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“Discovering Quality or Performing Taste? A Sociology of the Amateur”

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Abstract: taste as an accomplishment

Based on comparative ethnographic observations of wine, food and music lovers, the paper proposes an analytic grid in order to give an account of taste as a collective performance and an on-going process, instead of treating it as a passive consequence of the things tasted and an addition of competences and preferences inside the amateur (“discovering quality”).

Four central elements have been displayed, on which taste as an activity relies on:

- the object tasted
- a collective of tasters (be they “amateurs” or not)
- the taster’s “body and soul”
- and material and technical devices.

The crucial argument is not in the list itself, but in the reflexive and performative status of each of those elements. None of them is “already there”, none can be taken as an external determination of taste. Being both results and sources of taste, they are emerging together with the performance: they are “footholds”, productive constraints which amateurs themselves continuously discuss, test, elaborate. Bodies, spaces, durations, devices, objects, tools, instruments: the love of music or wine is an activity, not only the acknowledgement of social identities or a collective rite reinforcing groups and subjectivities. All the heterogeneous mediations engaged in any tasting performance give a handle to the analyst, when she herself wants to give an account of taste as an active performance.

This is not only true within the moment of taste: it can be extended in time, to the analysis of the consumer-product agreement on markets. Buying is like tasting: it can be described as an on-going experimentation relying reflexively on the product to be sold, the collective of sellers and buyers, the technical devices of markets and each buyer’s own “interest”. Thus, economics leave the only scientist model of a set of hidden determinations.

So conceived, taste is much more than a natural property of men and things,

a miraculous coordination of products and preferences on a market, or a passive social rite: it is an experience, providing an empirical model to analyse our active relationships with things, with ourselves, and with the others.

Introduction: objective and methods

The aim of this communication is to underscore crucial limitations of the current works on taste, and to propose another point of view. The main shift in the analytical position we defend comes from the status we give to taste, as its main self-describer, analyst and producer. We do not conceive our work as the long tracking of diverse kinds of external determinations helping to understand why different people have different tastes. Instead, we make the hypothesis that different people in different situations bring into play a collective knowledge, taste being a result of this accomplishment. In other words, taste is a way of building relationships, with things and with people: it is not a mere property of goods, nor is it a mere competence of people.

This work is based on comparative ethnographic observations of wine amateurs and gourmets, on a side, and music lovers on the other. The comparison of music and wine or food was aimed at providing evidences about the relationship between the amateur and what she likes, beyond native self-descriptions always insisting on the radical specificity of each object of love. More precisely, music is mostly described as a performance, on one hand, and is referred to as an artwork, on the other, and wine is a product at first -- even if it is interesting to notice that, when they try to promote the quality of their taste, wine amateurs tend to talk about it both in terms of aesthetics and, to a minor extent, of a physical and mental conditioning, making it resemble a music concert. Hence the idea of using the specific features of each product to see how they apply to the other, in order to gain a possibility of describing empirically diverse formats of amateurship independently (at least relatively...) of the objects of this attention, we mean not directly deduced from supposed intrinsic properties of either wine and food, or music. It does not mean there is no difference between listening to music and drinking wine: but those differences have to be given an account of within the relation of taste, not as external predetermining factors.

More interesting is to be able of analytically displaying the modalities taken by these activities, knowing that they can vary a lot inside each form. The main measurable modalities which we have pointed out are:

- the degree of involvement (in time, money, personal relations...),
- the central social form that performing the activity requires (collective or in a solitary way, going out often or mostly practising at home, relying or not on a network of friends, and/or of other amateurs),
- the long-term physical training or engagement it needs or not (it is very high and for instance in the case of singing or playing an instrument, it is high but more concentrated in the case of wine tasting, but it may be much more

diffused, like in the case of gastronomy, or be mostly undertaken collectively in a more or less explicit way, like for a rock band),

– and finally, the physical form taken by the product, which lead to typical amateurs' practises like collecting old or specific repertoires, and/or over-investing into technical knowledge about production (like these amateurs continuously tinkering with instruments or hi-fi, or wine lovers dream on/about making their own wine...); this includes the extent and commercial availability of 'catalogues', giving an easy access to the object of passion (a typical case being music since it can be recorded), and the existence of a more or less large range of technical sets and devices considered as the 'equipment', or the 'material' of the activity (like hi-fi for music, or glasses, corkscrews and, of course, the cellar, for wine).

