The sociality of minimizing involvement in self-service shops in Denmark: Customers' multi-modal practices of being, getting and staying out of the way.

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Abstract
For some customers, the corona pandemic has turned e-shopping into a fine alternative to shopping in brick-and-mortar shops. For other customers in quarantine e-shopping is the only alternative. The long-lasting pandemic, however, has reminded us all of the importance of social contacts and interactions – even if it’s just to go the supermarket to ‘mingle’. This paper investigates what ‘mingle’ means when shopping in physical self-service shops amongst unacquainted others in Denmark. It describes customers’ practice of doing self-service by organizing interaction to minimize social involvement. It shows how they, as a matter of fact, co-ordinate their conduct in ways that hampers possibilities for engaging in even small ‘ritual’ exchanges of talk.

The paper draws upon a corpus of video recordings of customers’ self-service practices in shops in Denmark. In addition, the customers’ gaze was recorded with the mobile Tobii Pro X3 eye tracker.

The study falls within the realm of ethnomethodological and conversation analytic studies of multimodal interaction. It concludes that self-service is achieved through co-present customers’ tacit coordination of multimodal actions in social interaction and that their practices work to achieve ‘effortlessly’ and ‘spontaneously’ being, getting and staying out of the way, which seems to be an ideal for self-service shopping. Talk and moreover having a conversation seems to be an impediment to it.

Keywords
Self-service, EMCA, multimodal, embodied, shopping, social interaction, unacquainted others, co-presence

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1. Introduction

The e-world has provided possibilities for buying goods online. The purpose is to a large extent to make buying quicker and easier since the customer e.g. saves time and avoids long queues (Albe Emballage, 2019). During the Corona pandemic another purpose may be to reduce risks of being infected by the COVID-19 virus and its variants.

In Denmark online shopping is popular as is buying in self-service brick-and-mortar (B&M) shops. The two kinds of practices may seem very much alike: the customers’ primary concern is presumably product choices, their own needs and wishes and, importantly, buying decisions. It may thus be argued that e-shopping refines some of the ‘qualities’ of B&M self-service shopping that more and more customers, from specific social classes or generations (Bailey et al., 2010), presumably have come to be convinced of since the 1940es, ¹ i.e. individuality and autonomy (du Gay, 2004; Slater, 2002).

This paper investigates how customers engage in ordinary B&M self-service shopping with no COVID-19 restrictions being imposed. It demonstrates that customers as a matter of fact do not engage socially in terms of e.g., having conversations with others. Rather it shows that engaging in self-service in B&M shops entails efforts to not get socially involved. It also reveals, however, that customers’ primary attention to finding, choosing and buying products emerges not only from engagement with the material environment, which may be ‘translated’ to immaterial digital representations on e-platforms, but also from social interaction with co-located (unacquainted) others in places and spaces that were designed for them to share for the very same purpose i.e., shopping. It shows how customers establish a social order of co-presence in physical shops and work to achieve self-service in interaction with one another.

Goffman (Goffman, 1963) positioned co-presence in social theory as he suggested that the ordered conduct of co-present participants in face-to-face interaction in shared physical spaces, i.e. co-located participants, can be analyzed as attributes of social order and of society. Rather than describing how stable social structures at a micro level (e.g. consumers’ or buyers’ behavior) or at a macro level (e.g. market or group level decision processes) are maintained by participants in interaction who play roles that are assigned to them (Goffman, 1967), this paper examines co-present customers’ social practices whereby social (micro and macro) structures and cultural phenomena of interest to social and cultural theory are made to happen (Hilbert, 1990). Within the realm of Ethnomethodological Conversation analytic (EMCA) studies of multimodal interaction (Mondada, 2016b; Mondada, 2016a; Deppermann, 2013), it examines how customers ‘do’ ‘self-service’ as they orient to the co-presence of each other. I.e., how the customers tacitly coordinate actions and conduct as they locally orient toward being co-located in the same space.

The paper zooms in on the microdetails of conduct in the aisles between merchandising shelves, refrigerators and freezer displays. In these aisles the space between customers is occasionally

very proximate and the customers may experience challenges in managing and coordinating shopping carts or baskets. Despite the seeming challenges, customers – like people walking on the sidewalks (Duneier, 1999), making formations as car drivers on the highway (Laurier, 2004), or as cycle drivers on the streets or cycle paths (Wolfinger, 1995; McIlvenny, 2015; Skinner and Rosen, 2007) – walk forward, stop (De Stefani, 2013), and form queues (Garfinkel and Livingston, 2003). When at some point they are within the perceptual range of one another and thus have ordinarily visible and/or hearable (e.g., footsteps) access to the space between them, they tacitly cooperate on the space and on the trajectories of their mobile conduct. The paper thus follows Goffman’s (1963) observation, that individuals in public places have an impact on one another’s actions as they pay attention to co-presence i.e., the fact that any of their conduct is available for any co-present individual to monitor, even the individual who may just “happen to be in perceptual range of the event” (Goffman, 1981:3).

