Science in context

Introduction and conference preparation

KULT8850/1 Fall/Winter 2024

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Plan Day 3+4

- Today
  - Thomas:
    - Lecture, plenary discussion: From reflection to **navigation**
    - Group work: Preparing our conference
  - Knut: The (Norwegian) university
- Tomorrow
  - Terje: History of science, the PhD degree, etc
  - Govert: Theories about science as practice

Days 1+2

- Rune: Theorising in social science and humanities (SSH) as act of making social processes and goals explicit, more effective and accessible to normative critiqu
- May: Research ethics
- Jonathan: Reflections on objectivity
  - the many meanings of this term
  - the (still) dominant view in science and engineering: scientific progress
  - doubt: paradigms, standpoints
  - the space between detached objectivity and anything goes
- Ståle: How can we know anything, what is the role of perception and the body in knowing? Is scientific knowing special - and if so, how?

Days 3+4: Starting points

What if we approach science as

- having a history (there was a time when it did not exist, it changes, and it may cease to exist)
- being entangled with politics, society and culture
- having consequences

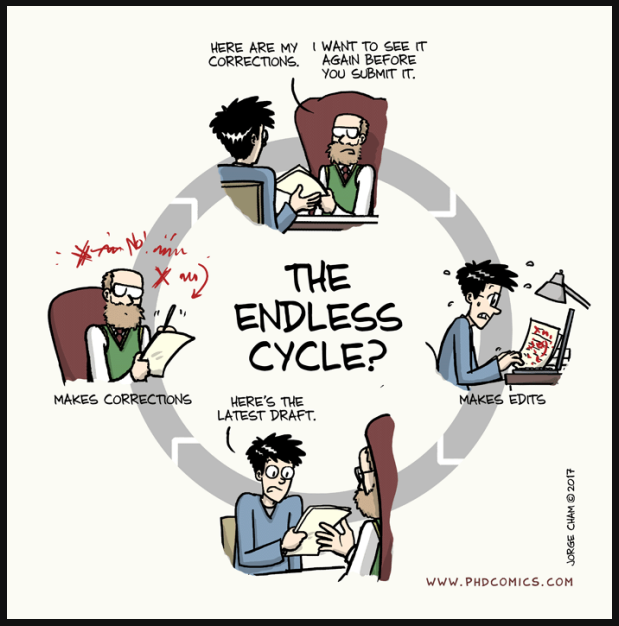
Precursors

- Laboratory studies (1970s/80s), the first empirical studies of scientific knowledge production: no secret sauce, no brilliant thinking, just regular practices that can be found elsewhere
- The strong programme of empirical relativism (Bloor 1976) in the sociology of scientific knowledge (SSK)
  - assumes that there are causes for truth claims to be made and accepted and identifies these causes
  - seeks to understand - with the same types of explanations - both successful and unsuccessful truth claims (symmetry-principle)
  - must be applicable to itself