Other modalities can be more or less crucial, according to the diverse activities, in particular their degree of historicity, the existence of a specific and more or less elaborated vocabulary, the size and variety of the available 'library' dealing with their various aspects (guides, books, critiques, secondary literature, amateurs' chronicles, novels...), the formalisation of a training or an education and, more broadly, their level of social recognition, valorisation and institutionalisation.

Another way of taking advantage of the cross comparison of music and wine or food was the use of our cross competences and weaknesses: one of us is a quasi professional expert in wine tasting but a "simple amateur" of music, the other is a great music lover and a former musicologist but only an average "petit amateur" of wine. We can use, then, our own bodies, our preferences, our knowledge and prejudices, as touchstones and variables implied into our experiments, instead of putting our own status-as-amateurs between brackets as is usually done by social scientists, on topics where belonging to the group of great amateurs, being a connoisseur, or simply "knowing a little what all this is about" is so crucial in interviews: the interviewer's "level of amateurship" modifies completely the kind of discourse and observation she can get from great amateurs, who never enter "the real thing" in front of uninitiated fellows; and if we are between great amateurs the danger is, conversely, to regard the love of music or wine as a pure apprenticeship, a mere process of acquiring knowledge and corporal ability, the quality of the object being taken as an evidence. Our cross inexpertise allows us to avoid in both fields any explanation in terms of biased perception...

Amateurs are our experts

Our idea is to focus on the study of "great amateurs'" practices -- ways of doing, manners, maniac procedures, uses of books and guides, and so on -- and to make them OUR experts in order to understand how taste works, instead of placing ourselves in a position of experts and making theories by "abstracting" from their pretendedly mute practices a kind of informal knowledge they

would not be aware of.

This is quite the opposite: comparing amateurs in various fields, we discover a lot of different definitions of what it is to like something, or to be an amateur of something (two different states already), but most of them are very reflexively and collectively debated and tested empirically by amateurs themselves. In particular, they seem very good at practically mobilising, combining or refusing different modes of tasting (schematically, as will be developed below: focus on the objects, on the collective, on oneself, on the “conditions” and technical devices; modes which look like the rival bases on which disciplines and knowledge have built their theoretical models: physics and bio-chemistry, sociology, psychology and cognitive sciences, technical expertise).

This shift changes completely the nature of our accounts, and the status of the “big questions” about quality. If we follow amateurs as our informers, instead of deciphering them with our theoretical preconceptions, these questions become difficult stakes of their debates and experiments, instead of being dogmatic and definitive answers defended by each theory: Does one need the others’ advices to like good products or be sensitive to high quality? Are tastes depending on objective features or properties of the products, or mostly depending on each one’s deep attachments? Must the relationship with the objects be purified and made independent of any circumstances, or on the contrary, is the pleasure of things always related to a whole situation, a big part of the art of tasting being the ability to put oneself into the good conditions? What is determined, what is radically unpredictable, in the feeling that something is “good” (whatever definition one gives of this quality of things...)?

Amateurs DO find their own answers, defining what we will call diverse “formats of amateurship” -- except these answers do not look like definite and coherent determinisms referring to theoretical models which scientists would then be paid to rationalise. On the contrary, they are provisional and incoherent trials, self-realising modalities, focusing on diverse contradictory aspects of taste, moving from one to the other: the test of their validity is part of taste itself, which cannot be separated from this whole set of collective practices and long-term relationships to a repertoire of things.

Our aim, then, is not to extract from interviews and observations with amateurs the objective grounds of a pleasure, a feeling, a taste that they would ordinarily live only as subjective, implicit representations largely blind to their own determinations. Conceiving taste as amateurs’ experimental on-going activity, an accomplishment continuously taking into account its own results to modify itself and its procedures, our aim is to promote amateurs to the rank of experts, to acknowledge their ability to be the reflexive managers of their own taste. In the present moment, first: one of our goals is to take advantage of the wide know-how they display, when looking for what they prefer, administering their pleasure, evaluating, trying, judging in situation or differing their

diagnoses, in order to put to the test and formulate, together with them, some of the modalities of taste; but, beyond these instantaneous tricks of the trade, it is also at the long-term scale that amateurs have been the builders of their own ability to appreciate things and the forgers of the frame of their taste: as much at a personal as at a collective level, tastes have a history (and this is why the plural is necessary here), they are but pure natural properties, they had to fabricate themselves through the invention of formats and repertoires, devices and abilities, all elements which amateurs of diverse products or domains have progressively settled up by passionately debating them collectively.

