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Tasting Rembrandt: examining taste at the point-of-experience

Dirk vom Lehn

King's College London

> "[O]ne cannot fully understand cultural practices unless 'culture', in the restricted, normative sense of ordinary usage, is brought back into 'culture' in the anthropological sense, and the elaborated taste for the most refined objects is reconnected with the elementary taste for the flavours of food". (Bourdieu 2010/1979: 1)

Introduction

Bourdieu's work has had an extraordinary influence on the development of the sociology of art and culture. Through his analyses he has provided sociologists with myriad analytic and methodological opportunities for research into the relationship between society, art and culture (cf. Chan and Goldthorpe 2007; Hanquinet 2013). This research, for example, treats museum visiting as a marker of distinction that reflects people's standing in society (DiMaggio 1996; Kirchberg 1996). The contributions to the present volume bear witness to the sustained importance and relevance of Bourdieu for sociology, social policy and

practice. They continue Bourdieu's exploration of how in modern societies "taste" is used as a marker of social distinction. Following this argument, museums can be seen as institutions that operate as "taste makers". They collect and exhibit aesthetic objects that can influence the orientation to the world of those who spend the time and resources to appreciate them.

This chapter turns to museum audiences as it explores exhibits and exhibitions. It is concerned with people's interaction at, and around, exhibits in museums and addresses Hanquinet and colleagues' (2013: 113) argument "that when looking at how people appreciate art, it is necessary to investigate people's underlying attitudes or dispositions as well as their actual practices". Yet rather than focusing on attitudes and dispositions underlying the appreciation of art my interest is in people's practices at the "point-of-experience" (vom Lehn 2006a), i.e. I am concerned with where, when and how people actually encounter and experience a work of art. For the purpose of this chapter I examine a single case of two visitors arriving at, examining and departing from a painting. The single case analysis will uncover the organisation of the participants' talk and bodily action in front of the piece.

Taste in Practice

Art perception has often been described as a cognitive process. It is assumed that works of art have certain properties that stimulate neurological and physiological responses (Ramachandran and Hirstein 1999; Tschacher et al. 2012). These studies of art perception are often conducted in experimental settings that largely ignore the social, material and

visual context of art and art perception. A related body of research known as visitor studies has emerged over the past 50 years that examines or measures the impact of the context on visitors' behavioural or cognitive response to exhibits (Schaefer 1996). Surprisingly, this body of studies largely ignores developments in the sociology of art and culture (for research of conversations in mainly science centres and museums, see Leinhardt, Crowley, and Knutson 2002; Leinhardt and Knutson 2004).

The sociology of art and culture has emerged in light of Bourdieu's (1968, 1987, 1991, 1993, 2010) and Becker's (1982) analyses of the arts as being produced through "collective action" and forming "fields" or "social worlds" that facilitate the creation, distribution and appreciation of works of art. They also have provided sustained criticism of descriptions of works of art as having independent properties that "the viewer" can see when s/he applies an appropriate gaze. Instead, Bourdieu (1968) powerfully dismissed the "myth of the 'fresh eye'" and showed society's influence on the relationship between people and art. In various publications (Bourdieu 1968, 1987, 1993) and in particular in his famous book "Distinction" (2010/1979) he suggested that the ability to make sense of works of art requires people to repeatedly engage with art and be exposed to art in the course of their socialisation and education.

Bourdieu's studies have informed analyses of social structure and participation in the arts and culture (Bennett, Emmison, and Frow 1999; Hanquinet 2013; Kirchberg 1996, 2005). They however have not encouraged investigations of the processes of consuming and experiencing works of art. Those studies in museums that show an interest in people's

engagement with museum exhibits are primarily driven by concerns with learning in and from museums. Many of these studies conduct studies of what people have gained or learned from the engagement with exhibits (Falk and Dierking 2000; Hein 1998). Only a few of these studies though are concerned with the processes of engaging, experiencing and "tasting". These studies often explore how "learning" in museums emerges from people using interaction and communication as means to "scaffold" their own and companion's understanding of exhibits (Davidsson and Jakobsson 2012). This research has mainly been conducted in science centres and museums.