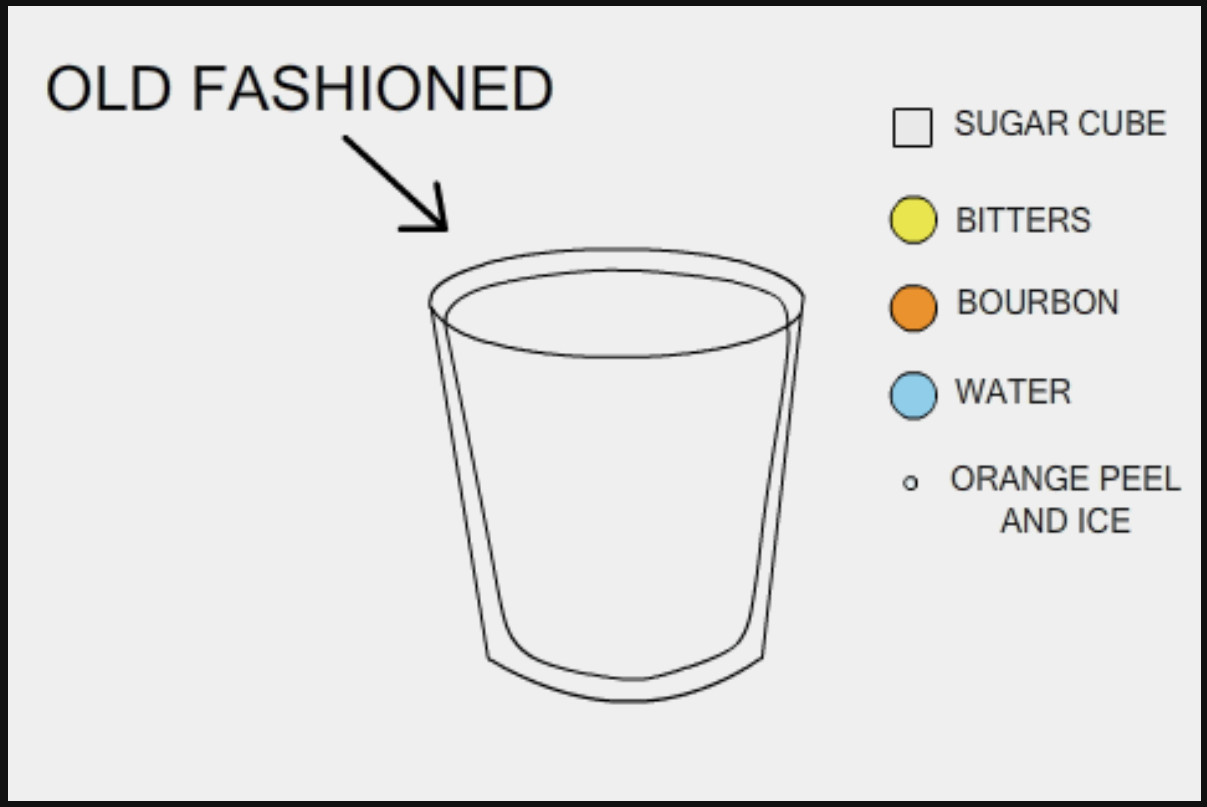
Latour (1983)

- A classic text from Science Studies
- After the empirical studies of laboratories: what does all this mean?
  - Macro-level: How society/culture/politics creates certain forms of science
  - Micro-level: The nitty-gritty of what happens in laboratories
  - Latour: How micro and macro is connected in a very special way in scientific practices
- Science = scaling/movement + inscription devices + **trial and error**

Navigating when there is no (complete) map



No recipes for a successful PhD project!

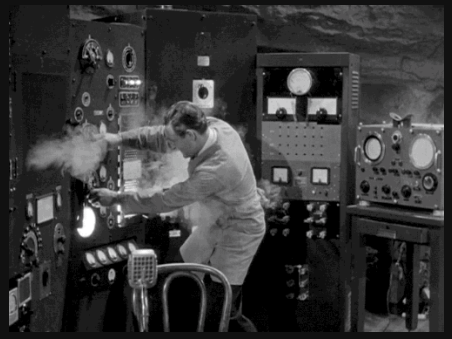


The horrors!

- Every PhD thesis is **unique** because of (slightly) different **research questions** but more importantly because of the **specific constellation** it is written in
- An expectation that the thesis contributes some **new knowledge**
- There is no map! You will enter territories which are not mapped (yet) and **navigate** through them

"Pre-map" Navigation

- Short periods of "getting lost" are part of every navigation as you probe a course and correction quickly
- "Publish" often, "release" early: Enables you to make many small corrections to the course, instead of waiting for the scary big "jump" to the destination
- The probe: being accepted by of the many academic communities as peer



Science as the art of learning through trial and error

- Collective failing
  - many scientists - many failures - worldwide!
  - the laboratory
  - The (forgotten) art of publishing failures
- Productive failing
  - failing despite the best preparations
  - the system of constructive critique (peer review)

And science has created tools that are there to help you to fail and to do so productively

- Earlier research
- Methods and theories
- Supervision
- ...

