustrates *that* and *how* bodily expressions are used to verify mediated events.

## **Case Study II: Balloon Photo Shoot**

This second case demonstrates that the previously analyzed staging of bodily expressions does not always work out in televisual media contexts. In the following example, taken from *GNTM* season 9 in 2014, the staging strategies are similar to the ones in the high-altitude catwalk; however, they do not unfold. Contestant Steffi has to perform a photo shooting with large balloons while she is hanging high up in the air from a crane. In this example, bodily reactions and hence the visible basis for authenticating a loss of control and a successful self-overcoming are only weakly pronounced. There are no physical indicators of fear; instead fear is only verbally emphasized by Steffi and the judges.

*Before* the start of the balloon challenge, Steffi's statements claiming to be afraid prospectively function to create a certain expectation. *After* the shooting, her statements reframe and confirm her overcoming of fear. *Throughout* the challenge, Steffi as well verbalizes her unwillingness to fulfill the balloon shooting task and her concern of a possible fall. Yet, her

---

<sup>3</sup> The term *acousmatic* describes a sound whose source is not visible in the moment of perceiving it (Chion, 1994).



statements, as well as the mirroring reactions of the other candidates, appear to only slightly support her expressed emotional state. Steffi does not show any physical reactions to match her verbal claims. All indicators identified in the first case study are missing: No heavy breathing, no tearful voice, no corresponding facial expressions, no shiver or shock. Therefore, no threat to lose control and no challenge to overcome any threatening situation can be identified.

This scene as well does not provide any dramatic increase or climax. Steffi's attempts to resist the challenge appear to be half-hearted and the danger of maybe having to quit seems very small. Her consistently calm attitude and, in particular, her relaxed and somewhat laughing facial expressions evidently contrast her verbal expressions of fear (Fig. 20) – in the excerpts, “#” marks the exact point of the corresponding still image.



03 die größte Angst ist für mich einfach die dass ich abstürzen könnte  
und wie der <<:-)>#AUFprall wäre;>  
my biggest fear is simply that I could crash  
and how the impact would be



20 ich WILL nich;#  
I don't want to  
21 (0.6)  
22 ich WILL nich;  
I don't want to



32 \*MAmi?#  
mommy  
\*cheeping voice, giggles, holds ropes  
tightly --->\*<br>33 <<p> hehe>HE; \*  
----->\*



```

42      <<f>ich hab so angst HEIdi:;#
        I'm so afraid, Heidi
43      (.) ich hab Höhena:ngst;>
        I suffer from fear of hights

```

Fig. 20: facial expressions and verbal conduct

Concerning the aspect of fear, there is as well a number of *detailed inconsistencies* in Steffi's performance: She does not resist moving into starting position and gladly cooperates without complaining. As soon as she is in the air, her apparent fear has vanished as she laughs and immediately begins to pose (Fig. 21). There is hardly any transition from initial anxiety to getting used to the task. Furthermore, when Heidi Klum instructs Steffi "*to feel good and be funny*" and to throw down her wig, Steffi immediately starts to scream, laugh, and wildly move around in the air. Therefore, Steffi does not only manage the task, she overachieves it (Fig. 22). Her rough shift from fear to cheerfulness and easiness appears random and too simple. She is at no point struggling with herself and there are no corresponding body reactions to support the apparent anxiety Steffi previously expressed.

These contrasts between visual and verbal claims result in contradictory information based on so called *channel discrepancies*, for example, saying one is scared while laughing at the same time (Fig. 20). The fact that fear is only verbally claimed but hardly verified through bodily expressions shows that staged situations, such as the balloon photo shoot, imply only little authenticity if the general arrangement does not offer anticipations of physical reactions and emotions.

As a result, the assumed anxiety of the contestants primarily appears as a construct of televisual staging. This explains the rough shift from staging anxiety to focusing on cheerfulness at

the end of the balloon photo shoot (Fig. 22). For competitive reality shows, such as *GNTM*, this changing of the staging and the 'story' appears to be common if either of these elements cannot be guaranteed as planned by the actual authentic events while filming. The balloon photo shoot illustrates how the intended story of 'the anxious girl who defeats her fears' did not work out due to Steffi's lack of fear and her inability to believably pretend it.



