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Expert Wine Tasting as a Social Practice: An Enactive Ethnography

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Abstract

The present contribution uses the theoretical framework of theories of practice to examine expert wine tasting. This paper highlights a number of sociologically interesting issues that have been previously conceptualised in the literature, trying to enlighten aspects not clearly showed by other theoretical approaches. After providing a summary and analysing the main themes touched upon by sociology when dealing with the issue of tasting, the central focus of the article will be on a "practice-oriented" analysis based on data collected during empirical research, in progress since 2013, concerning the production, distribution and commercial aspects of the wine field in Italy. The approach followed is considered an enactive ethnography. In addition, the practice theories approach will be integrated with the dispositional approach, along with the theory of social fields, in order to clarify some points that would be less clear through practice theories alone.

Keywords: Wine; Practice Theories; Bourdieu; Enactive Ethnography; Wine Tasting.

1 Introduction

Wine tasting is an activity that has been understood from various points of view by the social sciences. In this introduction, outlined are some of the main approaches to this issue before looking through the lens of practice theories (Reckwitz, 2002; Schatzki, 2002; Shove, Pantzar, & Watson, 2012; Hui, Schatzki, & Shove, 2017), which are sometimes integrated with Bourdieu's dispositional approach and field theory (Bourdieu, 1992 & 1997; Wacquant, 2015), and understood in the context of empirical research.

A first line of studies in which wine tasting is analysed is that linked to the social production of legitimate taste, social stratification and its function of identity. The moment of tasting a wine as a lover/connoisseur is present in studies like that of Kendall (2008) in elite clubs or Sherman (2011) on taste work in lifestyle management. As Schwarz (2013) states:

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> [The] mastery of tasting techniques often serves as a basis for exclusion just as the mastery of good taste does. In certain contexts, people who know how to drink wine and are able to judge and discuss wine may gain different privileges. (p. 423)

For example, in his research on the elite business selection and recruitment processes in France and Germany, Hartmann (2000) shows how mastering the knowledge of wines and how to taste them signals a syntonic habit with the recruiters themselves. Additionally, Howland (2013) reviewed how fine wine connoisseurship became cultural and symbolic capital, denoting an elite status (or, nowadays, a means of middle-class distinction).[1] In any case, however, attention in this kind of study is directed to what has been carried out thanks to wine tasting, and not to wine tasting itself.

A second strand enters more into the specificity of wine cultures, analysing how the various tasting situations serve to highlight internal classifications. The latter refers to the prestige of the producing companies or the placement of drinkers within the hierarchy traced by the continuous boundary work (Lamont & Molnar, 2002) implemented by producers, sommeliers and drinkers themselves. Thus, it is possible, as exemplified by Jamerson (2009), to focus on the symbolic boundaries produced by the Napa Valley wineries during guided tastings. These symbolic boundaries are aimed at building or strengthening divisions, like those between commercial and elite wines or between status seekers and real connoisseurs and lovers of rare wines.

Many observers have concentrated on the linguistic and semiotic facets of tasting:

> The spread of the semiotic means provided to the consumer for engaging with things brought close to and especially into the human body, the very senses and naturalised aesthetic sensibility of which are mobilised to and in acts of judgment. In such judgment, language is central, in the form of what I term an aggressively cultivated *register effect* (Silverstein, 2016, p. 186).

For instance, Lehrer (2009) wrote about the differences between scientific and non-scientific uses of wine talk, Silverstein (2004) about "oinoglossia", and in the Italian debate, Navarini (2015 & 2016) delineates the limits of language when moving from the tasting experience.

Stemming from wide research on tasting practices (not only those related to wine), Hennion (2007) and Hennion and Teil (2004) offered a satisfactory outline of wine tasting within a pragmatic framework but without going into detail about what really happens when people have different habitus, positions in the wine field or those faced with various tasting situations during a wine tasting. In a very schematic way, they examined the moment of expert wine tasting, as it would always coincide with blind tasting or a high reflexivity activity. However, it is not the case that wine tasting coincides with a high reflexive activity.