Goffman also noticed that a feature of co-presence is that it engenders ‘an obligation’ to involvement (Goffman, 1967) e.g., in terms of a conversation (Sacks, 1995). As studies in social interaction have shown, availability and unavailability for ‘focused interaction’ (Goffman, 1963) are a practical concern to co-present individuals. Whether in e.g., the streets of cities and towns (De Stefani and Mondada, 2010; Hua et al., 2017), in supermarkets (De Stefani and Mondada, 2018; Clark and Pinch, 2010) or other markets (Blackledge and Creese, 2018), acquainted or unacquainted co-present individuals come to be socially involved and uninvolved through the co-ordination of multi-modal conduct (Goodwin, 1981; Rasmussen et al., 2019; Mondada, 2009; Hirschauer, 1999). In line with previous EMCA research, this paper shows how individuals draw upon a variety of modalities in constructing their actions and conduct (Heath, 1986; vom Lehn et al., 2001; Drew and Heritage, 1992; Lerner and Zimmerman, 2003; Laurier, 2004; Mondada, 2014; Nevile, 2019; Schegloff, 1998), which, in this study, accomplishes self-service and minimize social involvement.

The customers e.g. move and coordinate their conduct with a view to the pace and flow of bodily movements, possible openings in the space around themselves, and co-present fellow customers’ actions and activities (see examples 1 and 2 below).

Example 1

Example 2
communication shields (Ayass, 2014; Goffman, 1963; Hirschauer, 1999). The study will especially present analyses of instances of gazing at products with a focus on how the conduct emerges opportunistically to provide time and space for others to service themselves.

As we shall see, in our data the methods for coordinating actions in self-service shops create interational environments in which conversations (Hoey, 2015; Button and Casey, 1984; Sacks et al., 1974), chats or even small ‘ritual’ (Goffman, 1967) exchanges (“excuse me”/“that’s all right”) are not relevant. The paper will show a case that differs in this respect. It illustrates how talk becomes relevant when smooth coordination of bodily movements fails or is likely to fail.

The paper concludes that self-service is a social accomplishment amongst customers. Rather than indicating e.g. customers’ lack of interest in one another, the interactional organization of actions works to share space and the actions and methods work to ‘effortlessly’ and ‘spontaneously’ being, getting and staying out of the way of each other, which implicates minimal social involvement. The paper closes with a short discussion of how and why self-service practices in B&M shops are not easily replaced with digitalized self-service practices of e-shopping, despite the minimal social involvement in the former. It also briefly discusses whether the described practices of doing self-service is specific to Danish culture.

2. Data collection and use of data types

The data for this study consists of video recordings. It was collected for the project ‘The digital (re)semiotization of buying and selling interaction” (RESEMINA) that aims to describe and understand differences and similarities, as well as possibilities and varieties, limitations and restrictions, of buying and selling across B&M shops and e-shops.

This specific study draws on the RESEMINA corpus of video-recorded buying and selling interactions in B&M shops in Denmark. The data were collected using a hand-held camera (for a discussion of approaches to collecting video-data, see e.g. (Knoblauch et al., 2012; Mondada 2019b). 168 instances of physically proximate customers’ conduct have been collected across different types of self-service shops. Most of them are chain stores that emphasize volume. Instances from this collection will be used to illustrate and unfold an analysis of the phenomenon.

The RESEMINA corpus also consists of recordings of customers’ gaze. Parts of the RESEMINA interests concern customers’ attention to product displays and the environment in both B&M shops and e-shops by studying the details of their eye-movements. The wearable eye-tracking glasses, Tobii Glasses, were used for this purpose in the B&M shops. Wearing eye-tracking glasses may have an impact on customers’ conduct (Brône and Oben, 2018; Stukenbrock, 2018b; Stukenbrock and Dao, 2019; Kristiansen and Rasmussen, (accepted)), both the customer wearing them and the customers who cross their path. However, the phenomenon of interest to this study is observed and recorded also in relation to customers who are in the peripheral vision (Gullberg and Holmqvist, 1999) of the customer as captured by the lenses of
the cameras; and they are observed in recordings in which no eye-tracker equipment is used. The phenomenon is recognizable to the researchers in the RESEMINA project.²

In this study, eye-tracking recordings serve exclusively to substantiate assumptions that customers and analysts rely upon when making sense of actions and practices e.g., what a customer is looking at and what a customer may see in their peripheral vision. Importantly, these recordings are not used to substantiate or verify analyses of what an action serves to accomplish e.g., the action of looking in a specific direction and moving ahead.

The instances of coordination of movements were tagged in the recordings and registered in a protocol, and some of these were transcribed using conventional EMCA conventions (Hepburn and Bolden, 2012). In this paper, examples are numbered (1) and the symbol (#) is applied to pictures illustrating the examples (#1.1). Accompanying pictures from the eye tracking recordings are numbered as well and marked with the symbol (●1.1) and inserted in pictures from the videorecording (picture-in-picture effect).

All data were collected with the informed consent of customers and staff, treated in accordance with the EU data protection law, and approved by the SDU Data Protection Office.