Fig. 21: Posing in the air



Fig. 22: Overachieving the task

## Conclusion

The two analyses illustrate that reality TV relies and as well depends on bodily reactions to authenticate its intended representations. The main strategy is to recreate the same controllable staged situations which prove(d) to be suitable for eliciting physical reactions and emotions which in turn are hard to control for the contestants. Provoking difficult-to-control emotions and corresponding physical reactions, such as fear, serves to portray the given task, in our case a catwalk and a photoshoot, as a challenge with a potential failure. In this kind of a staged scenario overcoming their fear is the only reasonable solution for the contestants. This generally resembles a heroic story, as shown in the Anna-Lena example, which becomes more and more meaningful the bigger the challenge is and the greater the effort to overcome it. Both aspects depend on the intensity and quality of physical reactions. These in turn are constructed by the show based on strategies of elicitation and, if successful, on the contestant's side by authenticity markers of a real problem and its possible solution.

*GNTM* obviously creates a situational framework in which the televisual staging itself produces the phenomenon that it presents as the 'problem' in the presented situation. Casting

shows are usually built on two frames: a professional frame, in the example of *GNTM*, people 'doing' fashion and model business, for example, catwalks and photoshoots, and a televisual frame in which TV producers design and stage a reality show to attract an audience.

Regarding a claim to 'the real' and to achieving authentic drama and amusement, televisual staging frequently uses similar tools, such as close-ups of the face to indicate the emotional state, acousmatic sounds to ensure physicality, or parallel montages of reaction shots to mirror and intersubjectify emotions. As a result, these ways of staging highlight and enhance bodily reactions, for example of fear, or of the actual overcoming of fear. Furthermore, less tangible aspects, especially contextual features, previous events and the process of overcoming fear are framed and thus disambiguated by on-comments and off-comments as well as by music to emphasize and dramatize certain scenes. The strategies of staging stressful situations illustrated in the two case studies are essential features within the television genre of reality TV. They demonstrate in which way the eliciting of emotions functions as a key to attractive programming which, in this case, is rooted in controlled use of staging and in the physical realness of the contestants. Rather deviant cases, such as the balloon photo shoot, exemplify how important but as well how standardized these forms and strategies of staging have become as they are kept up even if they do not really work out.

## References

- Andrejevic, M. (2004). *Reality TV. The Work of Being Watched*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Chion, M. (1994). *Audio-vision: sound on screen*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Corner, J. (2002). 'Performing the Real'. *Television and New Media*, 3 (3), 255–270.
- Deppermann, A. (2013). Multimodal interaction from a conversation analytic perspective. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 46, 1–7.
- Dubrofsky, R. (2009). Fallen Women in Reality TV. A pornography of emotion. *Feminist Media Studies*, 9 (3), 353–368.
- Goffman, E. (1959). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. New York: Anchor Books.

- Goffman, E. (1981a). Footing. In E. Goffman, *Forms of Talk* (124–159). Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Goffman, E. (1981b): Response Cries. In E. Goffman, *Forms of Talk* (78–122), Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Grindstaff, L. (2002). *The Money Shot. Trash, Class, and the Making of TV Talk Shows*. Chicago: University Press.
- Hearn, A. (2014). Producing “Reality”: Branded Content, Branded Selves, Precarious Futures. In L. Ouellette (Ed.), *A Companion to Reality Television* (437–455). Oxford: Wiley.
- Hill, A. (2005). *Reality TV: Audiences and Popular Factual Television*. London: Routledge.
- Holmes, S., & Jermyn, D. (2004). Introduction. In S. Holmes, & D. Jermyn (Ed.), *Understanding reality television* (1–32). London: Routledge.
- Kavka, M. (2014). *Reality TV*. Edinburgh: University Press.
- Keppler, A. (2006). *Mediale Gegenwart. Eine Theorie des Fernsehens am Beispiel der Darstellung von Gewalt*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.
- Kilborn, R. (2003). *Staging the real: factual TV programming in the age of Big Brother*. Manchester: University Press.
- Mondada, L. (2008). Using Video for a Sequential and Multimodal Analysis of Social Interaction: Videotaping Institutional Telephone Calls [88 paragraphs]. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung*, 9 (3), article 39.
- Mondada, L. (2014). Conventions for multimodal transcription. Accessed from: [https://mainly.sciencesconf.org/conference/mainly/pages/Mondada2013\\_conv\\_multimodality\\_copie.pdf](https://mainly.sciencesconf.org/conference/mainly/pages/Mondada2013_conv_multimodality_copie.pdf) (12.02.2018).
- Ouellette, L., & Murray, S. (2009). Introduction. In L. Ouellette, & S. Murray (Eds.), *Reality TV: Remaking Television Culture* (1–20). New York: New York University Press.