2 Framework and Methodology

If those illustrated previously are some of the main junctures addressed by the literature on wine tasting, I believe that a practice-oriented approach can shed light on many aspects that have been given little or no consideration.

More than based on the — to me — hyper-synthetic version of practice theory sketched by Shove, Pantzar, & Watson (2012), which groups the elements of the practice under the categories of "materials", "competence" and "meaning", herein, we will employ a combination of this method with the more articulated theory of Reckwitz (2002, p. 249), according to which "a 'practice' (Praktik) is a routinised type of behaviour which consists of several elements that are interconnected with one another: forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, 'things' and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge." This will be added to by intuitions by Schatzki (2002), who underlines the importance of space in structuring social practices. This is not the space for a detailed analysis of the differences between the variants within the theories of practices, but, briefly, the prior choice is dictated by the idea that too much compression of different

1. About this issue, see also Overton & Warwick (2013) and Demossier (2004).

elements into a single category — be it "materials", "competences" or "meanings", as Shove, Pantzar, & Watson (2012) illustrate — creates difficulties in understanding social phenomena. An example among all, drawing upon the issue discussed in this article: if someone considers the body, objects and infrastructures under the single category of "materials", in the analysis of a practice like wine tasting, he is actually making a superimposition of entities that have memory, like the body, on to others, such as glasses, which have no memory.

For the sake of this article, we will consider the following "elements" of practice, developing for each of them a brief discussion about their role on expert wine tasting by matching the concepts with data collected: 1) bodily activities; 2) mental activities; 3) materials; 4) spaces; 5) background knowledge and know-how; 6) emotions and motivational knowledge; and 7) language and meanings.

It is necessary to specify which wine tasting practice I will refer to: the area taken into account is above all what I define as expert tasting, that is, the tasting that has potential field effects (Bourdieu, 1992) for the people who participate or for the contexts in which it is held. I have chosen not to discuss professional tasting because certain wine enthusiasts, owing to their personal contiguity with the producers and experience as tasters, are able to exercise field effects (e.g., commenting on a wine in a WhatsApp chat with the producers themselves, talking about it on Facebook, writing for a non-profit blog) while not being professionally involved in any manner within the wine world.

The empirical approach I followed was that of an enactive ethnography (Wacquant, 2015), or a

> long-term, *intensive, even initiatory, form* of ethnographic involvement liable to allow the investigator to master in the first person, *intus et in cute*, the pre-discursive schemata that make up the competent, diligent, and appetent member of the universe under examination. [...] The methodological stipulation here is to dive into the stream of action to the greatest possible depth, rather than watch it from the bank; but to dive and swim along with method and purpose, and not with reckless abandon that would cause us to drown in the bottomless whirlpool of subjectivism." (Wacquant, 2015, pp. 4–5)

It is important to assume roles within the field or phenomenon that we study in order to not remain purely in the position of spectator. In so doing, the researcher submits him/herself to the constraints and forces in place in the field, understanding better its dynamics (Wacquant, 2014). The first act, as in the case for other colleagues who have studied the world of wine, was to complete a path that already started when I was very young and worked in a wine bar, and then was suspended from a sommelier association;[2] secondly, to start writing for a blog (later a real portal) of food and wine critics, thus building relationships within the world of wine, while I participated assiduously in fairs and tastings.

However, the turning point came in 2014, when my friends that own a small wine distribution company asked me to be a selector and buyer, look for small craft producers and pay attention both to the quality of wines and the stories of producers, hence bringing together my expertise in the wine sector and sociology. This allowed me a glimpse into the various phenomena that interested me, from productive practices to commercial ones, and not least to the world of professional tasting, including the experience, thanks to a chain of relationships, of participating in the 2016 tasting panel for the Marche region of the most important Italian guide in the sector, *Gambero Rosso*.