### 3. The EMCA analytic framework

The study is, as mentioned, conducted in the realm of EMCA studies of multi-modal interaction (Rasmussen et al., 2014). EMCA research describes how ordinary people engage in practices and carry out actions methodically in and through which they indicate their understanding of on-going activities. Moreover, it describes how they coordinate their actions and in this way work to achieve a common understanding³. EMCA research interests concern the systematic, recurrent, and socially recognizable ordinary actions and practices that co-participants orient to, i.e. somehow deal with, though they may do so without really noticing it (Garfinkel, 1967). Often, actions do become noticeable when they e.g. somehow diverge from an assumed – though maybe unnoticed – social order of an activity or event (Robinson, 2016; Heritage, 1988).

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² Importantly, the collection of instances of the phenomenon does not stem from a folklore or the analysts’ intuitive understanding of or theories about self-service conduct for the purpose of confirming or disconfirming them. Neither does the analysis of the phenomenon draw upon them (for at discussion, see e.g. Hilbert RA (1990) Ethnomethodology and the Micro-Macro Order. American Sociological Review 55(6): 794-808.

Key to understanding EMCA research is its interest in grasping and describing social and interactional phenomena from the perspective of the co-participants. This, however, is not to be taken in any psychological sense of the word. Rather, it concerns what co-participants (‘self’) may do in the assumption that ‘other’ can observe and witness what ‘self’ does as ‘self’ assumes that ‘other’ assumes that ‘self’ can observe and witness what ‘other’ does etc. (Garfinkel, 1967). The EMCA interest in co-participants’ perspective, in other words, concerns how co-participants act methodically through which they indicate some understanding of the world to co-present ‘other’.

Language has traditionally been seen as an important (Psathas, 1995; Schegloff, 1992) though not the only resource (or mode) for carrying out actions (Heath, 1986; Lerner and Zimmerman, 2003; Schegloff, 1984). With the notion of multi-modality, researchers like first and foremost, Lorenza Mondada, (Mondada, 2006; Mondada, 1996; Mondada, 2007) managed to draw more attention to other modalities and embodied resources and thus broaden up the scope of EMCA research interests and descriptions. Importantly, she also paved the way for understanding the use of different ‘modes’ as embedded in social action and practices and the ‘meaning’ of them as achieved by co-participants through coordinated work in the here-and-now of an ongoing interaction.

With an EMCA approach to multimodal interaction, studies in shopping in B&M shops put a focus on behavior and organization that is not captured in traditional studies of consumer behavior and organizations (at micro or macro level). They show (see also Rasmussen & van Leeuwen, this volume) e.g. customers’ actions and methods in interaction through which the customers appear to unacquainted co-present others and themselves (and the analyst) as a couple (De Stefani, 2013); how couples establish joint attention to products (De Stefani, 2014b; Stukenbrock, 2018a; Stukenbrock, 2020); how customers organize their actions as they orient towards one assisting the other (Krummheuer, 2019); how they and sales persons interact prior to the actual buying and selling encounter to make contact which is significant for whether a buying and selling encounter is initiated (Clark & Pinch 2010); how they and sales persons organize multiple requests and grants of requests for products (Mondada and Sorjonen, 2016); how they organize who touches which product displays, how and when, in shops (Mondada, 2018; Mondada, 2019) and markets (Mondada et al., 2020)(Mondada, this volume); and how they organize the manipulation of products (Fox and Heinemann, 2015; Moore et al., 2010).

Studies within the EMCA framework for research in multimodal interaction focus on the rigorous and detailed analysis of how co-participants order their actions multimodally in ways that happen to be possible and relevant for them in the situation. From an EMCA perspective, with the ordering, the co-participants work in every single situation to achieve a mutual understanding for all practical purposes (Garfinkel, 1967). EMCA studies in multimodal interaction may be single case studies, as a local social interactional achievement may analytically be treated as “evidence of an arrangement of the world” (Sacks, 1984). They may, however, also be built on collections of instances of actions and practices of interest. The instances are investigated with regard to similarities and differences of the details to work out the features that constitute the phenomenon and distinguish them from aspects of the situation in which the phenomenon is played out. This study is based on a collection of instances of the interactional organization of narrow spaces in B&M self-service shops.
4. Analysis: Customers’ multimodal practices for accomplishing the social order of self-service in Danish stores.

The large space of supermarkets and warehouses, the availability of a variety of products on the shelves, and the absence of a shop assistant in front of the groceries to service the customer, make it possible and relevant for more customers to simultaneously service themselves prior to entering a buying (payment) encounter at the checkout counter. The spaces between long shelves and displays of products next to one another constitute aisles leading simultaneously to other products and the cashier. They are thus polyfunctional and may result in ambiguity concerning relevant actions and practices as they invite the customers to both walk along the aisles and to stop to look at and reach out for products. The sections below show how the customers organize these spaces by giving and occupying them or sequencing the use of them in and through interaction in ways that address this polyfunctionality and possible ambiguity.

4.1 Timely coordination of movements to sequence the use of space

One of the practices for dealing with the polyfunctionality of the aisles is the timely coordination of movements to overcome space (Bergmann, 2004) through which customers make it possible for each other to continue their respective walking trajectory towards other aisles, shelves and products. Through the coordination they establish a linearized occupation of the space. Examples 3 and 4 below exemplify methods to accomplish this. Through bodily conduct, the customers in both cases organize ‘one going first’.

