WRITING ALOUD: SOME INTERACTIONAL FUNCTIONS OF THE PUBLIC DISPLAY OF EMERGENT WRITING

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ABSTRACT
This paper investigates some social uses of an everyday mundane object -Post-it- and how Post-its are used as part of a collaborative design activity. The activity evolves around a special graphical layout, the Value Design Canvas, which aims at structuring the progression of the design activity with designated sections of the (intended) discussion being printed on it. The writing of keywords, ideas and central features of the discussion on Post-its constitute a central aspect of the design activity and the integrated use of the Value Design Canvas. The paper focuses on social uses of writing in which the writing activity is made publicly available to the co-participants during its production. It analyzes situations in which the writer vocalizes the writing by reading aloud what (s)he is writing while writing it. The paper shows how this has interactional functions, and how co-participants orient to it as central to the ongoing course of action.

INTRODUCTION
Taking notes. Writing down decisions. Formulating the "essence" of a discussion. These are central components of 'meetings' in all their variety. These may take the form of individual notes for future individual use. Or they may take the form as the official minutes of the meeting – as a collectively gathered summary of decisions being made, time schedule agreed upon, to-do lists, future working steps and so on. Here I want to focus on a version of the latter: on how Post-its are filled with graphic structures, most noticeably single keywords and sentences, to document decisions, central features etc. that emerge in a collaborative design activity.

Converting (parts of) an oral discussion into written form is central for future reference (see e.g., Meehan 1986; Komter 2006). It is, in a sense, a commonsensical part of ‘doing’ meetings, discussions, workshops and so on. Often only one group member, who in some institutional settings may be referred to as ‘chair’, ‘secretary’ or the like, is in charge of the writing. Here a range of questions emerges: Who decides what gets written down? In what form is it written – e.g. keywords or full sentences? Which keywords are chosen? This paper looks at a few ways in which this can be accomplished, and in particular how it can be accomplished socially by making the writing publicly available for other group participants’ online inspection, comments or correction.

DATA AND METHODOLOGY
The data constitute approximately 1 hour of video recording from two group discussions between designers and business representatives. The discussion takes the form of a collaborative design activity about a...
potential future project, and the activity itself is organized around a special layout tool, the Value Design Canvas (see figure 1), which serves to structure different phases of the design process (for a description of the Value Design Canvas, see Gultekin Atasoy this volume).

![Value Design Canvas](image1)

The layout of the Value Design Canvas includes various sections – with the central idea of the design in the middle – in which participants can place Post-its that reflect aspects of the preceding discussion, features that are central to the design project etc. At the end of the discussion, the Value Design Canvas may be filled with Post-its (see figure 2) as a summary of the preceding discussion, which can then serve as a starting point for future steps in the design process.

![Value Design Canvas at the end of a workshop](image2)

The paper uses Ethnomethodology/Conversation Analysis (e.g., Francis and Hester 2004) to analyze the use of Post-its, and in particular the writing on Post-its in interaction. It aims at documenting participants’ practical reasoning for manipulating, writing on, and (re)placing Post-its during the collaborative design activity. Writing, in this setting, is seen as a publicly available action that is an integrated part of the design activity itself. It is then a members’ problem (Garfinkel 1967) to deal with such matters as what, how and when something is written down. In this paper, I will make a few general observations of how writing-in-interaction can be accomplished, and focus on situations in which the writer is indexing the writing activity by reading aloud what (s)he is currently writing. I will describe the sequentially unfolding action(s) of reading and writing, the sequential organization, and how the concrete physical objects, most noticeably Post-its and pens, are manipulated in such a way as to become available to participants’ mutually shared attention.

**OBJECTS AS AFFORDANCES FOR SOCIAL INTERACTION**

In perceptual psychology, Gibson (1977) used the notion of *affordance* to refer to the opportunities objects provide for action. A pen’s affordance would be that of ‘writing’, a bottle’s those of ‘containing beverage’ and ‘drinking’ and so on. And yet it takes only a second of reflection to think of our own experiences with alternative uses to such objects: A pen used as an extension of a pointing finger, drinking of a bottle to provide “thinking time” before answering a tricky question during an oral exam. Objects may then be used in the service of accomplishing social actions in specific sequential positions in social interaction (e.g., Hutchby 2001). Indeed, the ways in which participants manipulate and interpret objects are part of the communicative event itself (Streeck 1996). Streeck (2011: 67) writes: “Social interaction is a vociferous process, always hungry for stuff out of which signs, symbols, and scenic arrangements can be make, and it often appropriates for its own purposes other props such as objects on the table, or mediated practices such as writing, diagramming, or doodling”. This approach includes, then, looking at how objects can be used in ways that are generally not associated with their functional properties.