The analysis provided is based on 73 in-depth interviews with wine producers, eight with importers and distributors, 14 with wine promoters, 12 with journalists and bloggers, and hundreds of visits to wineries and small producers, as well as ethnographies conducted during wine fairs in Italy, including Vinitaly, Villa Favorita-VinNatur, Cerea-ViniVeri, Sorgente del Vino, Mercato Fivi, Vini di Vignaioli, Naturale, Io Bevo Così, Vinissage, and others. I attended the same fairs every year since 2013, numbering usually between ten and twenty per year, including the new fairs that arose each year. Moreover, within this context, I also took into account some moments in which the practice of tasting was carried out in a day meal between friends, if some of them existed in the condition described before, that is, people who can have a field effect in the wine field. One last remark about the use of empirical material: because of the pervasive nature of some sentences or behaviours during wine tasting practice, in some passages, I will regroup, under a generic sentence or observed behaviour, literally hundreds of similar phrases or

2. The association was the AIS (Associazione Italiana Sommelier).

ways of acting so that it will not be possible to know the specific context in which these events happened. The point is to comprehend the constitutive status of these words and actions for the practice analysed in the paper.

3 The Elements of Wine Tasting Practice

3.1 Bodily Activities and Wine Tasting

A crucial feature of practice theories is looking at the body as a central element of social life (Ginev, 2019; Wallenborn, 2013). If we study the practices surrounding tasting wine, we immediately face several bodily activities: first of all, the more obvious, such as the gestures of tasting or turning glasses — an activity that novices do not find so easy and that experts embody to the point of automatically turning a glass no matter what is inside, even water — looking at the colour, smelling the scents, spreading wine all over the mouth, spitting in a spittoon (another bodily activity that readily allows the identification of novices who manage with some effort the correct spitting technique, sometimes having embarrassing episodes),[3] or people outside the enoic field who used to attend wine fairs in order to drink and not to taste.

However, gestures of tasting are not the only bodily activities involved in the process. First, tasting sometimes more than one hundred different wines requires a conditioning in order to accustom the body to that amount of alcohol (even while spitting, an entire day spent tasting wine can be very tiring). It is also necessary to accustom the mouth and palate to distinguish between the flavours and sensations when they are fatigued.[4] Second, the body is implied in several other activities, like standing, queuing and facing the producers' stands during a wine fair,[5] or moving in the cellar while paying attention to oenological machines like pumps and filters, or actually engaging in some bodily performance, such as climbing up the big barrels or vats to taste directly with a pipe or tapping the wine from the tap.

3.2 Mental Activities and Wine Tasting

According Reckwitz, it is important to understand social practices as they relate to mental activities. Wine tasting involves several of these: First of all, the most iconic mental activity — often demonstrated in parody — is recognising and identifying (e.g., flavours, scents, vintages, producers, defects) and attempting to "transform 'soft' subjective judgments into 'hard' objective descriptions and evaluations" (Shapin, 2016, p. 436; see also Phillips, 2016). Secondly, and clearly related to the previous activity, there is a massive performance of classification that anyone can learn during every tasting session, no matter how concrete the tasting situation in which it happens. This is why I simply report the statements — to illustrate that classification is occurring without making reference to a specific context. Classification happens when someone says, "if it was a premier cru, it would be excellent, but I was expecting more from a grand cru" or "this white wine can hardly be Italian, there's too much acidity" or "this producer is a traditionalist; the other is a modernist" or "this is a natural wine." A third mental activity that often emerges during a wine tasting is comparing. For instance, during the tasting sessions I have conducted for *Gambero Rosso*, it was clear that the appreciation of a wine and its marks were linked to its contextualisation within the same DOC, vintage and style. Alternatively, during a selection as a buyer, you simply do not look for "the best wine," but for the wine that is better than others of the same type. As Silverstein (2016) notes:

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3. Fieldnote, 5 April 2014, Villa Favorita: "*This morning I have had access to the exclusive tasting room for importers, separated from the main rooms where the fair is deploying. The difference between the bodily skills of the tasters in the two spaces is striking: no one here risks splashing the others while spitting in the spittoons, as happened before with an enthusiastic girl — who was, I suppose, a little bit drunk — who left my white shirt with two spots. Everyone is mannerly here, tasting almost in silence.*"