Earlier research as navigational aid

- Following earlier research can give you important breaks from the constant fights of trial and error
- Your predecessors can provide partial maps but be careful when combining them into a new map: different "scales", purposes, contexts (time, geography, etc.)
- In fact: the art of stitching together "maps" is what ~80% of PhD work is about

Theories and Methods as navigational aid

- They tell you how to do the research but doing it is another thing
- They help you to avoid the most common (and probably uninteresting) mistakes
- Learning how to implement your theories and methods (involving errors and failures) is part of your PhD education (i.e., they are both aid and goal)

Notes on supervisors

- The more s/he has failed productively before the better s/he is in supervising process/person/product
- Unfortunately we tend to forget our failures (e.g., "post-defence amnesia")
- ...and there is (still) a misguided heroism in academia: "per aspera ad astra"

In summary

Let's fail beautifully!

Practising science: Ex. conference

Scientific conferences

- Who has been at one?
- How was it?

What are scientific conferences?

- Bridging the temporal gap between research and publication
  - early feedback on "preliminary" findings but also
  - a conversation around plans
- See and be seen: Where a scientific community manifests itself, discusses its priorities, fights about future directions
- PhD students: "legitimate peripheral participation"

Types of conferences

- Big regular meetings of basically "everyone" in a discipline or field
  - an overview of what is done right now: keynotes and the overall program
  - finding the small conference within the conference (session) which is most relevant for you
  - always useful to co-organise your own session (first step out of the periphery)
- Workshops on a specific topic, often part of funded projects
  - more difficult to "get in"
  - often connected to a publication (special issue, book)
  - in-depth discussion and networking

"New" formats

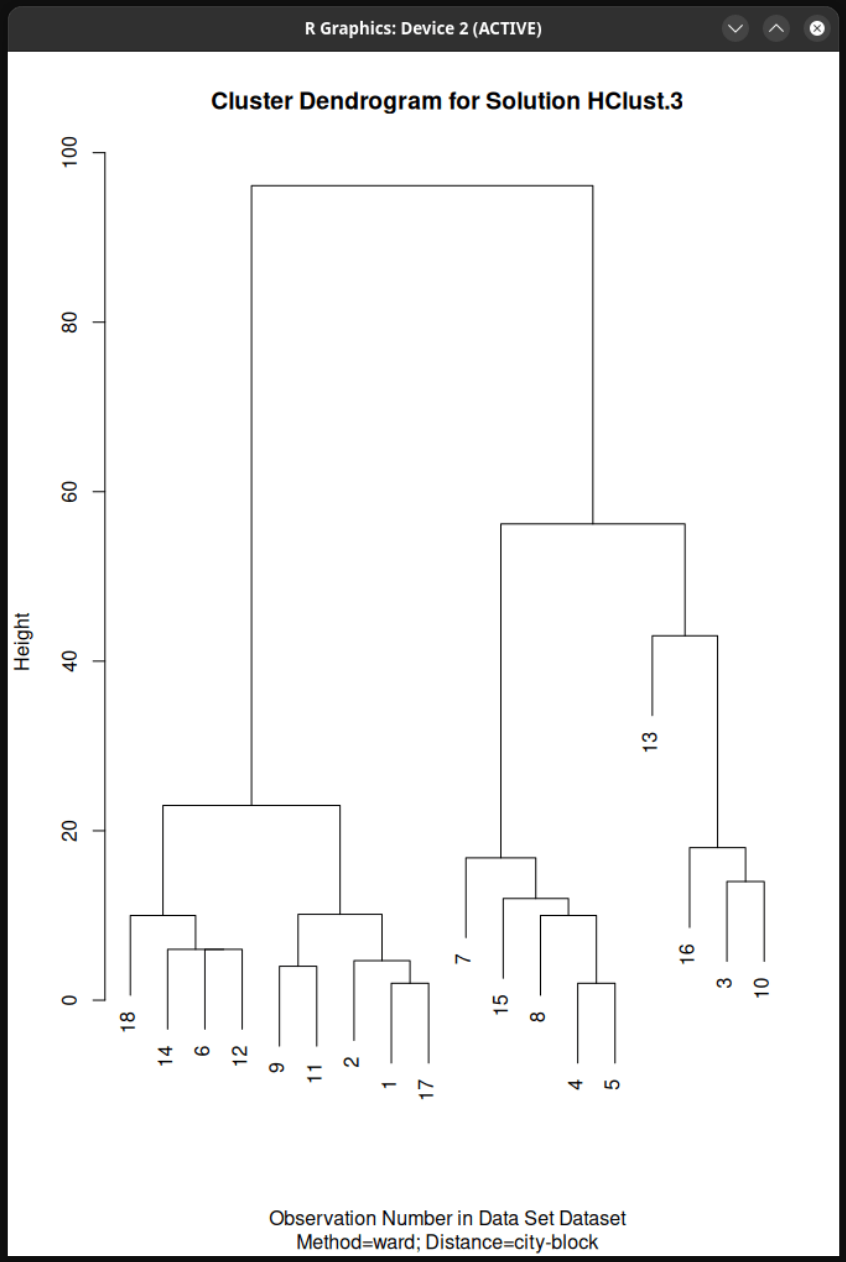
- Problems with the traditional format (keynotes+sessions+talks+posters)
  - Extensive travel not sustainable
  - Reproduces hierarchies
  - Often regular presentations are very short (10-15 mins), posters attract little attention
- Alternatives
  - Online/Hybrid conference
  - Unconference or other alternative formats (walking sessions, artistic elements, invited activists, ...)
  - ...