This is why the sort of “neo-ethnomethodological” posture which we plead for insists on taste as a reflexive and performative capacity, against any possibility of taking it as an objectified reality which scientific knowledge could give an account of from outside. This may be too general a claim: but it happens to be very efficient in the precise domain of taste, which by now is dramatically spread between rival disciplines, as if they were in competition to give THE right account of what is THE good taste or the quality of things. We propose here to ask some questions and give some results of our methodological approach, and to show its fertility in getting out of aporetic binary debates in the field.

Afourfold scheme

Whatever the taste device, a meal with friends, the listening of a record in the lounge, a wine probe in a shop, a music concert, a wine concourse, even a scientific experiment... the judgements on the taste and quality uttered for the occasion proliferate. Most of the present people do not agree; actually, the same person, even isolated, may change his mind more or less rapidly.

Most of the research works have been dedicated to the “explanation” of this variety. Without giving its elements any essential character, we have tried to define a kind of “scaffold”, a four-feet stool, which for us has just the provisional status of an empty frame in which attachments can thus be elaborated. As a sort of minimalist hypothesis (but this too can be debated), we have assumed that they mobilize, alone or combined, these four main different definitions:

- a. Taste as a property of a taster
- b. Taste as a property of the thing tasted
- c. Taste as a collective process
- d. Taste as a result of a device

We could immediately add, for instance, taste as a historical process (this can be included in taste as collective process), or taste as a behaviour (an extension of taster’s abilities). But the main point is not about the relevance or the exhaustivity of this grid, it is about the status of its basic elements: our purpose is to return them to the actors themselves, and to describe disciplines as rival ways of rationalizing and purifying each of them, after having snatched

those common knowledges from the amateurs' reflexive abilities and transformed them into an objective science.

Let's begin with a short example, in order to show the combining and incompatibilities of diverse formats of amateurship. We consider here the case of Raoul. Raoul is both a wine amateur and a music lover. He does think that some wines and some musics are better than others. In the case of wine, he tries and learns first which are the best in order to guide his perception and be sure he won't make errors in his perception of the quality of the wine he buys. So he is very attentive to what experts say, he listens to connoisseur friends' opinions, he buys many books and guides in order to increase his knowledge and tries to adjust his perception to the described quality of wines.

But he thinks music is totally different from wine. Music is something abstract that generates emotions and, for him, the quality of music is related to the quality of the emotions he personally perceives and which are strongly related to his past experiences and the ability of the listened music to evoke past experiences to him. So, in the case of music, he never relies on any advice, he considers them as inapplicable to his case. He listens to music on the radio, waiting for a casual encounter with something he likes; he hears music friends make him hear, but he never follows directly their opinion, he just takes them as opportunity to know new music. And whenever he likes a piece, an author, a player, then he buys the record.

Let's regard him first as a wine lover. If you consider taste as a property of a taster, X has a fully biased behaviour. The bias may then be explained by psychological causes: a kind of lack of self-reliance and the influence of experts on the proper judgement of the actors; if you consider taste as a collective process, you might interpret the case by sociological causes, the belonging of the actor to a kind of structuring/structured circle of social differentiation; if you consider taste as a property of the thing tasted, then you will take this case as a probe of a necessary apprenticeship of what reality is, only accessible through scientific procedures of production of knowledge. In any case, from diverse and sometimes contradictory points of view, you always emphasise the fact that taste is the result of a configuration of the amateur-object relationship.

And what about music? His behaviour might be considered as a probe for cognitive structure for tastes. All other explanations will insist on his biased behaviour, but for another set of causes. The same guy who had biased ways of tasting wine because he was obeying the others now only obeys his own feelings, and has a biased taste too, but because he is not aware of musical relevance, he does not reach any aesthetic elaboration, he is not aware of the unconsciously determined nature of his pretended spontaneous preferences, aso. Do we have to adapt each explanation to each empirical case? A better solution is to turn things upside down: those rationalized and incompatible principles, leading to decipher as diverse biases all the practical configurations that real amateurs set up, are but the basic elements on which amateurs

themselves continuously put to the test, elaborate, discuss, oppose and link together the diverse moments and constraints of their taste: but, except on rare cases, they do not try to purify them and make one of them THE only principle of taste, they just try and move, in a much more variable and flexible way than what they themselves acknowledge, describing these well-known stages which all great amateurs seem to have passed by ("oh, you're in your 'only old sticks phase'", or "oh yes, French opera is but light music: well, let's just wait for what you'll say in 3 years, my dear!"), and whose character, as dogmatic and assertive as it is limited and provisional, they are much aware of.