In example 3, a young woman (customer A) walks along a display of bread with a cart in a grocery store (fig. #3.1):

Example 3

#3.1

She then leaves the cart in the aisle to walk back along the aisle to re-inspect types of bread (#3.2):
As A walks along the aisle a customer (B) with a cart enters A’s visual field as captured by the eye-tracker (•3.3.).

A turns around and walks back to her cart fig. #3.4, #3.5:

For the phenomenon described in this paper, it is worth noticing that customer A and B indicate acknowledgement of each other’s co-presence, exclusively by moving away and giving space.

As B enters A’s peripheral visual field (•3.3.), A turns around and walks back in a comparatively slow tempo alongside the shelf while she continues gazing in the direction of the display of bread (see •3.6-3.7).
Notice that rather than being ‘a fact’ by virtue of having been captured by e.g., the eye-tracker-recordings, A’s conduct is observable and done for B to witness (#3.4- #3.7). In B’s co-presence and potentially overseen by him, A turns gaze direction and walking tempo into a resource for indicating searching for or browsing bread. In and through this action she accounts for her presence in the aisle and space, that leads B to some other area, in this moment of time in front of him.

As A comes closer to her cart, she, again observably, orients towards the space between herself and B, their moving trajectories, and their timely coordination. Customer B walks quicker than A who after a few steps in her previous rather slow walking tempo, ends the search for bread as she increases velocity and grasps her cart before customer B walks up to it (#3.8-#3.9).

The same increase in speed occurs in example 4 (#4.1-#4.3) in which a young mother speeds up in an almost running tempo as she grasps her pram with her baby in it. In this example as in example 3, the customer’s action is understandable as ‘getting out of the way’ to provide space for the other customer who through his walking direction, bodily posture, gaze direction, and velocity may be understood to indicate ‘being on his way’ to maybe another section beyond the space that Mom and her pram occupy.

Example 4
#4.1
Mom grasps her pram
In contrast to customer A in example 3, Mom has already finished fetching products in this section and is on her way to grasp the pram when she realizes (#4.1.) that B is coming close. That is, Mom seems to almost run (#4.2-#4.3), in time to go first. Thereby she (and he) forms a formation of customers walking along the aisle (#4.4).
Interestingly, customers may stay in this position till the tailgated customer (A) enters another aisle. That is, though A presumably hears the footsteps and ‘feels’ (see also De Stefani and Mondada, 2018) B coming closer from behind and though B ends up in a ‘waiting position’, no action is undertaken for one customer (or staff) to get past the other customer immediately. That is, the customer in front (A) does not attempt to step aside and the customer behind (B) does not attempt to squeeze by (cp sections below) e.g., combined with an ‘excuse me’. Instead, they sequence their trajectories by forming a queue and the possibility of passing one another is solved by the customers gaining access to other aisles or spaces. Through their coordinated actions, both customers thus seem to orient towards the conduct of the one customer being in front of the other as relevant to the situation: a slow walking tempo combined with gaze direction towards product displays is understood as e.g., searching for or browsing goods to buy. Searching for or browsing goods seems in other words to entitle customers (A) to ‘occupy’ space while moving forward.

4.2 The use of free environmental areas for a momentary division of space
The customers organize space for self-service purposes through interaction as they systematically go to free spaces or avoid spaces at a specific time too (see also vom Lehn et al., 2001)). This conduct differs from the one described above: the customer (A) who indicates browsing for or searching for products does not move ahead while searching, thus continuously changing their spatial position, but occupies a space which they stand in with their bodies turned and their gaze directed towards product displays. Other customers moving near approach the occupied space or work their way around it which allows the customer (A) who occupied the space first to finish their business. The occupying customer notices the other e.g., in their peripheral vision, and leaves the space after a short while.

The coordination of actions is done with orientations towards bodily movements, spaces and product displays. The patterns are illustrated in examples 7 (#7.1-#7.5), 8 (#8.1-#8.3), and 9 (#9.1) below, and again in example 11 (3 continued) (#11.1-#11.9) in the next section.

In example 7, customer B walks up to a food display in the section of specialty foods in a supermarket. By stopping and gazing towards foods in a free space next to customer A (#7.1),
who is also looking at the food displays, she indicates searching for products. After 0.4\(^4\) seconds, however, B starts walking towards the space occupied by A (#7.2), who walks away as B approaches her (#7.3):

**Example 7**

#7.1
Customer B goes to a free space next to A

#7.2
B starts walking towards A's space.

#7.3
A walks away

By approaching A’s space after a short while (0.4. seconds), customer B’s prior action (stopping and gazing at products) is understandable as giving A time to carry out her business while ‘occupying’ herself with other products i.e., noticing and shortly paying attention to them. By the act of approaching A’s space, B’s action in cases like example 7 is treated as indicating that A is supposed to finish and make room for B to serve herself as the next customer in line. A indicates an understanding of B’s actions along these lines, as she leaves the space opportune for B to stand in the very same space as A did before her. In this way, the transition of rights to inspect products in specific occupied places is accomplished smoothly in, relatively, minimal time.