4. Navarini (2015) writes about the "thin border line" represented by tasting over 100 wines.

5. Fieldnote, 22 March 2016, Grands Jours de Bourgogne: "*Today, the room is too crowded, especially by the newly rich from the wine, the Chinese importers, who think that their economic power gives them the right to shove in order to taste first. It's so hard to focus in these conditions.*"

> This wine — say, a red one now being tasted — can be comparatively described in relation to others of its point of origin (vineyard, producer, region, etc.) in different years of production; it can be compared to other named wines of its locale; compared to other red wines with its predominant (or exclusive) grape type, no matter the locale of origin; compared to other red wines of other grape types; and so on. (pp. 189–190)

It is very important here to underscore that these activities are "mental" but embodied as a routine, and as a competence demanded by the field, and they could also be part of a habitus developed outside the field.[6] As Bourdieu (1997) explained while writing about the scholastic disposition, the analytical and reflexive posture is socially constructed, embodied and embedded in trivial routines.

3.3 The Materials of Wine Tasting

Like any other social practice, tasting wine has its foundations in many "things": having a resource-based role, a device-centric role and an infrastructural role (Shove, 2017). To refrigerate a white wine during a wine tasting (a fair, a competition, a tasting panel or even a meal), for instance, one requires an electric power network (infrastructure) and electricity (resource), while to maintain the temperature, a wine cooler with ice might be necessary. A wine tasting is full of device-centric things: special glasses (no one, in a tasting situation, gives you a wine in a glass without a stem, unless it is specially designed for it), spittoons, barrels, vats, bottles of different shapes, corkscrews, decanters, stoppers, drips, technologies like Coravin or Enomatic, glacettes, tinfoil or other features to cover the bottles for a blind tasting, block notes to fix descriptions or marks, notebooks, laptops, and smartphones and tablets to take pictures or notes. Last but not least, the wine itself is a fundamental object in wine tasting. Hennion and Teil (2004) write that the object, wine, does not contain its effects (its taste). They are constructed by the means through which wine lovers learn to appreciate them. Nonetheless, when — as it happens also in avant-garde art, for example — a "new" object like a natural wine without sulphites (or a Barolo in barrique, in other times) appears on the market, the tasting practice changes because the discursive dispositives applied until the moment before are no longer suitable in a certain respect (think, for instance, about all the visual analysis taking place when facing a very long macerated wine that assumes orange colour but is a white wine). Wine is made by "things" like tannins, sulphites and acids, and those things stand "in front" of the wine taster and react to his/her approach and tasting habits:

> You know, I'm no more accustomed to the amount of sulphites that you can find in conventional wines, so, when I'm forced to taste them, I admit that I try to spit them faster than the natural wines. (Interview 22)

3.4 Space and Wine Tasting

Following Schatzki (2002), spatial relations are a crucial element of the social order in which social practices have life. There are many sites in which wine tastings happen; they are very different and can change the practice itself. It is possible to taste at home, in a restaurant/wine bar, in a tasting room tailored for the practice, in a cellar (wide or small, with the related "things" to pay attention to) and at wine fairs (indoor or outdoor, with the related climatic conditions) with many people around or alone while standing in front of the producer. It is also possible to engage in the practice at the office of a wine guide, a consortium or association. As a result, it is possible to taste alone or in group, sitting, standing, in silence or talking, with background music or with a voice making announcements from loudspeakers.

3.5 Background Knowledge and Know-How in Wine Tasting

As Recktwitz (2002) says, two other important elements of a social practice are "a background knowledge in the form of understanding" and "know-how" (p. 249), or, in Schatzki's (2002) terms, general

6. A person who worked as a wine journalist, wine tasting teacher and wine seller told me, "*I've always been a little bit obsessive with my passions and objects of study. When I discovered wine, it was like a fairground, with all these categories to memorise and recognise*" (Interview 4).