There however is a small body of studies that explores sense making in art museums. They include research on meaning making in art exhibitions (RCMG 2001), exploration of collaborative activities and workshops in art museums (LaVilla-Havelin 1989) and our own video-based studies of interaction and communication in art museums in which we have begun to investigate how people socially organise the navigation of galleries (vom Lehn 2013) and how they configure each other's experience of works of art (vom Lehn and Heath 2016; Heath and vom Lehn 2004). Related video-based studies also have been conducted by Kesselheim (2010, 2012) who is interested in how the material and visual structure of exhibits influences the organisation of people's encounters with works of art and objects shown in glass-cases.

These video-based studies of interaction have begun to reveal that experiences of exhibits are produced in, and through, interaction between people at the exhibit-face. They argue that what people look at and how they see it is not prefigured or even determined by

dispositions and attitudes acquired through socialisation, education and repeated engagement with art, but it arises at the "point-of-experience" (vom Lehn 2006a) where people interact at, and around, the works. Despite the growing body of studies concerned with the experience of works of art in museums, only little research examines people's display of 'taste' in exhibitions. For studies concerned with the display of taste we have to move to a different domain, namely people's consumption of food which interestingly brings us back to Bourdieu's (2010) quote from the beginning of this chapter.

Studies of food consumption have been conducted in discourse psychology and conversation analysis. Similar to the research on the aesthetic experience of works of art these investigations complement existing research that explores people's food preferences and attitudes towards food (Fishbein and Ajzen 1975) by shifting the focus to the actual eating and to people's accounts for the taste of food while eating. These studies provide a critique of survey-based research that relies on a "generic use of evaluative expressions such as *good* or *like*" when examining people's "taste" and attitudes to food (Wiggins 2001: 447). Moreover, Wiggins (2001) argues that the assumption that attitudes are stable across time and contexts is misplaced and demonstrates that taste and attitudes to food are highly variable and context-bound. Thus, she provides the grounds for studies that investigate the assessment and evaluation of food when it is being eaten. Wiggins (2002) examines how people display their pleasure in tasting certain foods and explicates the interactional relevance of vocal displays such as "mmm". In a subsequent study Wiggins (2004) elaborates on the interactional deployment of assessments of food and demonstrates the discursive nature of food evaluations. Whilst Wiggins' (2001, 2002,

2004) analyses use audio-recordings of conversations recorded at family meals Mondada (2009) examines audio-/video-recordings of talk and interaction over dinner. Her analysis of interaction at dinner tables focuses on the sequential organisation of food evaluation. She identifies three moments in dinner conversations when food assessments are produced; first, when food is offered, second, they use references to food to contribute a new topic to a conversation, and third, they reference food to change the trajectory of the conversation when it has arrived at a problematic point. Mondada's study provides me with an interesting starting-point to turn to the analysis of people "tasting" works of art.

The following analysis will examine a video-taped fragment recorded at a painting by Rembrandt. It will focus on the organisation of visitors' encounter with, examination of and departure from paintings. Thus, the analysis will investigate the emergence and development of the 'tasting' of paintings from the initial encounter through to the leaving from the piece.

Tasting Rembrandt

The interaction under scrutiny has been recorded in an exhibition of paintings by Rembrandt at the National Gallery in London. The painting in question is a portrait of a lady that is presumed to be Hendrickje Stoffels, a nurse to Rembrandt's son Titus and mistress of the artist. The painting is of considerable size, about one metre in height and more than eighty centimetres wide. A label attached to the wall on the right of the painting provides information about the piece:

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Rembrandt (1606–1669)

Portrait of Hendrickje Stoffels, probably 1654–6

Hendrickje Stoffels had entered Rembrandt's household as a nurse to his young son Titus by 1649. She later became the artist's mistress. There is no documented portrait of Hendrickje. The identification is based on the informality and the affection with which she is represented. The French frame was made around 1710; the gilding is original.