In this paper, I take an *emic*, participant focused approach to how objects are used in social interaction. In particular, I will make some general observations about the activity of “writing on Post-its” and in particular how writing is embedded within the social group work. Or rather, how writing itself is can be a social activity.

**WRITING-IN-AND-AS-INTERACTION**

Writing is most often seen as an individual and “private” activity – or, in Vygotskian terms, as a mediation tool to facilitate inner mental processes. Often, however, writing is not done in the isolation of the writer himself, but is situated in a social situation (e.g., Whalen 1995). The writing then becomes a central component of the social activity at hand and a vehicle for (other) social actions (cf. Wilkinson et al. 2011; Hazel and Mortensen, accepted). Here, it becomes relevant for the participants to negotiate just how the writing is included in the social activity. In situations...
involving three of more participants one way this can be done is that one participant does the writing while the others continue talking. This results in a kind of schisming (Egbert 1997) that divides the group into two (or more) parallel interactions - one participant being engaged with writing while the others continue the prior discussion. This is, indeed, very frequent in our data here as demonstrated in example 1.

Example 1: Private writing

Here, F in lines 11-12 writes “privacy” on a Post-it while the discussion continues with H’s comments on how to deal with weight problems (line 9 onwards). “Privacy” is related to a comment just being made by F himself about using Facebook as a motivational factor. What is written on the Post-it is not being turned into a topic to be discussed prior to its production. Nor is the end result, i.e. the Post-it with the keyword “Privacy” written on it, being assessed or being made relevant for assessment by the co-participants. This resembles taking notes from the ongoing discussion. In the data, it is significant that when looking at cases of “private writing” what ends up on the Post-it very often reflects the opinion, suggestion and formulation made by the writer him- or herself. In other words, in these cases the writer has a strong control over what will eventually end up on the Value Design Canvas – as a summary that is ‘supposed to’, or ‘understood as’ reflecting the general discussion of the collaborative design activity.

This does not mean that the writer is not part of the social activity. Indeed, the writing is a central feature of the design activity and is not oriented to by the co-participants as irrelevant to it. However, by physically turning the gaze away from the other participants and withholding further speech the writer changes the participation framework (Goffman 1981; Goodwin and Goodwin 2005), changes his role within it into a for-the-moment bystander and displays not being available for the ongoing or continued discussion. In this way, the writer engages in a parallel activity that is nonetheless central to the ongoing activity, and the precise timing in which the writer engages in the writing activity displays his/her understanding of the prior discussion as relevant for making a written comment or keyword(s) about it. Even such individual writing is thus integrated within the emergent progression of the design activity, and oriented to as a central component of it.

WRITING AND TALKING

In this paper I will describe situations in which the writer is talking during the writing activity. That is, the writer is contributing to the ongoing discussion during the writing activity. This is (perhaps) surprisingly frequent in the data. As opposed to the “private writing” just described, here the writer is not (necessarily) disengaging from the participation framework established between the group members. The writer may physically turn the gaze towards the Post-it on the table, but in and through talk maintains his/her position as a principal participant in the social encounter. One way of doing this is by talking during the writing activity i.e. continuing the discussion simultaneously to writing on the Post-it. The writer thus keeps being engaged in the continued discussion, and at the same time formulates elements of the until-now discussion. It is, in a sense, dividing the writers attention between two parallel activities – writing and talking – thereby dealing with both courses of action simultaneously (cf. Haddington et al. forthc.). As example 2 shows, this is often reflected in the writer’s hesitant speech production.
Example 2: Writing and talking

Here, B is writing on the Post-it while continuing the prior discussion. In the beginning of the example, B refers to an earlier comment by D’S colleague (who is not present at the table). This results in a word search activity and several candidate solutions by C (line 5), B herself (line 6) and D (line 8). D’s candidate solution, “a mission”, is partly accepted by B, who repeats it (line 9) and expands it (line 11). The word search sequence is then closed, and B returns to the prior discussion and projects writing on another Post-it by pasting it to the Value Design Canvas in front of her. In line 18, she initiates another turn-at-talk at the same time as she starts writing what eventually turns into a list of keywords on the Post-it starting here with the word “mission”. Her turn includes several pauses and hesitations. To the participants this displays that her turn-at-talk is emerging, that she is currently holding the floor and that this is not a relevant position for others to start talking. It is thus an effective way to maintain the speaker role and to project an upcoming turn-at-talk once the writing activity has come to an end.

WRITING ALOUD

Writing and talking is, indeed, not very common in the corpus, and when it occurs it seems to project an upcoming turn from the writer rather than continuing the prior discussion simultaneously to the writing. More frequently, however, are cases in which the writer indexes the writing activity or “writes aloud” (cf. Komter 2006) what (s)he is currently writing on the Post-it as in example 3**.

