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SMITH MAGUIRE, Jennifer

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Towards a Sociology from Wine and *Vina Aperta*

Jennifer Smith Maguire ^{1*}

¹ *Sheffield Business School, Sheffield Hallam University, UNITED KINGDOM*

*Corresponding Author: j.smith1@shu.ac.uk

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ABSTRACT

In considering the wisdom of pursuing the development of a sociology of wine, I outline several dangers associated with sub-disciplinary specialization, including overlapping risks of silo-ization, sequestration, and scope and process reduction. In particular, I discuss the attendant risk of thinking of wine as *vinum clausum*, that is, as a closed and static object. In contrast, I outline an open, processual approach to wine as *vina aperta*, and consider three, interrelated features of conceptualizing wine as processual, interconnected, and constituted through interdependence between humans and the physical world, others, and themselves. Drawing on a number of process-oriented sociologists, and a range of existing sociological research on wine and related topics, I advocate for a sociology *from* wine, that is, for wine as an invaluable point of departure for a historically- and processually-oriented sociology.

Keywords: consumption, cultural production, interdependence, process, wine

INTRODUCTION

There is a vibrant body of sociological and sociology-adjacent research with wine as its focus. Nevertheless, there is no ‘sociology of wine’ *per se*: a state of affairs that the Special Issue seeks to disrupt. Yet, to my mind at least, the nature of that disruption is far from clear. *Should* we have a sociology of wine?

As a response, I outline a number of reasons to resist the seemingly inexorable push and pull towards a separate sub-field. Well-charted pitfalls of sub-disciplinary specialization offer a cautionary tale as to the risks that are likely to pertain to a sociology of wine, to the detriment of both sociology and sociological knowledge of wine. I am especially concerned with the risk of “process reduction” (Elias, 1970: 112). Drawing from several process-oriented sociologists (e.g., Bourdieu, 1977; Elias, 1970; Latour, 2004), I set out two, contrasting approaches to thinking about and researching wine. On the one hand, we can think of wine as *vinum clausum*: a closed, static object, the production and consumption of which are treated as finite events that are calculable and predictable, and specific to a discrete set of actors and factors. This approach may not be typical of sociological analyses on wine (as opposed to much work in the marketing and consumer behaviour domains), but there is nevertheless cause for concern given the implications of specialization, and the nascent sub-field’s recurrent narrowness of scope in focusing on ‘spectacular’ forms of wine, which risks several blind spots. On the other hand, we can regard wine as *vina aperta*¹:

¹ An explanatory note for the curious, regarding the formulation of *vinum clausum* and *vina aperta*: Latin adjectives must agree with the noun in terms of number, case and gender. The noun for man/men – *homo/homines* – is masculine, whereas the noun for wine/wines – *vinum/vina* – is neuter. The adjectives of closed/open therefore vary accordingly: *homo clausus* (singular, nominative, masculine); *vinum clausum* (singular, nominative, neuter); *homines aperti* (plural, nominative, masculine); *vina aperta* (plural, nominative, neuter). I am indebted to classics scholar Ruaidhrí Maguire for the instruction in Latin conjugation.

a multifarious, multifaceted, processual ‘thing’ that is constituted through intended and unintended outcomes of humans’ interdependent relations with the world, others, and themselves. In outlining this latter approach, I revisit examples of sociological research on wine (my own and others’), linking to such themes as taste and tasting, the construction of heritage and place, consecration and qualification, and the nature/culture nexus. Rather than simply cautioning against a sociology of wine, I advocate for a sociology *from* wine, and attempt to demonstrate some of the ways in which wine is ‘good to think with.’ Thus, following Callois’s (1958) incitement to derive a sociology from play and games, I suggest that we might consider wine—specifically, *vina aperta*—as an invaluable lens through which to grasp some (I would not suggest all!) dynamics of social worlds, and to develop a more historically- and processually-oriented sociology.