Oil on canvas

NG6432. Bought with a contribution from the National Art Collections Fund, 1976

The analysis focuses on the interaction between two ladies, Jo and Paula, while they are at the exhibit. The two ladies spent about two minutes at the exhibit, although they do not look at the piece for the entire time. How they see and experience the piece primarily arises during those two minutes. They may discuss the piece again later when continuing their visit, in the coffee shop or elsewhere but the principal experience arises in the here and now, at the exhibit-face.

The analysis will examine aspects of the interaction at the painting that are critical for the way in which the two participants experience the piece. It will be organised in three parts: first, I will turn to the beginning of the fragment to investigate how the pair initially engage with the work of art; I will liken the action under scrutiny to having a 'starter' or

an appetizer at a meal. From here on, second, I will analyse the segment of the fragment, when Jo and Paula look at and examine the painting itself; the 'main dish'. And third, I will turn to 'the dessert', the segment in the interaction when the participants bring their interaction at the exhibit to a close before preparing to move elsewhere in the gallery.

'The Starter': "this is the girl who came into the house"

We join the action when Paula comes to stand slightly to the right of the painting where she leans forward and reads the label. A moment later, her friend Jo arrives to her left and also leans forward to read the label occasioning Paula to talk. She says, "is this (who he loo)" (Transcript 1a, line 1) and a moment later "this is the girl who came into the house…" (Transcript 1a, line 3).

Transcript 1a[i]

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1 P: is this (who he loo)
2 (.9)
3 this is the girl who came into the house (.3) and lived with (.)Rembrandt


4 J: oh is it is
5 [
6 P: here this hee:

7 [
8 J: is it ehm that wasn't that film ehm eh
9 (I) was thinking girl with the pearl earring wasn't it?
10 P: no that's Vermeer=
11 J: =that's Vermeer
12 P: yah (.) but this girl (.) is that the woman he gets really

13 J: (went to his house as a nurse)
14 (2)

When people arrive at a work of art, generating a topic for talk is an interactional problem. There is a substantial amount of conversation analytic research concerned with topic initiation, topic generation and topic change that primarily but not exclusively focus only on participants' talk (Casey and Button 1984, 1985, 1988; Maynard and Zimmerman 1984). At works of art, topics are often drawn from text in labels that offer people with a 'talk-able', i.e. a topic that is a suitable to be discussed at a work of art. Here, I am interested in the participants' development of the topic of their conversation at the exhibit.

In our fragment, the label on the wall to the right of the portrait identifies the woman depicted by Rembrandt right underneath the name of the artist, "Portrait of Hendrickje Stoffels, probably 1654-6". Paula who has arrived at and reads the label first, before raising the topic of the lady's identity just when her friend arrives to her left and also turns to the label. The reading of the label and maybe also prior knowledge about Rembrandt provide Paula with resources to "take the floor" (Goffman 1981) and define the topic of the conversation at the exhibit, at least initially. In the subsequent conversation, the lady's name does not feature in the conversation. Instead, Paula turns a bit of historical information about a woman into the topic for the conversation with her friend, "the girl who came into the house (.3) and lived with (.) Rembrandt" (Transcript 1a, line 1-3). She does not merely read out the label but reformulates the text that says, "had entered Rembrandt's household as a nurse to his young son Titus by 1649". By virtue of the reformulation Paula displays knowledge and "performs expertise" (Pfadenhauer 2003) that allows her to define the situation and the topic for the pair's conversation. Her utterance occasions Jo to align with her friend's suggestion for a topic and to further explore the lady's identity, "oh is it is" (Transcript 1a, line 4). Thus, the two participants have constituted the identity of the lady depicted by Rembrandt as a topic for their talk.