understanding, practical understanding and rules. Expert wine tasting requires at least a minimum of technical knowledge about winemaking processes, such as fermentation(s), maceration, disgorgement, etc., and a minimum of technical knowledge regarding the components of wine, like alcohol, acidity, tannins, sugar and so on. In this way, these aspects can be tracked during the tasting process. This also requires a minimum knowledge of wine language in order to understand what the producer means when he or she says that a certain wine is "smooth", "lively" or "easy to drink" and so on. However, practical understanding and know-how requires knowledge about why people spit wine instead of drink it: not blaming people for making strange noises with the mouth for the purpose of better spreading the wine over the palate which are the correct tasting routines if one has to taste different kinds of wines — i.e., sparkling wines first, than whites, than reds, or, following the burgundy school, reds first because they are more tannic, and so on.[7] Moreover, tasters have to learn how to act in front of a producer during a fair (facing a stand, saying "do you have any white wine?" or "any bubble?" does not give the impression of being a "practitioner" unless the sentence is preceded by something such as "I am on white wine this morning, than I will come back later for the other wines").

As an interviewee revealed to me, if someone is not an actual practitioner, the lack of background knowledge is clear in the eye of practitioners:

> You know, I can't stand those open events in which you can clearly distinguish a professional taster and most of all those who are involved in wine business, from wine lovers, or worst, simple drinkers. It's a question of how people speak, how they act with the glass or how they interact with me, I could even bet on who is who… (Interview 52, wine producer)

3.6 Emotions and Motivational Knowledge in Wine Tasting

Both Reckwitz (2002) and Schatzki (2002) note the importance of emotions and motivational knowledge, or the teleoaffective structure of social practices. This is a very important point for the understanding of expert wine tasting, and — as I will further explore subsequently — one of the key issues in Bourdieu's social fields theory.

Emotion is the main ingredient of the wine world because of the involvement of wine in the affective life, resulting in the relationships between drinking and group belonging, family connections and the sentimental sphere (see Mora & Moscarola, 2010; Groves, Charters, & Reynolds, 2000), and so during a wine tasting, it is frequent that one hears sentences like "this wine is emotional" or "I'm so excited, this is my first bottle of X," etc. Furthermore, tasters face a cognitive bias when drinking a famous high-priced wine if they know this information beforehand. Siegrist and Cousin (2009) as well as Willer, Kuwabara and Macy, (2009) have shown that during a public wine tasting, there is a pressure to conform, which can lead some to even prefer a wine with added vinegar. Nonetheless, during a wine tasting, there are other emotional elements we have to consider besides the cognitive aspects, which are only attributes of practitioners and their position in the wine field. For one, what happens during a wine tasting depends on the symbolic capital of tasters, producers and wines, as I can illustrate with this fieldnote taken during the tasting panel of *Gambero Rosso* during the summer of 2016:

> During the morning panel, we only knew we were tasting Verdicchio di Matelica, vintage 2015, but the tasting was blinded, with an employee of the Istituto di Tutela Vini Marchigiani who was in charge of covering bottles with tinfoil and then pouring them at random, only respecting the homogeneity of PDO and vintage. We (the four of us) recorded all the marks on a single file, taking notes on our laptop, and only after having tasted all the wines from a single PDO we unveiled the bottles and wrote the wines' names. I have discovered during the past two days that after the regular session, the best bottles or the bottles that gave rise to doubts were re-tasted, sometimes still covered and sometimes not. The president of the tasting session — a part-time journalist and well known as an ambassador of Marche's wine — has led this panel over the last 10 years and after that, a bottle had bad remarks from three out of four of us. All the comments said "guys, let's give this a chance,

7. For an ethnographic account of a novice attending a wine festival, see Vannini et al. (2010).

I think it's Collestefano [one of the best Verdicchio di Matelica, at least for the *Gambero Rosso* guide over the last years], maybe this is a bad bottle or it needs to breathe." During the afternoon, with a fresh palate after lunch break, we tasted the bottle again, raising its marks. (Fieldnote, 17 July 2016)