To be a "great amateur", then, no more signifies that one knows how to feel the quality of a wine or a music, and knows how to manage the context of the tasting situation, to use the good devices in order to get the best perception; it does not restrict to the recording of the succession of "tastes" or loved things, nor to the primacy of the search for pleasure. The amateur appears to be someone who selects, juxtaposes, co-ordinates ways of elaboration of his taste. As a consequence, "satisfaction" and "pleasure" are no more to be considered as the direct consequence -- necessarily felt by the subject -- of the perfect fitting between properties of a product and characteristics of a subject, even a social subject. Satisfaction, pleasure, emotion, are purposes of a reflexive interrogation by the subject.

All these former points of view try to reduce the variety of judgements on the quality to a variety of degradations of a reference point of view defined by a theoretical posture, a specific device or situation aimed at showing the involved causes. But most of the time, these theoretical postures appear to be irrelevant for the actors. Their obsession for a rational complete coherent search for a localised cause in a determined part of the taste device is not to be found in the actors' practices. And all these points of view postulate taste as a result that imposes itself to the actors, "in spite of them", when on the contrary they describe the most common stakes of debate through which amateurs reflexively elaborate their taste.

Instead of applying from outside rival disciplines, each of them fighting to give more importance to one aspect of their love (wine and works "themselves", body and mind, social game of participation and rejection, material, economic and technical devices...), these debates should be returned to their real experts: the amateurs. They are the ones who perform the experiments, forced to call themselves into question through the collective trial any performance represents. In search of effects which are never assured, they are the ones who draw on aesthetics, sociology, psychology, technology and economics, always needing to put collectively their feelings into words in order to master, multiply and share them.

Taste as a reflexive and performative activity

Let's go back now to the four feet of our poor stool. None of these elements

are to be taken as "given", or natural, pre-existing. And this is true whatever elements we speak of: it is first the case with the tasted objects (the plural form fits better: as music shows, for instance, tasting is not only about "the" work, the "Object", it passes through a lot of intermediary objects, the grain of a record, the sound of an instrument, the ambient room, a voice, the body of a performer, scores, gestures -- all objects whose relative importance in the performance is passionately debated between music lovers from opposed aesthetic positions): they are on the contrary continuously tested, uncertain, tentative, appearing in situation and in the process of performance, as they are both the only means and the products of the amateurs' activity.

The same goes for amateurs' collectives: sociology proceeds a little too fast as if it was the exclusive gate-keeper of this register; it takes this modality of amateurism out of the reach of amateurs, elaborates it as an autonomous, systematic, external causality, and finally turns it back against the amateurs, as the hidden principle of their activity, revealed to them in spite of their resistances and denegations by a heroic sociologist; this figure of the amateur is far from any real situation: on the contrary, there is no amateur as long as one is alone in front of some good things to taste. Amateurism begins with the confrontation with others' tastes: some of those other lovers functioning as models forcing oneself to depreciate what one loved, and to love what one just despised; some other people, as foils helping oneself to get rid of inappropriate tastes; far from being mere snobism, this collective production of a common elaborated taste is a very powerful way of experiencing the stability, the durability, and the various type of "resondance", of responding ability that objects of love may have, and to produce conversely the collective ability to perceive these differences and give them more and more worth: the antonym of love is not hatred, but indifference.

Objects/collectives: till now, we were in the territory of the usual debates about art or taste objects and sociology. But the other elements open even more this space in which love may display itself. The material devices of the activity are crucial because they are the concrete mediations supporting most of the real debates about tastes. One glass for clarets, one glass for Burgundy wines. In the baroque revival in France in the late 70ies-early 80ies (Hennion, 1997), what has been reported afterwards in terms of aesthetic and commercial dual oppositions between two clear camps was first of all a systematic calling into question of each medium, device, object of the musical performance: pitch, voice, instruments, size of orchestras, tunings, scores, and so. The same is true with rock and its successive fads and fashions: nothing reveals more clearly the differences between styles than the kind of material musicians use, or the places they perform in.

Material and spatial devices, collective arrangements, organized spaces and times, objects and instruments of various modes, and a wide range of techniques to deal with them: such a vision of taste as a performance undertaken through a

procession of mediations perfectly fits the situated, "equipped" and collective definition of taste for food or love for music we try to clarify; it is at the opposite of the false image that the 'object vs sociology' controversy gives of it, that of a face-to-face challenge between the Object and the Subject; nothing like that when confronting real debates among music (or wine...) lovers.