Paula's expertise is affirmed and strengthened when in the continuation of the fragment she corrects her friend who likens "The Girl with the Pearl Earring" (Transcript 1a, line 9) in the movie about the Dutch artist Vermeer with the same title saying, "no that's

Vermeer" (Transcript 1a, line 10). With this correction both participants again turn to the label. Having established that the lady in the portrait is not the one who is the topic of a recent movie the pair further explore her identity when first Jo looks to it, followed by Paula who says "but this girl (.) is that the woman he gets really" while thrusting her left forefinger in front of Jo's face to the painting (Transcript 1a, line 12).

In art museums, people's activities change between periods of talk and periods when they are quietly looking at a piece, read information or walk through the gallery. As in the fragment under scrutiny here, topics that feature in visitors' conversations in museums are related to participants' ongoing orientation to the material, visual and social environment. Because people quite possibly have never seen the work of art before and have no personal or intellectual relationship with it, it is not surprising that they draw on the information in the label as a (first) topic of their conversation.

After having read the label for a few seconds Paula further explores the identity of the lady in the painting. She offers information about a relation in Rembrandt's life who "may be the one he eventually decides (.) to move on…" (Transcript 1b, line 15). As she produces this utterance she gestures in an increasingly noticeable manner in front of her friend's face. These gestures occasion Jo to turn from the label to look to the painting when Paula says "move on" and flicks her left fingers close to her friend's face (Transcript 1b, line 16). A split of a second later, Paula also turns to the piece and continues her talk in which she first voices her assumption about the identity of the lady in the painting and then recalls other information about Rembrandt (Transcript 1b, line

17-21). The looking at the work of art, in this segment of the fragment lasts for about 2.5 seconds, while previously the two participants have spent more than a minute reading the label and talking about the lady without looking at the piece. After this brief visual engagement with the painting Paula followed by Jo returns to the label.