What I described before was only possible because of the symbolic capital owned by: a) the commission president, who intimidates the other tasters, pushing them to doubt their previous judgments, and by: b) Collestefano, a prizewinning, prestigious producer who can generate anxiety, especially in a taster wanting to impress the president.[8] Several other examples could be referenced in order to illuminate the relations between emotions and symbolic capital during a wine tasting. For instance, while a blind tasting is taking place, the comment of a highly esteemed taster can easily move the other tasters, most of all novices to the practice, towards some descriptors or evaluation, or to solicit more attention to some aspects of wine over others. See the case that follows:

I'm participating in a wine tasting conducted by Sandro Sangiorgi, one of the most, if not THE most, influential wine writer and teacher in Italy, about Chronos and Kairos in wines. He asks: "Which of the wine best expresses the perfect tasting moment?" A woman indicates, shyly, a white wine with a strong aromatic impact. Sangiorgi patronises her, making some ironic comment about her predilection toward the nose instead of the mouth, and all the other tasters start to appreciate out loud other wines than the previous. (Fieldnote, 23/02/2015)

Besides emotions, motivational knowledge can also alter the performance itself. What someone wants or what someone is expecting from a tasting session leads to their way of tasting. For instance, if someone must evaluate — as mentioned before — wines from the same typology with the purpose of writing a report for a wine guide, he/she will try to create a ranking based on marks and briefly describe the wines. If a sommelier, during a wine tasting, is looking for some new wine to insert into his restaurant's wine list, the first thing he will focus on will be the pairing potential:

You know, when I'm selecting a new wine, I'm not so much interested in a full understanding: I've got in mind maybe some specific dishes, and I know already that I'll need perhaps an orange wine with a good aromaticity, a little bit of tannin to pair with a certain fattiness, and so on… Only later, when the wine comes to the restaurant, I will focus on full understanding and descriptors in order to tell a story to the clients. (Interview 13, 1 Michelin Star Sommelier)

If the selection is made by a buyer for a distribution, the performance is different in another manner:

I'm reflecting on the difference between my first time here at Sorgente del Vino, when I was only a wine lover, and now, after eight editions, tasting here looking for the catalogue for another wine from Friuli and one from Puglia that is missing in the catalogue. The first time, I used to listen for many minutes to the stories of producers, fascinated to discover details and also some "wine gossip", or simply intrigued by the sociological angle of their trajectories in the wine field, and inevitably I was conditioned and influenced — for the bad and the good — to taste their wines. Today, I was completely focused on wine, and in a mood to ask to myself questions like, "How is this wine in the style of the rest of the catalogue?," paying the maximum attention to the salinity of wine, the tension and energy on the mouth, with a right cleanliness on the nose. If something of this was lacking, I moved away very quickly. (Fieldnote, 11 February 2019)

Or, we can see another way of practicing during a wine course. One example is a person who leads the tasting session while assuming a pedagogical approach in order to let the novices learn the proper techniques, conducting a work of setting, or "fine tuning," of the object (Giglioli & Fele, 2016).

8. Of course, this is also the result of a specific cultural capital embodied in the president and constructed during previous tasting experiences, which made him able to recognise Collestefano (from a covered bottle).

4 Language and Systems of Meanings as Elements of Wine Tasting

If the discursive side of social practices is just an element among others, it nonetheless has a peculiar role in wine tasting. First off, as mentioned previous, wine language is something upon which several authors have focused, stressing how a wine tasting "can be properly understood as the best circumstance in which a subject, in our society, contends with the vocabulary available to describe what he perceives, or even to manage to perceive what he learns to describe" (Navarini, 2016). Next, much of the literature has emphasised the role of wine critics (Teil, 2001; Hay, 2010) and the "oenological signature" as factors of symbolic capital (see earlier) (Chauvin, 2010), most recently the transformation of wine journalism (Rossel, Schenk, & Eppler, 2016) and the influence of wine magazines on wine tast(e)ing (Smith Maguire, 2018). Since the impact of Robert Parker on the wine field, giving marks (not necessarily in hundredths like Parker does) has become a common activity in wine tasting, even when marks do not have any public resonance, as during a dinner with wine-loving friends. Lastly, tasting results are often variegated in descriptions and in creating/using synesthesia, metaphors, hyperboles and other rhetorical devices. So, the tasting note becomes a verbal component of a normative cultural schema for experiencing and enjoying the aesthetic object, constructing "that aesthetic object as one that will, in phases, reveal its dimensionalised qualia to the experienced sensorium of someone who purports to construe it, to interpret it with appropriate descriptive verbalisation (whether thought to oneself or uttered or written)" (Silverstein, 2016, p. 194). Hennion and Teil (2004, p. 522) describe this process: "As the domain gains in generality, it is visibly occupied by critics, guides, prescriptions, norms; the taste is made by telling it and is said by making it. Historically, this reflexivity tends to take the more classic written form, and, in a very characteristic way, each domain gives birth to a specific vocabulary."