THE RISKS OF SPECIALIZATION

The institutionalization of a specialist sub-field is a substantial task. It requires a significant and widespread (if not necessarily collaborative) investment of time, service, passion, and graft. Yet, the political economic conditions of academia, and the long-term development of disciplinary knowledge, generate clear pressures towards specialization. Investing in the institutionalization of a sub-field may be a necessary or advisable undertaking in the entrepreneurial milieu of higher education, in which Universities of Excellence (Fish, 2005) compete for visibility, kudos, and cash (e.g., in the form of students or grants). Such an investment may also be an understandable—if not inevitable—defensive response to challenges posed by sociology’s ever-expanding body of knowledge, the individual mastery of which becomes increasingly difficult, thus pushing practitioners towards specialization (Goudsblom, 1977). Sociologists—of gender, family, religion, law, art, leisure, sport, and so on—thus build up and hive off sub-disciplinary domains, with specialist textbooks, courses, degree programmes, departments, conference themes and conferences, journals and special issues, anthologies and book series, research networks, professional bodies, PhDs, and faculty posts.

From the preceding list of milestones, it appears that the materialization of a sociology of wine is already underway, if only as a thread within a multi-disciplinary ‘social sciences of wine.’ An increasing² number of wine-specific contributions are being cast into the communal sociological pot, and/or cluster within a range of sub-disciplinary areas including sociology of culture, economic sociology, science and technology studies, organisation studies, food studies, alcohol studies, rural studies, tourism studies, and so on. And, various binding agents—such as edited collections (e.g., Charters et al., 2022; Inglis and Almira, 2020), textbooks (e.g., Morgan and Tresidder, 2016) and the present Special Issue—contribute to the gelling of a specialist area, generating momentum, visibility and legitimacy for wine as a sociological research focus. So far, so good.

The institutionalization of a sociology of wine (alone, or as part of a social sciences of wine) is nevertheless not without risk. By way of a cautionary tale, consider Bourdieu’s (1990: 156) characterization of the sociology of sport, which finds itself

doubly dominated, both in the universe of sociologists and in the universe of sport. ... [T]he sociology of sport...is disdained by sociologists, and despised by sportspeople. ... One thus has, on the one side, people who know sport very well in the practical sense but can’t talk about it and, on the other, people who don’t know sport at all well on the practical level and who could talk about it but disdain to do so, or do so badly...

Is such ignominy likely to befall sociologists of wine? Anecdotally (having had a foot in both camps; e.g., Smith Maguire, 2008), I would say it is unlikely. On the one side, I have found that wine producers and intermediaries are well versed in treating wine (in the glass, on the page, as practices of making and drinking) as an object of analysis, and often welcome a chance to reflect on their craft through a new lens. On the other, sociologists’ private, public, and professional lives are often well-lubricated by wine, making them comfortable, if not downright eager, to talk about wine (once the required ‘I’m no expert/snob/connoisseur!’ caveat has been proffered). More to Bourdieu’s (1990) point, wine’s heritage and cultural cachet tend to spare it—and its sociological interlocutors—the dismissiveness levelled at ‘less serious’ aspects of leisure (Maguire, 2011). (That said, I have received enough jokey asides and impromptu offers of research assistance to nevertheless detect a whiff of suspicion as to the seriousness of wine as an academic focus.)

More generally, critiques of sociology’s fragmentation highlight genuine dangers that attend the institutionalization of a sub-discipline, including interrelated issues of silo-ization, sequestration, and scope reduction. In terms of the risk of silo-ization: the specialist sub-field can become an increasingly isolated “fortress,”

² As one (imperfect) indication: a search of Sociological Abstracts, May 2021, using search parameters of ‘wine’ in the abstract, and ‘sociology’ appearing anywhere in the record, shows a steady increase in peer reviewed outputs per decade, e.g., from the 1980s (25 records) to the 2010s (113 records).

with drawbridges raised and increasingly inaccessible (if not outright inhospitable) to non-specialists (Elias, 1970: 50). In turn, the potential for a sub-discipline's knowledge (theories, concepts, methods, findings, provocations) to impact on and contribute to sociology as a whole is curtailed. The sub-discipline neither feeds into nor feeds from the wider sociological enterprise.

