

Accounting for taste: conversation, categorisation and classification in sensory judging.

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Abstract

The session I will present at the mini STS conference arises from my fieldwork for my PhD in Techno Learning where I am looking at the processes of learning and practising sensory judging. My fieldwork stages: participant observation of: 1 - a blended face-to-face/online course in beer judging, 2 - a multiple-choice style guide exam and then the tasting exam 3 - course participants practising sensory judging at the UK national homebrew competition. In considering sensory evaluation, in particular I focus extensively on contemporary work by established STS scholars. For example Law notes that if we were to face the messes of reality at all then we would be going to have to teach ourselves to think, to practise, to relate in new ways. We will need to teach ourselves to know some of the realities of the world using methods unknown in social science. For example? Here are some possibilities. Perhaps we will need to know to satisfy our hungers, tastes, discomforts, or pains of our bodies. These would be forms of knowing as embodied. Other considerations of tasting within STS include those of Latour (2004, p. 123), Gomart and Hennion (2004, 2007); Mol (2008, 2011); Mol and Law (2004); Teil and Hennion (2004) and also contemporary work by Annemarie Mol by Anna Mann (2011, 2012 ; 2011) At the core of this course, practice and my investigation is a classification system used and its consequences - following the ethnography of classification systems of Bowker and Star (1999) and Star (1999). Bowker and Star note that they have seen categories as coming from an abstract sense of mind, little anchored in the exigencies of politics. The work of attaching things to categories, and the ways in which those categories are ordered are often overlooked (except by theorists of Language like Harvey Sacks 1975, 1992). (Bowker & Star, 1999) I am therefore taking a particular interest in the conversational aspects of interaction as well as my extensive fieldwork documents. Of particular interest is the potential of working with the ethnomethodological orientation of both actor-network theory (ANT) and the approach to analysing conversation known as membership categorisation (MCA). I am particularly interested in exploring how the conventions of MCA would be shaped and their consideration as a methods assemblage (Law, 2004) and from a praxiographic approach to conversation. A departure point for this is the assertion by ethnomethodologists/conversation analysts Ester and Hennion that MCD inquiry may extend beyond the traditional sociological domains. Is there any scholarly activity that human activity earned out in language, that does not entail describing, judging, and inferring, to which

categorization (extended to things other than persons) is not applicable? (1992, pp. 263-264) By seeking consideration of classification-in-interaction to incorporate non-human classifications this is substantiated by the work of Lucy Suchman (1987, 2007) who extended the better known aspect of Harvey Sacks's sequential analysis of conversation to take into account the interactional and conversational turns of photocopies' displays and other aspects of human-computer interaction. Early questions I will explore happen to categorical concepts such as 'standard relational pairs' (SRPs) when there is not a pair network of relationships evoked in a category? And how could ANT contribute its particular developmental ethnomethodological approaches to this aspect of ethnomethodological enquiry? As my research experience I see this as an opportunity for experiential participation, as well as presenting some of the data gathered I will include elements of data generation through inviting conference participants' processes of sensory analysis and categorisation of some example beers as a potential site and setting for my research project.

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