Yet, things are more complex in a dimension that involves issues turning around to the matter of position-taking in the field. Let us pay attention to this phrase, which appeared in a Facebook post from the "Movimento di Avanguardia Enoica":

> What if tasting, instead of simply drinking, would represent an intolerable act of superiority and a lack of respect toward the wine producer and his product, as an expression of nature? (EKW, Movimento di Avanguardia Enoica, post on FB 26 June 2018)

The entire movement of "natural wine" (Black, 2013; Cohen, 2013) — within which the association mentioned before positions itself — is a discourse that is dictating new tasting practices. First, much of what have been considered "defects", like Brett, volatile acidity, oxidation, murkiness and so on, are now enjoyed, sought after or not noticed. Second, all the language of natural wines is pushing towards a posture that highlights the drinkable aspect of wine: "glu glu wines", "drinking buckets of that wine" and so on. Moreover, if since the dawn of wine tasting practices, the olfactory stage had a key role, lately — as a reaction to almost three decades of "wines for contests," very refined in the cellar with many oenological additives — it is questioned by important tasters and journalists (see Rigaux, 2012; Rigaux & Sangiorgi, 2017), and already in some fairs, there are "true believers" of this new tasting practice explaining how wrong one is to smell wine.[9] Therefore, we can say with Silverstein (2016) that:

> One is then not only characterising the aesthetic object but also, in effect, placing or locating oneself socially with respect to a "community of practice," those "in the know" — or not — about matters oenological within the complex intersection of institutionalised practices that bring the aesthetic object and the judging aesthete together. (p. 197)

9. " *I'm standing opposite to the stand of Cavaliera, a well-reputed producer of ancestral sparkling wines, discussing how he makes the 'degorgement', smelling the wine while feeling a little distracted, without paying attention to my gesture. Suddenly, a guy who seems to have familiarity with the producer starts asking me if I know of the 'geosensorial tasting'. When I answer affirmatively, he scolds me with a professorial attitude: 'So, don't you know you have the first taste?.' When I ask him (already expecting the answer) if he is attending the fair as a professional, he tells me that he is a banker, but he took a course from Sandro Sangiorgi.*" (Fieldnote, 25 November 2017, Mercato Fivi)

5 Variations in Tasting Wine Practices and Their Intersection with Other Practices

Recently, Hui (2017) has stressed the importance of considering variations in a nexus of practices, moving forward from just focusing on the variations between performances, and instead on the constituent elements of a performance. It is interesting to reflect on how different practices can change other practices, forming a circular relationship. Let us review again the issues brought about by natural wines. Making natural wine is a practice that has transformed its final product by a different use of things (e.g., agronomics products, technologies, anphores), meanings (e.g., redefining the entire category of "defects," defining other wines as "industrials" or "conventionals") and skills (biodynamics treatments, for instance), and doing so has also modified the wine tasting practice: the natural wine fairs are very often more similar to a feast than to a professional tasting, and we already examined some changes in tasting techniques. This is also applicable vice versa: if during a tasting, it is more and more important to understand the production method and discover if a wine is without sulphites, while "defects" become a factor of enjoyment, producers (some of them, in a way that will be addressed elsewhere in a social field theoretical frame) will be forced to adopt winemaking practices at more and more extremes. As a consequence, wine promotion, too, is changing, encouraging distributors, agents and journalists to concentrate on the process of winemaking instead of its results.

