

Report on Outcomes:

**Visiting Lecture and workshop by Professor Heather Paxson (MIT) –
“The Cultural Life of Cheese: Gender, Labour and Microbes in U.S.
American Craft Production”** (Friday, 24th of August)

Summary:

A grant was sought from the Gender Institute to bring Professor Heather Paxson to the ANU. Prof. Paxson has been internationally recognized for her contributions to the anthropology of labour and food. Her work has focussed particularly on women's labour and how the regulation of food can translate to the regulation of women's bodies.

The grant allowed us to take advantage of Prof. Paxson's concurrent travel from the US to Australia to host both a distinguished lecture and workshop. The workshop was hosted by both Prof. Paxson's and Prof. Stefan Helmreich who is a renowned anthropologist specializing in the social studies of scientists and scientific knowledge making.

The event was considered a success and well received by all those who attended, although attendance might have been improved.

The event used \$624 of the allotted \$750. This low total was made possible due to Prof. Paxson and Prof. Helmreich's concurrent travel plans to Australia and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology covering costs associated with their car rental while in Australia.

Event Description:

The production of artisan cheese in the United States (US) has exploded over the past two decades. Unlike its European counterparts, US artisan cheese emerged on the back of narratives of innovation, and not through historic legacies of pre-industrial artisan production. American Artisan cheese has been permeated by competing views towards the utility and moral qualities of microbial cultures and action. In this seminar, Prof. Heather Paxson demonstrated how practices and standards associated with industrial production not only inform the regulation of artisan food production, but also the regulation of human bodies, and relationships between human and non-human organisms.

A follow-up workshop hosted by Prof. Paxson and Prof. Stefan Helmreich (MIT) engaged student and members of faculty in thinking about commercial and professional spaces as sites of participatory research and engagement. Participants were invited to explore how debates in feminist science and technology studies and political ecology might shift understandings of spaces historically framed by highly masculine perspectives, literature and language.

Fulfilment of expectations:

The seminar and workshop ran smoothly and were well received by students and staff. Around twenty members of the academic community attended the seminar. It was felt by many that this turnout was adequate although lower than ideal. Four students and four members of faculty attended the workshop. Each event was followed by vigorous debate and attendees commented that they found the events highly valuable.

Speakers in attendance:

Professor Heather Paxson is a tenured professor of anthropology at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and an incoming editor for the journal *Cultural Anthropology*. She is most known for her celebrated work, *The Life of Cheese: Crafting Food and Value in America* (University of California Press, 2012). She was awarded the Diana Forsythe Prize by the Society for the Anthropology of Work and the Committee on the Anthropology of Science, Technology and Computing.

Professor Stefan Helmreich is the head of Anthropology at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and has received an array of awards for his contributions to the social studies of science. Stefan has published multiple manuscripts, including the widely awarded *Alien ocean: Anthropological voyages in microbial seas* (University of California Press, 2009). This manuscript was the recipient of the American Ethnological Society's Senior Book Prize, the Society for Cultural Anthropology's Gregory Bateson Book Prize and the Society for the Social Studies of Science' Rachel Carson book prize.

Impact:

The seminar had around 20 attendees: both members of faculty and students. The subsequent workshop had 4 members of faculty and 4 students, predominantly from the discipline of anthropology attending.

Attendance numbers could have been improved amongst both staff and students. Details of the event were circulated in advance by email and printed posters to all schools possibly interested in the event. These included the research School of Biology, the School of Regulation and Global Governance, the School of Archaeology and Anthropology, College of Asia and the Pacific and the School of Culture, History and Language.

The event was interesting and valuable for those in attendance, and contributed to the profile of the university.

Media:

See attached for event flyer and photos from the seminar.



The Cultural Life of Cheese:

Gender, Labour & Microbes in US Craft Production

How do changing understandings of microbes and their relationship to people inform the regulation of both food products and peoples' bodies? How can emerging artisan markets challenge notions of labour, class, and existing regulatory categories?

Professor Heather Paxson (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) will be hosting a seminar, building on her recent work with artisan cheese producers in the US.

A follow-up workshop with Prof. Paxson and Prof. Stefan Helmreich (MIT) will explore approaches to participatory research in commercial and industrial settings.

Seminar:

Friday, AUG 24 9:30 -11:30 Sir Roland Wilson Building 2.02

Workshop:

Friday, AUG 24 1:00-3:00 Banks Building Tea Room

Lower Ground Floor

Contact james.debowski@anu.edu.au for workshop registration.