Example 3: Writing aloud
Here the group is discussing how an (imaginary) technological system can help motivating elderly people to exercise (more). We come in when they discuss how the software should be designed in terms of personal set-up and individual settings. In lines 1-7, B, who is at this point acting as a chair within the group, opens a discussion about the necessary steps when firstly engaging with the system. Both D and C, lines 10-11 provide candidate solutions, and B picks up on C’s suggestion – that you first should “check in”. B’s acceptance of C’s suggestion is made visible firstly in and through her moving hand towards the Post-it block, which projects a writing activity. And secondly by repeating the suggestion (line 12). Note the change in pronoun, which suggests that B takes up the position as representing the future users. She then starts writing on the Post-it – again with a change in the pronoun, and ends up with the words “you check in” written on the Post-it. During the writing, however, she reads aloud the words as they are produced or reprinted on the Post-it. This is done as reading-what-she-is-writing: first of all, her (accompanying) talk is produced in a lower volume than the surrounding talk and the individual words are productionally isolated through prolongations and pauses. Secondly, the writing in initiated slightly before she starts reading. In this way, when she starts her turn-at-talk in line 14 it is heard as related to what she is currently writing on the Post-it. Thirdly, the end of the writing and the simultaneous reading of it is marked by physically removing the Post-it and replacing it in the relevant section of the Value Design Canvas, and B’s transition to the next step (line 16).

The example continues with another example of writing aloud. And once again, it follows a similar sequential organization as before: Again, B accepts C’s suggestion starting in line 25. She does this by taking another Post-it from the block and pastes it on the Value Design Canvas in front of her. This is done at a point of possible completion of C’s turn-at-talk, thus projecting the writing to be related to C’s prior turn. However, C continues and B, in overlap, starts writing on the Post-it (line 29). In line 31, C reaches another possible completion point, and exactly at this point B starts reading aloud what she is currently writing. As before, her turn-at-talk is produced as reading through stressing each word, prolongations, and pauses. And again the end of the writing is marked by tearing off the Post-it, and replacing it in the right section on the Value Design Canvas. Here D displays his understanding of the writing being completed as he moves to the next relevant step once the reading reaches a possible completion (line 34).

A common aspect of “writing aloud” seems to be that the discussion is put on hold during the writing activity. This is different from both ‘private writing’ and ‘writing and talking’ as described above. The writing is here turned into a social activity; it is, in and through the reading aloud of the emergent writing, made available for public inspection. This means that co-participants can comment on, repair, assess and so on the writing as it is emerging.

Example 4: Repairing the emerging graphical representation

In line 1, F summarizes the prior discussion and suggests how it can be formulated as keywords to be written on a Post-it. Note that line 1 is not produced as reading. F’s suggestion is positively received by J in line 2. H, however, suggests specifying that it is a “team score board” (line 3). Nobody comments on the suggestion. Instead, F reads aloud what he has just written, “improvement”, and continues with reading aloud the emergent writing (line 5). In this way, the writing is initiated before it is being read aloud – as was the case in example 3. When the reading and writing of “measuring” is completed, F proceeds to the next item. He produces “team” with a rising pitch thereby inviting confirmations or comments from his co-participants, and in overlap H presents his suggestion once more. This is the syntactically relevant position for adding his suggestion “team score board” and therefore a relevant position for adding it to the emergent writing through its publicly available display. What we see, then, is that the online reading of the emergent writing provides co-participants a chance to add to it, to change or correct it during its production. In this way, the written Post-its are, indeed, socially and interactionally constructed despite the individual character of the graphical representation.
Example 4 showed that co-participants may, indeed, continue talking during the (displayed) writing activity, but here H’s talk was commenting on the emergent writing. The data suggest that writing aloud is oriented to as a primary socio-interactional activity, i.e. the previous discussion is put on hold until the publicly available writing is completed. Verbalization of the writing activity is thus taken by the participants themselves as an action that is relevant to the more general design activity and not, for instance, that the reading is “done” for the writer him or herself – so as to mediate the writing, for instance. Rather, like other kinds of turns-at-talk, there is a preference for one speaker at the time (Sacks et al. 1974), which means that other speakers’ talk coming up to possible completions of the ongoing turn. Within the turn itself, then, other talk is generally dispreferred if not, as in example 4, it is being invited and related to the emergent writing. In example 5 we see how violations of this norm are dealt with by the participants – and the writer in particular.