The last "foot" of our scaffold is probably the one which poses more problems for sociology: the involvement of our body and our soul in taste and art experiences -- and more generally, the acknowledgment by any form of sociology of our sensations, our feelings, our emotions. Far from recognizing this aspect of taste, the over-frequented track of "embodiment" takes the opposite direction, showing how our bodies are "constructed" through social devices and norms (see e.g. Featherstone, Hepworth et al., 1991). But the question here is not primarily about how a "natural" body is in fact determined, tamed, performed and deformed by our social environment. Before this important matter, it is positively about the co-production of a loving body and of a loved object through a collective and instrumented activity. No tongue, no taste for wine, no nose without the whole wine-tasting activity. No musical ear before a music to hear. The "body", or more accurately our "body and soul" equipment, is (as are the objects, the collectives and the devices of taste) a result emerging from the activity of tasting, and not a "given" reality, an autonomous and pre-existing physical body just needing a musical or gourmet training, nor is it a psychological ability to enjoy organized sounds or elaborated products, which cognitive sciences would soon give us a satisfying understanding of! Our "bodies and souls" too, like musical works and techniques, like the taste of wines or amateurs' identities, are nothing but the means AND the products of an uncertain, tentative, on-going performance. Taste is precisely about managing this creative uncertainty: it's not about liking something from what we already know, but about changing our ability to like from the contact with a new thing, most often pre-presented by other amateurs used as mediators of one's own taste.

The provisional aim of our "scaffold", that we use more as a "infra-method" than as a meta-discourse, is to allow comparisons. Sports would direct our attention more towards the long-term training which can produce a new performing body -- but there is no sports possible without objects, either: no pole vault without a bar, and this also means no sports without records, concourses, coaching, other performers, and a lot of techniques, both incorporated and objectified. It remains that, out of this common four-fold scheme (objects, collectives, devices, bodies), the case of sport displays more clearly the fact that there is no such a thing as a given natural body. Only a long training makes present to the performer the feeling of a "natural" gesture: he is taking possession of a corporated collective ability. Think of this with wine lovers or musicians in mind -- and not only performers, but listeners too -- and the weakness of the dual model "object-society", skipping bodies and material

devices, clearly appears. No music without the collective long-term production of an hearing, of a specific "listening", ranging from the more general frame of attention (paying attention to music-as-music) to the more local and specific habit of listening to tunes and works made available when and where we want by the record industry -- a reality of music that the recording industry has developed a lot, but which existed from the early 18th century with the expansion of activity for amateurs of piano makers (Ehrlich, 1976) and "paper music" publishers (Peacock and Weir, 1975).

An amateur always participates into the production of the product he likes, as does the reader, in literary theory, or before this, the reader as Proust describes him in the foreword of the French version of Ruskin's book, le Sésame et les Lys: a reader who is an actor of literature, made of a set of attitudes not in front of the book, but inside it. One better sees now the difficulty and the interest of this notion of taste, precisely in that it loosens itself from the mere activity of a subject in front of a given object to appear as a corporal, affective and mental ability, but also as a collective one, an ability induced by the products given to the attention of the taster, but also tightly depending upon material and technical devices of the performance of taste and, then, a variable, contingent and historical ability.

The market and the prescription of a product whether new or not

As an extension of the theoretical point of view proposed above, we suggest reconsidering the analysis of the "satisfaction" of the consumer. The problem is quite the same. Purchase and repeated purchase are interpreted as the consequence of a concordance between supply and demand. Its establishment is seen as requiring "good" information for the consumers on their "needs" (often taken as conditions for their "welfare") or interest, and on the "properties" -- qualities and price -- of the products. But this "good" information is always threatened by a wide range of "opacities" occurring on different places of the food-chain, or by the intrusion of always new factors of influence on the "needs" of the consumer, the "properties" of the products or their perception.

In order to simplify we will focus on the adjustment consumer-product as on a "characteristic"-"properties" adjustment. The collective support has been studied elsewhere. Instead of considering the stability of the relation between a consumer and a product as a sign for the good fitting between his characteristics and its properties, stability that most of the time does not occur, instead of trying to reach an ever greater stabilisation of the purchase relationship by incorporating always more factors of influence, we suggest to keep aware of the variety of relations that might arise between the consumer and the product.