Transcript 1b

```
15    P:  one she may be the one who eventually (.) decides (.) to
16        move on
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17        she gets send off to some sort of
18    J:  what (.) institution
19    P:  institution for mentally ill something like that
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20        but I may have it (.3) what period are we looking at
21          (.9)
22        perhaps she's eh
23                    [
24    J:              so was he never married?
25    P:  she's his second mis=
26    J:   =yes
27    P:  but I'm not sure
28    J:   yah
29    P:  (         )=
30    J:  who came first
31    P:  who came yah
32    (6.3)
33    J:  informality and af- affection
34        (to it) (.3)
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My data corpus contains a large number of similar instances in which participants arrive at exhibits and first approach the label before turning to the work itself. In fact,

participants often spend more time with the label than with the original piece. In the present fragment however, the two ladies do not leave the exhibit after reading the label but they turn to the painting and examine one or two of its features in some detail. Without stretching the allegory of the meal too far, in this first part of their interaction at the painting Jo and Paula have developed a taste for the piece; they have consumed the starter by reading information about the painting and had a 'taste' of the actual piece by briefly looking at it. A moment later, they return to the label and discuss somewhat more the possible identity of the lady in the painting without her name ever being mentioned. The talk then dissipates until Jo reads out, audibly to Paula, a short segment of the label, "informality and af- affection to it" (Transcript 1b, line 32) by which point Paula makes a step back and turns her head to look at the neighbouring exhibit on her right before again looking to the portrait of Hendrickje Stoffels. Her actions suggest a shift in activity that leads to another segment in the pair's engagement with Rembrandt's portrait.

In this first part of their encounter with Rembrandt's portrait the two ladies gain a sense of what it is they are looking at. In the sense-making process the reading of the label has an important bearing on the "definition of the situation", that becomes like a quest for who it is they are looking at. This quest is informed by the content of the label and also draws on information the pair have from elsewhere, such as their education and background reading about art history.

The 'Main Dish': "She looks very pretty"

Having withdrawn from the label Paula briefly looks at the portrait before producing an

audible in-breath followed by an assessment of the depiction of Hendrickje Stoffels, "she looks very pretty" (Transcript 2, line 37). With this assessment Paula occasions Jo to bring her reading of the label to a close, step backward and turn her head to the left where she can look to the painting. As Jo steps backward Paula makes a step forward and then to the left closer to the painting, while vocalising an appreciative sound, "mh:::::::m" (Transcript 2, line 38). Her bodily movement coupled with the appreciative sound occasion Jo to attend to her friend's shift in orientation.

Transcript 2 – Assessing the Garment

36 P: [.hhh]
37 P: she looks very pretty (.3) mh

38 [mh:::::::m]
39 J: [she is lovely

40 P: is she wearing fur? I think that's fur some sort of
41 white fu:::r (.) over=
42 J: =yes
43 P: very rough isn't it very (.9) perhaps it isn't fur

44 (11.9)
45 J: so was he never married?

She steps backward and to her left, placing her body in front of the painting while aligning with her friend's assessment, "she is lovely" (Transcript 2, line 39). Her utterance arises while she changes position and in overlap with Paula's appreciative

sound “mh:::::::m”. In this moment, both participants display how they see and assess the lady depicted in the painting. Paula’s initial assessment has encouraged her friend to change her standpoint and where to look, and to also produce an assessment of the lady. Now both participants stand side-by-side and look at the large canvas, yet their head and eye movement suggests they are not looking at the same part of the exhibit; Paula looks to the top of the painting and Jo to the bottom left.

From studies of dinner conversations we know that assessments can be used to generate topics of conversation and they can help to have otherwise separate activities converge (Mondada 2009). Here we see how an assessment is used not only to generate a topic for conversation but to align diverging visual perspectives. Paula’s assessment occasions her friend to change position and orient to the lady in the painting. The convergence of the pair’s orientation to the figure in the painting however lasts only briefly. A moment later both participants’ eyes again separately orient to the canvas until Paula displays her noticing of the material of the garment of the lady in the painting, “is she wearing fur” (Transcript 2, line 40). She displays this noticing by virtue of a question, “is she wearing fur” followed by further utterances that affirm her description of the garment’s material, “I think that’s fur” (Transcript 2, line 40). The description is produced swiftly until Paula brings it to a close with an extended “fu:::r (.) over=”, that begins to delineate the location of the garment. The description is composed of three units, the initial question, a presumption of what the garment might be and a specification that adds the colour to the original description, thus providing Jo with information to locate the item of clothing in the painting (Transcript 2, line 40 - 41). Only after Paula pauses having said, “over”, Jo

has a chance to vocally attend to her friend's question and description that she immediately takes up. Her agreement with the suggestions that the garment is "fur", "yes" (Transcript 2, line 42), however, does not do more than display an agreement with her friend.