Silo-ization stems, in part, from a turning inward. Within the sub-discipline, there is a risk of stagnation and decline in the production of reality-congruent knowledge (Elias, 1998) as inhabitants regard "whatever lies beyond their immediate problem area as they have learnt to define it" (Goudsblom, 1977: 3) as external and irrelevant (thus linking to the risk, addressed below, of scope reduction). At the same time, there is a turning away of (and by) those outside the sub-discipline, which entails the "threat of sequestration" (Inglis, 2014: 109). Contained within its own territory, defined and defended through distinct journals, departments, and conferences (if not also specialist concepts, theories, and jargon), the sub-discipline becomes readily pigeonholed and/or ignored by others. That side-lining may be wilful—e.g., by intellectual competitors vying for the same terrain—or inadvertent, thanks to the discipline's ongoing fragmentation and silo-ization. This leads to a profusion of reinvented wheels, and simultaneous yet disconnected insights, at the expense of significant and cumulative advances in understanding.

Both turning inward and turning away raise the further risk of scope reduction, limiting the sub-discipline's critical capacity. This may involve a narrowing of temporal scope—a form of myopia, if not outright historical ignorance, that misrecognizes (and misunderstands) the 'now' as 'new' (Inglis, 2014). Scope reduction is also evident in the generation and definition of problems, as when a sub-discipline becomes increasingly subservient to the here-and-now needs of the state, the market, and so on (Maguire, 2011). Scope reduction may also mean conceptual stasis and processual blindness. Inhabitants come to treat the fortress (e.g., sport, wine) as if it is a "universe closed in on itself" (Bourdieu, 1990: 159), thereby depriving them "of the means of accounting for the multiplicity of forces at play within their own field of investigation" (Goudsblom, 1977: 123).

This problem of "process reduction" (Elias, 1970: 112) is not exclusively a symptom of specialization; more generally, sociologists compound the usual (but not universal) human habit of rendering processes in the form of static concepts, and thereby forgetting their contingent and emergent character. To illustrate the point, Elias (1970: 119, *passim*) discusses "*homo clausus*" as the typical way in which sociologists (and everyday folk) speak and think about humans. The idea of an individual as a closed box, separate from society, and complete (that is, unchanging) is a myth that ignores humans' ineluctable interdependence on and with others. In this myth, interdependence and change are segregated to childhood; if they are acknowledged for the adult, they are typically compartmentalized (e.g., as a corollary of the division of labour, or an outcome of strenuous self-improvement). Yet, the adult is no less dependent than the child on relationships with others through which to acquire, enact, and realise those qualities that make them human (Elias, 1970: 113). Furthermore, change is endemic to life in its entirety, human and otherwise, even if it is a condition perhaps more readily detected in the earliest and latest stages of life, and even more difficult to detect if the timespan is that not of a lifespan but of societal development or species evolution (Goudsblom, 1977: 133). Thus, what are in actuality processes (individuals, societies, *things*) are habitually misrecognized, in everyday language and in sociological terminology, as static, unchanging *objects* (Latour, 2004).

What do these dangers of specialization look like for a sociology of wine, albeit *avant la lettre*? Silo-ization and sequestration may presently seem unlikely outcomes, by virtue of a community too small, with too few own platforms, to be an insular fortress. In addition, sociologists who study wine come from a diversity of disciplinary and sub-disciplinary positions, ensuring that parameters drawn around the focus of study remain generous and porous (for now). Even so, the risk is not nil. The sociology of wine always has the potential to be (or become) inhospitable to newcomers and outsiders, given that fluency in wine field terminology, knowledge, and rituals is typically bound up with forms of cultural capital associated with processes of distinction, stratification, and social closure (Bourdieu, 1979).