When customers who occupy a space do not finish their business within a short while for others to serve themselves in the occupied space, other customers may squeeze by. Example 8 illustrates this: customer B comes from behind customer A in a shop specialized in wall decoration. B stops behind A (#8.1) for about (0.3.) seconds and walks to A’s right (#8.2-#8.3). A bends simultaneously forward. In her space B browses goods for a short while. After (0.2)

\(^4\) The time is measured in tenths of seconds.
seconds B enters A’s space, as she squeezes in between customer A and a basket standing behind A to the left (#8.4-#8.5).

Example 8
#8.1
B stops behind A for (0.3) seconds

#8.2 B walks to A’s right and A bends forward

#8.3 B stands to A’s right for (0.2.) sec.

#8.4 B squeezes in between A and a basket to A’s left

#8.5

A, who recognizably indicates searching for or investigating the products on the shelf in front of her, does not take initiative to step aside, as B stops behind her. Neither does she provide space for B to get access to the products in her space after B has walked to her right and looked at products on the shelf next to her. B’s action may be ambiguous for A: She may be understood to enter the free space next to A (#8.3) to look at products that happens to be in that area and
thus ‘spend time looking at products while standing in line’. This makes it relevant to A to eventually finish and leave the space to B. Alternatively, B may be understood to enter the free space having a genuine interest in the product display in that space. The point of interest is that A and B negotiate access to A’s space through tacit coordination of bodily actions and orientation towards product displays on specific locations. A, who as A in example 7 above, accessed the space and commenced looking at its products first, does not abolish the activity and so after (0.3) seconds of standing behind A and (0.2) seconds of looking at products next to her, B squeezes by. B initiates squeezing by (#8.4.-#8.5.) as she moves forward and turns her back to customer A i.e., B takes steps to create an interactional environment in which talk is not relevant. A responds to B’s initiative as she almost imperceptibly straightens up (#8.5).

‘Squeezing by’ is also found in example 9 below. An elderly woman (B) and a young woman (C) who organize the space between them (Mondada, 2009) as a couple in an electronics warehouse seek help from a salesperson (D) to buy a computer. They have been sent to search for D by another salesperson whom they turned to in the tele section behind them. In #9.1 and line 1 in the transcript, the elderly woman (B) calls out for (D) in front of them to the right (white shirt). Subsequently, the couple squeezes by an unacquainted customer (A, blue shirt).

Example 9

1 B /er du i data
   are you in the data section
   /*walks towards D -- ->
   >>D
2 D /ja
   yes
   /nods

Fig #9.1, •9.1

#9.1

#9.2
B moves slightly to the right

#9.3
B moves further to the right and A to the left

#9.4
B and C squeeze by A
In contrast to examples 7 and 8, the couple is not looking at good displays before entering the space of A, who isn’t looking at displays either, but conducting himself in ways that are recognizable and understandable as waiting (#9.1). A responds to B and D’s talk-in-interaction and B coming from behind him as he moves slightly to the left. This is done simultaneously with A who moves further to the right (#9.3). In this way they establish interactively a narrow corridor which B and subsequently C uses to squeeze by (#9.4) before they stop walking.

In example 8 above, customer A responded by changing position too as she almost indiscernibly straightened up (#8.5). ‘Squeezing by’ is in other words socially accomplished as is ordering the use of spaces in other ways, as described in example 7 and 8 above.

An adequate subtle bodily response to the subtle initiation of squeezing by is in one case in our data constituted by standing still (#9.5-9.6 below). Subsequent to the first squeezing by (example #9.1-9.4 above), the customers B and C accompany the salesperson, D, past the section that they came from (#9.5).

D and C almost simultaneously squeeze by A (#9.6) in front and behind him. In doing so they arrange with A a ‘sandwich’ configuration. A contributes to the configuration by standing still and C by responding to the very narrow space between herself, A, and a station with product displays to her left, as she bends forward with her back towards him (#9.6).
As shown in #9.7 below the couple and the salesperson subsequently form a formation of one walking after the other as they accommodate to each other’s walking tempo. In formation they walk up behind yet another customer (Ai) to whom the salesperson (D) initiates squeezing by as she accommodates the walking tempo to the customer in front and retracts her right arm and shoulder.

As the examples (7-9) demonstrate, the customers monitor the spatial environment as well as other customers and others’ conduct and align their actions through which they ascribe meaning to others’ conduct. Customers’ practice of approaching and entering others’ spaces is understood to convey to them to finish their business standing e.g., gazing at or examining products, and their practices of subtly initiating squeezing by to orient towards a kind of ownership of spaces for doing one’s own business with as little interference by others as possible. Simultaneously, entering others’ space is understood to indicate that one has business to do in that space oneself whether to search oneself or to pass by to get access to other spaces.

Customers in the occupied space respond in ways that indicate an understanding along these lines as they typically move a little to the side or change posture, while remaining in the space to carry out their own business, or as they, alternatively, finish their business and move out of the way of the approaching customer. These responses establish the meaning amongst the customers. Whether a customer in the occupied space actually finishes within a, relatively, minimal time and leaves for the next customer to access or remains in the space, it is a matter of tacit negotiation in interaction. In the interactions the customers draw upon bodily movements, gaze direction, time and space as resources for sense or meaning making through which they design an interactional environment in which talk between them is not relevant.