Here the group is discussing how nodes to measure heart frequency should be attached – on the person or on the machine. D’s suggestion that it “could be both” is accepted by B, who starts writing on a Post-it. Again, the writing of each word precedes its verbal formulation. After completing the first one, with “nodes on people” written on it, she takes another Post-it from the block and pastes it in front of her. She thus projects a second option – that the nodes can be in the machines, on this Post-it. In the pause in line 12 she starts writing “nodes”, and shortly after starts reading aloud. In overlap, D produces a (inaudible) turn, which is not picked up by B. Instead, she continues writing aloud. C, however, accepts D’s turn with a “yeah” in line 15. As B starts writing “equipment” on the Post-it, C stretches her right hand towards the Post-it B is currently writing on (see figure 3). This can be seen as a way to project an upcoming turn-at-talk (Mondada 2007). Her hand ends in a pointing gesture (figure 4) in B’s immediate field of vision (Goodwin 2003) in overlap with B’s reading aloud the word “equipment”. B is still writing at this point, and C maintains her pointing hand towards the Post-it.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(5) Group1: 03:20</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>01 B: and eh s- let’s say your nodes? (0.2) are they (.) on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02 B: the ↑people (.) or in the machi:nes,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03 B: or [both</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04 D: [mm it could be both</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05 B: yeah?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>06 Ps: (0.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>07 D: &quot;both ( )&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>08 Ps: {(0.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>{nodes}</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 09 B: ↑no::de:ses: ---- (0.8)) o:::n ↑↑people
| on } {people |
| 10 Ps: ------)--) (1.0)) |
| __________ |
| 11 B: ↑“not in people” |
| B: ↑takes another Post-it and pastes it on the Canvas |
| 12 Ps: ------)( (1.3)) |
| {nodes} |
| 13 B: ↑no::de[s --]----)--) (1.1)) g:::n |
| on |
| 14 D: [( )] |
| 15 C: [#3yea:h |
| 16 Ps: {[--]=(0.7)) |
| {equipment} |
| C: ↑stretches R hand towards the Post-it B writes on |
| 17 B: ↑(equipment) |
| C: ↑at points at Post-it |
| 18 C: I’m ↑I’m (.) ![for nodes on ↑people I would (.)] |
| 19 C: ↑retracts pointing hand |
| 20 C: ↑imagine (the:) there would be a: (1.0) eh::: some |
| 21 C: (sport) (0.5) sporting ehrn: wrist band or knee |
| 22 C: bands that you can attach ![these nodes to |

Example 5: Overlapping talk during writing aloud

Figure 3: Pre-pointing

Figure 4: C’s pointing

B finishes the reading of “equipment”. The end is a possible completion not just of the turn-at-talk, i.e. the reading aloud, but also of the writing on the Post-it – which is still in progress. Now C initiates a turn-at-talk (line 18). Her turn-beginning includes two re-starts and a retraction of the pointing gesture to its home position (Sacks and Schegloff 2002). Her turn is now underway and extends beyond the last bit of B’s writing. In this way, it requires interactional work to initiate a turn-at-talk while the writer is engaged in (visually and audible) displayed writing. Here, the pointing finger in B’s field of vision is not only projecting an upcoming turn-at-talk, but this is significantly withheld until the writing, i.e. the displayed writing activity, has come to an end.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

In this paper, I have showed how the activity of writing in an interactional setting can both be done as an individual “private” activity, and as a displayed social and publicly available activity. And, furthermore, that writing as a social accomplishment can be done by the writer’s online reading of the emerging graphical structures. In this regards, I made the observations that (i) the writing of a lexical item precedes its verbalization, (ii) writing aloud creates a participation framework, in which the Post-it, the writing and the reading aloud are central components not just to the
writer him- or herself, but rather to the entire group. Co-
participants orient to writing aloud as a relevant social 
action as further talk is withheld until the (displayed) 
writing has come to a completion. And (iii), that talk 
occuring in overlap with writing aloud is done as 
comments, corrections or suggestion to the emerging 
writing, e.g., as suggestion for changing the course of 
the projected writing. Writing aloud is thus done as a 
publicly displayed activity, in which the group members 
can influence, or at times are invited to ratify the 
emerging writing.

The paper adds to a range of ethnographic studies that 
show how "basic" everyday objects are used in the 
service of interaction (e.g. Luff et al. 2010; Hazel and 
Mortensen accepted). Here, the very design of the Value 
Design Canvas includes and supposes the use of such 
objects as paper (although not necessarily in the form of 
Post-its) and pens. The ways in which such objects are 
used and implemented into the discussion are made 
relevant in and through the design. Writing Post-its, 
then, is a central component of how participants engage 
with and experience the Value Design Canvas. This 
paper has sought to describe only one practice for 
writing-in-interaction.

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Gultekin Atasoy, P. et al., this volume. Facilitating 
design and innovation workshops using the Value 
Design Canvas.
Transcription conventions follow Jefferson (e.g. 2004). Transcription of participants' bodily conduct follow Mondada (2007) in which '+' notates the writer and ‘!’ other participants.

Here ‘{ }’ marks beginning and end of the writing as well as what is being written on the Post-it (in bold). The duration of the writing is marked with underscore (‘___’).