Sequences in which visitors draw another's visual orientation to an exhibit or exhibit feature can be observed quite often. By virtue of vocal descriptions, questions or assessments coupled with bodily and visual orientations or gestures to an exhibit feature they encourage co-participants to shift orientation to a particular object. These objects and specific exhibit features that a visitor has noticed and drawn another to, rarely are discussed in any detail. In many fragments of my corpus we find a brief vocalisation of agreement, such as a "yes" or "mhm", but rarely longer conversations about the same exhibit feature. They constitute moments of co-viewing, i.e. moments when participants recognisable for each other orient to the same object. For most parts, people visually orient to a particular exhibit feature together for a brief moment and then again look at the work independently from each other. As in dinner conversations (Mondada 2009), assessments embedded in talk in front of works of art can encourage co-participants to shift and align orientation, thus interspersing phases of independent, silent viewing with phases of co-viewing and talk. These phases of co-viewing, however, often are dissolved a moment later.

In the fragment here, Paula remains concerned with the garment after her friend has confirmed that she has seen it. A brief moment after Jo's "yes", Paula describes the

texture of the garment as "very rough" followed by an utterance, "isn't it very" (Transcript 2, line 43), that at the same time emphasises the assessment and may encourage Jo to respond. While Paula describes the texture of the fur as "very rough" she moves her left hand in front between her body and the painting, and animates the roughness of the garment. Jo however stands still with her eyes directed to the top of the painting, and not where the fur is. By not moving her body or changing her gaze direction to look down where the fur is Jo displays that currently she examines the work of art independently. She has created "elbow room" (Hughes 1958) that allows her to engage in an independent activity; some might describe this activity as 'contemplation'. Paula attends to her friend's lack of response and sustained visual orientation to the painting by questioning her own assertion, "perhaps it isn't fur" (Transcript 2, line 43).

Both participants then look silently and independently from each other at different parts of the painting. Their heads and eyes move up and down and to the side until Jo turns her head to Paula and renews her interest in the lady in the painting and her relationship to Rembrandt, "so was he never married" (Transcript 2, line 45). With this query the two participants bring their engagement with the original work of art that has lasted for twenty seconds, to a close, and return to the label; their 'dessert'.

'The Dessert': "So was he never married"

When turning from the label to the painting Jo and Paula also change the topic of their conversation. On arrival at the exhibit the participants generated a topic for their conversation by drawing on the information in the label and focused on the identity of the

lady depicted by Rembrandt. The topic is changed when Paula after having turned to the painting refers to the garment the lady in the painting is wearing. This topic is relatively quickly exhausted and after about twenty seconds of looking at the painting Jo turns to her right where Paula stands, her bodily and visual turn marking the beginning of a shift in activity.

Jo's bodily turn first is treated by Paula as an invitation to leave the exhibit (vom Lehn 2013). Paula also turns to her right and begins to move away from the painting and says, "I can't remember" (Transcript 3, line 47), thus undermining her earlier performance through which she presented herself as knowledgeable and having expertise of Rembrandt. The statement encourages Jo to offer a possible answer to her own question. She turns to the label, leans forward and reads a bit of information in the label. Just when Paula begins to speak, "I feel I think there was a wife" (Transcript 3, line 48), Jo points to the label and generates a topic for talk, "this is his young son Titus" (Transcript 3, line 49). By virtue of her utterance Jo presents herself as knowledgeable of the piece and underlines her expertise by gesturing to the label as the basis for her expertise.

Transcript 3

45 J: so was he never married?

46 (.9)
47 P: °I can't remember I think not°

48 I[feel there was I think there was a wife

49 J: [this is his young son Titus
50 P [I feel he had a wife yeah yes
51 J: [she was a nurse to his son Titus so presumably
53 P: his wife must have died then this girl came then I think
55 J: [the other one took
56 [over as it were
57: P: [but I might be wrong
56 P: yeah and I am not sure it's after this one
57 [
58 J: he ditched this one
59 P: yah
60 what what what would that be ofrom hereo eh::m fifty something is
61 he? I would say another twenty seventy years of (.) life ups ( )
62 six years it must have been after her
63 [
64 J: ( )
65 P: makes you want to go back and read
66 [[
67 J: yes yes

At this stage it does not matter that Jo's statement is produced in haste and turns out to be incorrect. Yet, it serves the purpose to set the topic for this last segment of their conversation about this exhibit and to display that Jo also knows about art. When in line 50 Paula attends to her earlier statement, "I feel he had a wife", she seemingly tries to

take back the floor in the interaction by displaying that she might know something about the lady captured by the artist. Jo however has already moved on with her investigation of the label and voices her presumption what might have happened in Rembrandt's life, "presumably his wife must have died and then this girl came" (Transcript 3, line 51 – 52).