4.3 Customer orientation towards products and artifacts  
It seems to be of significance to the social ordering of serving themselves in specific (occupied) spaces that a) customers (A) have (some) time and space to finish their business and others (B) do not intervene (immediately) in ways that prevent this; b) others (B) do not force or put pressure on them (A) to end their activity and so they (B) do not indicate waiting for e.g. getting access to the goods in front of (A). Standing in a free space next to a customer (A) gazing in her direction may indicate ‘waiting for someone to finish’. By contrast, customers (B) who approach stop to look at other products in other spaces next to A through which they seem to indicate that they are occupied with finding products themselves. By being occupied with other
products, of course, one is unlikely to constitute an obstacle to, interfere with, or put pressure on A.

This is also demonstrated in example 10 below. However, in contrast to the examples shown above, it illustrates how gazing at product displays accounts for not getting in other customers’ way in terms of crossing their walking trajectory.

A father (B) and his toddler son approach shelves and displays of candy (see red lines in map table 1 below). Candy is displayed at the ends of two sections of shelves that constitute one ‘wall’ out of two in two aisles (1 and 2) that run in parallel to one another. The division of the ‘walls’ into two sections forms a third perpendicular aisle (3) that connects the two horizontal ones (1 and 2).

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Grocery store aisle map</th>
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Before B and his son reach the corner of section 1 and the shelves with candy, customer B asks his son (J) “hva’ mangler vi så Jacob”/so what’s left, Jacob? while gazing at a shopping list in his right hand. He then changes from gazing at the shopping list to gazing at the son while he answers the question himself “fredagsslik”/tv candy which the son confirms with a nod and an acknowledgment token ‘hm’. Using candy as a landmark (De Stefani, 2014a) for the organization of the next shopping item, B turns to his left along the diagonal aisle (3). He gazes at the candy in front of him (#10.3, •10.3, #10.4, •10.4).

Example 10
1 B: /hva’ mangler vi så Jacob
   what’s left Jacob
   >shopping list in right hand
2 (1.5)
3 B: /fredagsslikket
   the tv candy
   >Jacob
4 (0.7)
5 J:  hm
6 B: /hm:
   /turns to his left along diagonal aisle
B picks up a couple of candy bags as he asks “skal vi ha en af hver af dem her” / do we want one of each of these (#10.3, •10.3) and throws them in the shopping cart, which all together builds up to an action (Goodwin, 2011) that may be recognized and understood as B making a choice or a decision which makes relevant a confirming acknowledgement token delivered by his son. Alternatively, B could have acted to indicate a suggestion or invitation to his son to make a decision (B: do we want one of each of these?); yes; B: throws bags in the cart) (Schegloff, 2007). The son does indeed confirm B’s choice (through a *hm*), which B then confirms, also through a token (*hm*), while he straightens up, moves body and head into a straight angle that follows the trajectory of the aisle that he is standing in. Then he starts walking the few steps to the end of the aisle (#10.3, •10.3 and #10.4, •10.4).
(jelly)
10 B: /hm
 /straitens up, body and head in straight angle
11 B: pushes cart forwards, walks towards end of aisle
12 B: glances at customer A walking along the aisle
fig. #10.4, •10.4

#10.4

13 B: pulls cart back

As B notices at a glance A crossing his way (#10.4, •10.4), he pulls back the cart and turns his head to the left where he begins to, observably, search for other types of candy (#10.5, •10.5).

14 B: turns head to the left
15 (/0.2)
16 /gazes at candy while A passes by
fig #10.5, •10.5

#10.5

After (0.2) seconds i.e., upon A passing by, B looks up (#10.6, •10.6) and pushes the shopping cart into aisle 1 and follows A along section 1 in aisle 1 in the direction of the cashier as he accommodates his walking tempo to A's.

17 B: looks up, pushes cart
fig #10.6, •10.6
In other words, B’s action that is understandable as a search for more candy is fitted to the bodily position of A in relation to his own bodily position, his son and his shopping cart on a path that crosses A’s. The organization of the action by reference to the environment, to time and place not only provides the possibility for A to effortlessly continue his walking trajectory, it also constitutes an observable accountable action (Garfinkel, 2002) that indicates to A that he may continue and will not cause any inconvenience, since B is not entering aisle 1 instantly as he is occupied with something else.

Notice, incidentally, that B does not pick up the candy that he gazed at (#10.5, •10.5) (see also examples 7-9). Neither do the customers in any of the other 40 examples collected of customers gazing at products which is geared into another customers’ conduct. Thus, not only grasping or picking up products, but also gazing at and searching for products are actions that account for being at, standing and stopping in, or going to specific spaces.

As illustrated in this and the prior section, looking at products is used to indicate and is understood as ‘customer is busy doing self-service’; the conduct claims space, room, and time to do one’s business, but it also provides space, room, and time to do so. It is in other words, drawn upon as a resource to order the use of space.

As we shall see in the next section, it may, momentarily, be counterproductive to achieving self-service when two customers simultaneously carry out actions that serve to give time and room for each other’s business.