Organising committee

- **decides topic** and formulates the call
- receives, reviews and chooses abstracts
- practical organisation (advertisement, room, time, conference dinner)
- organises the publication

Group work

- Groups, similar mixtures of motivations
- Each group organises one of the conference sessions/streams/panels



The day after the defence

Some findings

Almost 50% of you ranked "Truth/Knowledge" highest

40% of you ranked "Personal development" second highest

On rank three some 30% put "solutions" (which is also number two on rank 1)

Some "meta"

- Your motivations may very well be in flux, especially if you are still in an early stage
- But I think it makes sense to think early about finding out who your "buddies" in academia are: academia is a space where you find communities that represent all the mentioned motivations (and all possible combinations)
- If you feel somewhat "isolated" after this exercise or more general in your PhD work: No worries, your buddies are most definitely "out there" - you just have not found them yet
- But: If you do not care for any of the offered alternatives you may have a hard time during the next three/four years

Group work

- 15 min: What do you have in common (start with comparing your rankings focusing on rank one and two and maybe three)? **Result: A name for your group**
- 15 min: What do you think should be the most important part in a course like KULT8851? **Result: Two or three bullet points**
- Rest: A session at our conference - what could be a topic that relates to the course's topics (reflection, navigation, critique) and is relevant for all of your projects? **Result: a preliminary title**

Session abstract

The default is that every session has one common introduction (ca 10 min) and individual presentations (ca 10 min) from all group members

A title and a few sentences on what the session is about

How does this topic relate to KULT8850/1?

Why is the topic relevant for all PhD students taking our course?

Any ideas for a special format (alternatives to the default intro+presentations)?

Sent by email to me, deadline 21.11.2024

Groups

- Group 1: (Anna-Laila,) Benjamin, Morgan, Preema,
- Group 2: Anne, Joachim, Liv, Wenjia
- Group 3: Even, Mari Karoline, Martin, Terese, Thea
- Group 4: Einar, John David, Magnus, Regine, Cecilie