The two visitors discuss the nature of the relationship between "this girl" and Rembrandt whereby their talk and bodily action overlap and become increasingly heightened, displaying competition for "the floor" in the interaction at the piece. While making their respective case Jo and Paula stand next to each other and alternate their visual orientation between the other participant and the label. However they do not noticeably draw more information from the label but just discuss a possible scenario in the Rembrandt household. Towards the end of the discussion Paula manages to shift the topic from the lady to the artist himself (Transcript 3, line 60 – 63). She raises the topic of his age when painting this portrait and as she brings her talk to a close has already initiated the departure from the painting. Thus Paula has regained the floor and is able to display that she has some knowledge about Rembrandt and the piece in front of them. When she says, "makes you want to go back and read", she admits that her knowledge is not complete and could be improved by reading about the artist. This however is only a closing remark that accompanies the pair's departure from the portrait; the 'dessert' has been consumed.

Discussion

Research on taste and the arts is predominantly concerned with exploring the nature of cultural participation. Scholars investigate correlations and correspondences between

people's socio-economic background and more complex assemblies of variables to explain museum visiting and art participation. In these studies, taste remains an abstract concept and a category of people that relates to their position in society. This paper has shifted the focus from abstract concepts of culture and taste to the concrete practices of people's "tasting" of cultural objects. Thus, I have taken literally Bourdieu's (2010/1979) call to bring "'culture', in the restricted, normative sense of ordinary usage … back into 'culture' in the anthropological sense". I have examined the interaction of a pair of visitors at a painting. The analysis has been concerned with how the pair practically organise their looking at, examination and experience of a painting; in other words, I have been interested in how the two visitors develop and display a taste of the work of art in front of them.

In the fragment discussed here, maybe surprisingly, displays of taste and assessments of the painting, maybe surprisingly for some, play a relatively minor part in the participants' interaction. One of the two visitors makes an aesthetic judgements of the lady captured in the painting when one of the pair turns from the label to the painting. Yet, this assessment is not clearly an assessment of the work of art or the artist's technique either. The analysis thus has revealed that displays of taste through assessments not only are about the work of art they refer to but also about the organisation of the interaction. It is noteworthy that when the participants spend time with the original work of art they rarely assess what they are looking at but examine a particular exhibit feature and discuss what it is they are looking at. For example, they look to the lady captured by the artist and one of the visitors describes her as being "pretty". The participants' discussion then however

moves on to other exhibit features without exploring the prettiness of the lady further, for example by examining the artist's technique in painting her. And when touching on the "fur" garment in the painting the two ladies do not assess its aesthetic qualities at all.

Throughout the analysis I have noticed that changes in bodily orientation render changes in activity observable, not only for the researcher but also for everybody in the gallery. The visibility of activities, orientations and states of engagement with exhibits are important resources for visitors in galleries that allow them to organise their museum visit (Trondsen 1976; vom Lehn 2006b). Displays of taste and related aesthetic assessments of the work of art and of features of the piece are embedded within participants' interaction at the exhibit-face. How people see and assess a work of art and what aspect of the piece they are assessing is produced in the specific circumstances in which participants encounter it.

From our analysis of the fragment in this chapter and in other publications we see that taste and aesthetic judgement occasionally play a part in people's engagement and discussion of works of art in museums. Such aesthetic assessments are contingently produced at the exhibit-face in specific circumstances, and may not be defined or influenced by social or cultural predispositions. Rather, as Mondada (2009) has shown with regard to the display of taste in dinner conversations, in art museums participants deploy displays of taste and aesthetic judgement when addressing particular interactional problems, such as when they produce an encouragement for another to look at a work of art. Thereby, they often use information in labels to generate topics for the conversation

at the exhibit-face.

Therefore, for museums that strive to again become important institutions in the shaping of people's taste the analysis suggests that labels are important resources that people use to learn about exhibits and to identify talk-ables. Indeed, our observations in museums imply that labels are often the first point of call when people arrive at an exhibit, and they often spend more time with these information resources than with the original works of art. Therefore, it would seem that detailed, video-based studies of people's interactional use of labels could form the basis for the design and deployment of information resources that encourage people to consider art museums as expositions of the 'taste of the nation' and to turn aesthetic assessments of works of art into a topic for talk and discussion.

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[i] Parts of this fragment were discussed for other purposes in (vom Lehn 2010 & 2013).