4.4 When practices to not get in each other’s way reinforce each other.

Customers may order their conduct in ways through which they, for a short while, thwart the possibility for servicing themselves. Example 11 (3 continued) aims at illustrating this: the two customers A and B (A ahead of B) cross the path of a third customer, Ai. Ai is searching for biscuits (#11.1, •11.1), he turns around, and walks towards the main aisle (#11.2), where he stops:
As in example 10, here the customer Ai changes his action (#11.2) which is understandable as 'being on the way', when A and B reach his path. At exactly this point, he looks at a piece of paper, a shopping list, in his right hand (#11.3, •11.3). This action is understandable as 'being occupied with something' and accounts for not moving on. In this way Ai takes A and B’s walking trajectory into account and contributes to an interactional environment in which they may relevantly continue.

Customers A and B continue on their walking path. As indicated with the small red circle in picture (•11.4) below, A, as a matter of fact, gazes in the direction of biscuits (i) behind Ai and then glances at Ai (#11.5, •11.5) who is busy writing on his piece of paper. The indication that he is busy accounts for the fact that he occupies the space momentarily and so his activity makes it relevant for other customers, here A and B, to respond by moving on and thus not disturb him (compare to examples 7-8 above).
A stops a little further down the aisle. She then leans on her right foot, bends a little to the right, away from customer Ai and gazes in the direction of other biscuit products (ii) for a short while (#11.6, 11.6).

#11.6, biscuits (ii)

It is noteworthy that customer A does not walk towards the biscuit products (ii). Instead, she restricts her conduct to slightly leaning on her right foot. After (0.3) seconds she walks back to the aisle and enters Ai’s space (#11.7, •11.7 below) to search for or pick up biscuits (i) behind him. In this case, Ai walks away in the very moment in which A moves around him (#11.8, •11.8 and #11.9, •11.9) (compare to e.g., example 7 above):
This indicates that rather than walking straight towards the biscuits (i) that A gazed at first and which were closer to her as she walked towards Ai, she takes into account what he indicates through his bodily behavior and gives him a little time to finish his business.

Hence, the customers (re)establish a practice for organizing conduct through which customers pave the way for each other to service themselves and engage in activities that are relevant to self-service shopping. In this case, however, the actions for achieving this reinforce each other: Ai paves the way for A. Thereby, however, he occupies a space which she does not enter initially as she, on her part, takes his action into account and makes room for him to do his business.

5. Deviant cases

The data materials exhibit only four cases in which the customers do not operate tacitly on the space i.e., using exclusively bodies, space, and materials to e.g., get access to an aisle or to get access to products. Example 12 (#12.1/•12.1-#12.6/•12.6) illustrates one of the instances.

Customer A (red coat) stands in front of a shelf in a bookstore with her gaze directed towards the shelf (#12.1). She occupies the end of a narrow aisle that leads into a wider aisle which B (dark coat) walks along towards her (#12.2). Close to A, B gazes in the direction of A (#12.2, •12.2) and turns then slightly towards and gazes at products which are displayed to A’s left (#12.3, •12.3 below).

#12.3

B gazes at product display to the A’s left
While B gazes at the display, A glances at B (#12.4 below):

#12.4
A glances at B

The display is very close to A though A stands to the right in the narrow aisle (•12.5) and so B stands almost in front of A when she starts to gaze at the display (#12.4). The action (#12.4) may be understood in two different ways (cp to analysis of example 8 above): B is occupied with the products and B is waiting to get past A. In the former case, a relevant response is for A to stand still to not force B to move away from the space that she occupies to gaze at the products. In the latter case, a relevant response is for A to actually move away and give B space. A may thus be understood to monitor B’s conduct to dissolve the ambiguity.

After 0.3 seconds, B turns her gaze towards A and they achieve mutual gaze (#12.5).

#12.5
A and B achieve mutual gaze

B then lifts her plastic bag and basket above the book display in the direction of A's space (#12.6 below):

#12.6.
B lifts bag and cart
1. A: ja undskyld
   yes excuse me
   smiles steps forward

2. B: det er i orden
   that's alright
   steps forward

Fig #12.7

#12.7 'yes excuse me'; that's alright  #12.8 A and B squeeze by each other

A responds with a smile and with a step forward while she utters “ja undskyld”/yes excuse me (line 1; #12.7). In this way she recognizes what is relevant for her to do with a token (“ja”/yes) and excuses for being in B’s way i.e., for not having moved away in time without being ‘requested’ to do so through B’s gaze at her. B responds by accepting the excuse (“det er i orden”/that’s alright, line 2) while she enters the space that B’s action provides. The effect is that they squeeze by one another (#12.8)

Example 12 illustrates a situation in which customers’ ordinary tacit interactional organization of embodied conduct fails. This brings about an environment in which talk becomes relevant in terms of an excuse which is in example 12 delivered by A. Also, in the three other cases relevant talk-in-interaction constitutes excuses (followed by acceptance) or some version of it. The excuse may however be delivered by B in terms of e.g. “må jeg lige skubbe til dig engang” which in a literal translation says ‘may I push you a little’, to which the other customer responds: “det må du i hvert fald”/of course you may.