As for wine and music-lovers, some consumers are not reflexive; they won't be addressed by any marketing procedures. Some others are and try to direct their purchase through a precise theorizing of their relation, resting on the four above supports: themselves not only as amateurs with tastes, but as buyers with

tastes, needs, interest, economic power...; the product as a good with characteristics, price, value... among many other products; a collective of sellers and buyers; the situation of purchase as a particular market device (a device aimed at producing a specific encounter between a product to be sold and a buyer).

Each buyer elaborates his own relationship. But this relationship is not a kind of consumer behaviour that would be worth for (m)any products. On the contrary, the elaborated relationship might always depend on the product considered, on the situation of purchase, on his interpretation of the purchaser's relationship of any other people. Moreover, it might always change in time.

Selling is not the result of a good revelation of the needs of the consumers; it might occur for many various "reasons" always particular. So the purpose of the producers and sellers is to initiate a purchase of a product by a consumer and to keep them more and more firmly attached through complex procedures such as market vigilance and communication.

These procedures can be co-construction processes. During the conception process, the producer will try to enlarge the attachment between a set of selected "representative" consumers and a prototype to a larger and larger set of consumers by reshaping the need/properties adjustment; once the product released, the communication of the firm will insist on the necessity for the consumer to use the diversity of the supply to think his buying relationship as a process of adjustment of properties of products to himself. The adjustment will be surveyed through consumer panels, and if necessary reoriented. The advertisement on the product will insist on the perfect fitting between the target consumers and the advertised product.

If these co-construction processes seem to be widely used, they are not the only ones. The marketing of quality wines or the selling of luxury products seems to proceed according to asymmetrical adjustment procedures. The quality of the products is certified by experts and the attachment of the consumer conceived as an apprenticeship by the consumer of the qualities of the wine, of the excellence of the luxury product. This is why the usual marketing analyses in terms of mutual adjustment of demand and supply do not apply or lead to paradoxes (Dubois, 1992).

But as efficient as these procedures of marketing, in this enlarged meaning, might be they never lead to a deterministic action or effect. If some consumers seem to fit to the procedure, "betraying" the "information" given by the producer either on themselves or on the product, others do not and seem to shape opportunistic uses, "bricolages", often noticed by the producers.

Conclusion: the felicity of taste

Pragmaticians speak of the conditions of felicity of a sentence (e.g. Austin 1962): are not all the good reasons there for this type of analyses, making

communication depend not only upon the properties of the enunciated nor of the speakers' competences but upon the situation of enunciation, to be especially relevant about taste? From an analysis centered on the perceptible effects of a product on a subject, one slides towards an analysis centered on the conditions allowing an effect to arise.

In the first case, all the methodological effort aims at inventing the good devices and experiments which can divide what comes from purely musical or objective effects of a product on an isolated guinea-pig, from "biases" coming from the context, influences, or socio-cultural determinations (indirect effects helping or preventing a good taste). In the second case, all these elements are there too, music and wines, diverse contexts, genres, formats of taste and various determinisms: but their a priori distribution into distinct orders of reality (external causes, favorable conditions or obstacles, purely oenologic or musical effects) and the modalities of their action are not known in advance, they are the "constructive constraints" (Gomart & Hennion, 1999) on which taste relies and from which some effects occur or not, without any amateur or analyst able to decide or to master them.

As the ones of Becker's marijuana smokers (Outsiders, 1963) effects only occur when expected, named, identified and collectively learnt, and when this long-term attention has allowed to produce products responding to this demand. Taste is a performing activity: it only succeeds when it relies upon its own results and effects, in a circular way, as long as it isolates, discusses and names them. One only hears music if one hears it as music. Then the question is not to isolate music or food, and understand their "own" specific efficiency (or conversely, in the case of sociologists, to deny it and make it a social rite or a game of identity and difference), but to give an account of the way wine or music have effects, arising from a whole set of practices, bodies, collectives, all taken and taken again by the reflexive work of taste itself. Taste is an action, not a fact, it is an experience, not an object.

The shift is important. It has a crucial consequence, in particular, on methodology -- as long as we acknowledge that the "effects" of a product, be it wine or music, have no reason to depend only upon the product itself, nor upon the consumer's abilities only, a crucial characteristic of taste becomes its reflexivity: and the analyst can only accompany amateurs, observing, seeing things arise, noticing changes, noting all the work of adjustment; he cannot just objectify them without falling into one of the many strategies of the amateurs, which they have already tested and, most likely, which they have already shown as being outdated!