It has been highlighted how the spread of tasting posture and its language — according to what could be called a "vinification process" — has generated a similar attitude towards the most varied of products, from meat, judged and described based on the marbling, to gin or olive oil, cheese and so on, an attitude that is naturally related to distinctive processes, as studied by many after Bourdieu:

> The institutional world of wine as a node has itself become a center point of "emanation" of ways of constructing prestige throughout a whole world of construable comestibles, edible and potable commodities that are brought into the stratified precincts in which wine has long had a social life (Silverstein, 2016, p. 205).

Moreover, we can see another level of intersection of the practices, involving scientific institutions, with the practice of scientific research providing new words and frames to the tasting practice, or the practice of distribution and selling, forging as a matter of marketing the new slogan as "the important thing is minerality" or "saltiness", or in an intersection with wellness practices, "digestibility," and so on:

> At the culminating moment of consumption, the tasting and evaluation of the experience, the wine consumer is poised in a place where all these institutions have intersected with distinctive shaping influences (Silverstein, 2016, p. 203).

Last, the trajectories of practitioners are important for understanding the kinds of tasters people can be, moving from other practices and melting some elements of one into the other. For instance, one of our interviewees — nowadays one of the most famous and well-reputed wine journalists — before dedicating himself to wine was a sports journalist. That led him to approach wine tasting as storytelling, even when he guided a technical tasting. Or, digging in to my own experience, when I taste wine, I activate resources that are part of my sociological habitus, like comparing, categorising and creating taxonomies, and I tend less to create innovative descriptors for a wine, whereas when I participated in a didactical tasting panel led by a famous perfurmer, all attention was focused on the olfactory analysis.

6 Conclusions

After having emphasised the fruitfulness of approaching expert wine tasting in a practice theory framework, I would like to recap where it would be useful by igniting it with some Bourdieusian concepts, which are crucial to comprehending various features of this practice and its elements.

For one, it is not possible to give an account of the transformations of the wine tasting practice without referring to field theory, just as we saw in several places in this article. For example, the possibility of

introducing new discursive elements — as wine language, or new categories like "natural", "artisanal", "biodinamyc", "glu glu", etc. — depends on which position people occupy in the wine field and on questions of (specific and general) cultural, economic and symbolic capital; or the influence of a single performance — like orienting the taste, or the pace of tasting or the frame of tasting (blinded? uncovered?) — depends again on the position people occupy in the field. Conversely, when we reflect on the intersection of practices, we also have to consider the relationship between the field or subfield involved in this intersection. For instance, we could analyse the weight and give the historical period in which wine critics, oenologists or wine distributors oriented the intertwining of wine production and wine tasting. Finally, motivational knowledge depends almost entirely on position occupied in the field.

Second, we cannot prescind from a practitioner's habitus (also in its bodily aspects) and social trajectories their way of practice and their relationship with the various elements of practice. For instance, a professional taster in another field (e.g., a cook, an olive oil taster, a perfumer) would bring their dispositions with him/her to the wine tasting, or a very cultivated person would have more ease in creating descriptors, especially synesthesia (provided that the person previously experienced the sensations described. However, once again, this is a question of social trajectory).[10] Alternatively, like I mentioned earlier, one can bring a taxonomic attitude to wine tasting. So, the learning process that "builds" a wine taster is a practical issue, where the shared knowledge is created in interactions, but as Alkemeyer & Buschmann (2017) notice, the experience of practice "not only depends on a participant's *actual* bodily and mental situatedness in a practice, but is also informed by a 'personal situatedness' that is defined by his or her position in the social space of a given society and in the trajectory of his or her life" (p. 15).

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10. For instance, I remember that while I was giving a lesson in wine tasting to young students who never had this experience, one of them, tasting for the first time a gewurztraminer, immediately referred to litchi, instead of the more usual — at least in Italy, in my experience — rose. When I asked how she found so quickly such a descriptor, she told me that her parents were from the south of China, where this fruit is commonly consumed.

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