5 In two of the cases one customer actually bumps into the other.
6. Conclusion and discussion

Customers draw upon ‘seeing’, ‘hearing’ (footsteps) and ‘feeling’ each other, upon product displays, the environmental space and upon time as resources for constructing actions and for ascribing meaning to them. Understanding actions in terms of ‘browsing’, ‘searching’, ‘examining’, ‘choosing’, ‘approaching’, ‘aiming for’, ‘wants’ and ‘needs’ results from producing and ascribing meaning to actions in the here and now of action production. Moreover, customers construct actions for other customers to observe and in interaction they draw upon each other’s actions as resources as well. In other words, they coordinate their actions as they gear them into each other in stop-and-go processes, processes of occupying spaces, getting access to occupied or free spaces, and giving space for engaging in relevant business. In and though interaction they dynamically establish an observable social order of self-service shopping as they orient towards ‘co-presence’ and ‘otherness’.

The study has shown that the customers’ organization is accomplished through subtle and smooth coordination of bodily movements, gaze behavior and ‘occupation’ with products to the effect that talk is not relevant and availability for further social involvement not indicated. Of course, customers may glance at one another simultaneously, which may occasionally result in a smile and a nod and may occasionally result in a ‘narration of the conduct’ e.g., “jeg skal lige forbi en gang” (I just need to get past). They may also engage in small ritual exchanges of ‘excuses’, but it happens in comparatively few cases and in our data such exchanges emerge in environments in which subtle and smooth coordination of bodily movements is not accomplished within a short amount of time.

Smooth navigation implies none or minimal social involvement in our data. None or minimal social involvement thus seems to ‘increase’ the social order of doing self-service and may even embody an ideal. Not orienting towards this social order, not engaging in e.g. the synchronization of velocity, in monitoring and exploiting available spaces and using displayed products to indicate being or staying occupied with relevant business, or not leaving an occupied space opportune but ‘taking time’ to move out of the way, smiling and working to involve other customers in small exchanges of talk, is in Denmark stereotypically ascribed to older people, mostly older ‘talkative’ women, who may cause some bewilderment during rush hour as well as reflections and talk on why ‘they’ go shopping at this time of the day. The fact that the data were collected in Denmark of course prevents us from generalizing the findings to other geographical areas and to what may ‘appear’ to us as other ‘cultures’ (see also Watson, 2009; Mondada and Sorjonen, 2016). However, it does not imply that similar organizational patterns of self-service interaction cannot be found in other countries. Neither does it imply that organizational behavior that differs from the systematic behavior described in this study may not occur occasionally in the ‘Danish culture’. Finally, it does not imply that some details of the self-service conduct in interaction may not differ across ‘cultures’ while the overall organization is similar or the same. Interestingly, people’s ‘frequent’ use of exchanges of ritual excuses to pass in shops, metros and streets, in countries like the UK, Italy or Australia is noticeable to many Danes on visits abroad. This is also evidenced in a quote from an interaction between a researcher who has lived in the UK for some years and his mother in a store in Denmark:

“Du har været for længe i England. Her i Danmark siger vi altså ikke undskyld til hinanden når vi skal forbi nogen eller når nogen lige skal forbi os” / You have been too long in England. Here
in Denmark we do not excuse ourselves when we want to get past someone or when someone wants to get past us”  
(Mrs. Haman)\(^6\)

Whether one may expect to find similar patterns and details of conduct in other countries or whether a specific ‘Danish culture’ seems to ‘appear’ through (some of) the details of the organization, of course remains an empirical question.

Customers’ conduct is not non-socially reactive (Schutz, 1962). It takes social coordination i.e., co-organized processes of multi-modal conduct, to achieve individualist, ‘self-centred’ engagement with the products of the stores. As shown in this paper, customers’ detailed multi-modal work to do self-service and accomplish minimal social involvement is interactional and social. It takes into account other customers and other customers’ business and even assumes other’s wishes and needs, and it (re)establishes rights to fulfil them. Through customers’ tacit interaction, they provide room for each other to search products to do necessary everyday self-service shopping as easily and effortlessly as possible. That is, they pave the way for one another to fulfill some of the customer purposes of self-service i.e., providing immediate access to goods and securing efficacy through less social involvement. Self-service in stores is a social achievement amongst customers. Doing self-service on-line entails no social interactional processes of this kind. Prior to the Corona pandemic, wishes to increase effortlessness accounted for e-shop owners’ invitations to shop groceries on-line: it saves the customers the physical efforts to go to the stores, to stand in line, to physically reach for and carry the groceries, and it eliminates face-to-face social involvement. From this perspective e-shopping takes the purpose of the multi-modal work, described in this paper, to the extreme. The Corona pandemic added to this list of accounts the fact that no face-to-face social engagement lowers the risk of being infected with the virus. The consequences of e-shopping are evidently economic losses for brick-and mortar shop owners. E-shopping as well as other incentives to keep individuals apart have also, however, reminded us all of the importance of being part of social life. Going to stores, even in cultures that seem to prefer low social engagements when doing self-service, is part of that social life.

Declaration of Interests
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\(^6\) The researcher sent this quote to the authors after having heard a presentation of the phenomenon described in this paper in the meeting ‘Human touch’ November 2018. The quote stems from the researcher’s visit a few days after the meeting to a toy store.
Albe Emballage AS (2019) Papkasse køb online hurtigt og nemt. METAL SUPPLY. www.metal-supply.dk/announcement/view/103804/papkasse_kob_online_hurtigt_og_nemt