- Rasmussen, T. (2000). Construction of Authenticity. Television talk as situated interaction. In G. Hallenberger, & H. Schanze (Eds.), *Live is Life. Mediale Inszenierungen des Authentischen* (47–67). Baden-Baden: Nomos.
- Selting, M., Auer, P., Barth-Weingarten, D., Bergmann, J., Bergmann, P., Birkner, K., ... Uhmann, S. (2011). A system for transcribing talk-in-interaction: GAT 2. Translated and adapted for English by Elizabeth Couper-Kuhlen and Dagmar Barth-Weingarten. *Gesprächsforschung - Online-Zeitschrift zur verbalen Interaktion*, 12, 1–51.
- Streeck, J., Goodwin, C., & LeBaron, C. (Eds.) (2011). *Embodied interaction. language and body in the material world*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

## Transcription conventions

### Abbreviations for interactants

|                |                          |                        |                     |
|----------------|--------------------------|------------------------|---------------------|
| <i>Catwalk</i> |                          | TR                     | Thomas Rath (judge) |
| AL             | Anna lena (contestant)   | TH                     | Thomas Hayo (judge) |
| CO             | Choreographer            |                        |                     |
| ML             | Marie-Luise (contestant) | <i>Ballon shooting</i> |                     |
| L              | Lisa (contestant)        | S                      | Steffi (contestant) |
| A              | Alex (contestant)        |                        |                     |

**Verbal transcription following conventions according to Selting et al. (2011)**

### Compilation of used conventions

|          |  |
|----------|--|
| °h / h°  | in- / outbreaths   |
| (. )     | micro pause  |
| (1.9)    | measured pause in sec.   |
| =        | fast, immediate continuation with a new turn or segment (latching) |
| :        | lengthening  |
| SYLlable | focus accent   |

### Final pitch movements of intonation phrases

|                       |     |   |
|-----------------------|-----|---|
| ?                     |     | rising to high  |
| ,                     |     | rising to mid   |
| -                     |     | level   |
| ;                     |     | falling to mid  |
| .                     |     | falling to low  |
| [                     | ]   | overlap and simultaneous talk                                   |
| [                     | ]   |   |
| haha, hehe, hihi      |     | syllabic laughter   |
| ((laughs)), ((cries)) |     | description of laughter and crying                              |
| <<laughing>           | >   | laughter particles accompanying speech with indication of scope |
| ((coughs))            |     | non-verbal vocal actions and events                             |
| <<coughing>           | >   | with indication of scope  |
| (                     | )   | unintelligible passage  |
| <<surprised>          | >   | interpretive comment with indication of scope                   |
| <<:-)>                | so> | smile voice   |
| <<f>                  | >   | forte, loud   |
| <<p>                  | >   | piano, soft   |
| <<pp>                 | >   | pianissimo, very soft   |

**Multimodal transcriptions following conventions according to Mondada (2014).**

### Compilation of used conventions

## Multimodal Details

- are in grey
- are described in the following line (without a separate segment number)
- are *synchronized* with talk/pauses using *actor-specific symbols* (e.g. \*, + etc.) indicating the *beginning* and the *end* of body movements

- continued actions and events
  - > Action described continues across subsequent lines
  - >\* indicates end when reaching the same symbol