I would suggest that reductions of scope and process are more pronounced hazards, in the form of what we might call, following Elias, *vinum clausum* thinking about wine. A *vinum clausum* approach already holds sway in much marketing and consumer behaviour research on wine, in which wine is treated as a self-contained object, the choice of which is a rational, planned outcome determined by independent drivers such as price, country of origin, labels and logos, and pre-existing attitudes and intentions. Such knowledge *may* help model and predict purchase outcomes in very circumscribed ways, but does little to illuminate what wine means and what it does within its social relations of use. For example, research on organic wine purchasing intentions and behaviours may segment Canadian (Rojas-Méndez et al., 2015), German (Schäufele et al., 2018), Chinese (Lu et al., 2019) or Floridian (Bonn et al., 2016) consumers to identify the degree to which favourable attitudes, purchase intentions, and willingness to pay a premium are explained by level of wine involvement, health or sustainability consciousness, price sensitivity, and so forth. Yet, such research tells us little about how the same consumers choose, understand, drink, and evaluate organic wine 'in the wild' of their everyday lives (e.g., dinner parties, winery visits, selecting or receiving wine as gifts): situations in which such drivers may play very different roles (or no role at all). A *vinum clausum*

perspective is ill-suited to accounting for how the same wine may be chosen for different reasons by different people, or may be valued differently by the same people over time and in different contexts.

Lest I be too quick to point an accusatory finger elsewhere, let me also note the tendency in sociological research to focus on ‘spectacular’ versions of wine (e.g., premium-priced, critically-acclaimed, low yield, artisanal, biodynamic, natural). Explicitly or implicitly, ‘mass appeal’, ‘big brand’ and/or ‘industrial’ wine is often positioned as the stigmatized other against which spectacular wine is defined (for a nuanced exception, see McIntyre and Germov, 2018). This narrowness of scope runs several risks of closed-off thinking, including: a blindness to assumptions of exceptionalism (for wine vis-à-vis other consumer entities, and for spectacular wine vis-à-vis other wines); a fetishization of narratives of authenticity, *terroir*, and the lone, heroic winemaker (among others); and a reinforcing of spurious (and prejudice-affirming) dichotomies, such as big/small and industrial/craft (or object/thing; Latour, 2004). Such dichotomies may be embedded—and largely invisible—as data analysis devices and sampling parameters, or reproduced through generalizations that outreach non-comparative research design (i.e., naturalistic research may find that producers, consumers and intermediaries prize small-scale wine for notions of authenticity, heritage, and place, but this does not preclude that such qualities are also associated with ‘big brand’ wine). A *vinum clausum* perspective is blinded to the continuities of practice, discourse, and meaning across the spectrum of production methods and places, price points, and styles of consumption (and thus has a diminished capacity to identify, articulate and evidence what are the actual, meaningful discontinuities).

There is also a recurrent bracketing off of wine’s dimensions of intoxication and drunkenness, which are largely ceded to the sociologies of alcohol, health, and/or deviance (or DrunkSociology³), despite the fact that inebriation is central to what differentiates wine from the vast majority of other food and drink things, and consumption entities more generally. At the risk of slipping into a *vinum clausum* reification of wine, we might say that it is wine’s “power to banish care” (Johnson, 1989: 10)—to ease anxiety, fear, and pain; to facilitate sociability (Elias and Dunning, 1986), conviviality and conversation (up to a point!)—that fundamentally underpins its long-established and esteemed place in human history, rather than its various other attributes (e.g., capacities to signify place, enable performances of connoisseurship, generate revenue) for which it does not hold so near a monopoly.

The risks outlined above pose threats to a sociology of wine, if (and it is, indeed, *if*) we understand the task of sociology as a “quest for connectedness” (Goudsblom, 1977: 4). The sociological endeavour to locate and understand seemingly separate events and ‘unique’ realities within their larger social and historical milieux, to develop a sociological imagination that can grasp “the problems of biography, of history and of their intersections within a society” (Mills, 1959: 6), cannot but be impeded by silo-ization, stagnation, side-lining, and the scope and process reduction of *homo clausus* and *vinum clausum* thinking.

THINKING ABOUT *VINA APERTA*

A focus on a specialized topic need not be inimical to a historically- and processually-oriented sociology. A sociology of wine need not be a fortress, closed off. For an alternative approach, let me draw from Elias’s (1970: 125) recommendation of thinking of humans as “*homines aperti*”: mutually interdependent with, open towards, and connected to others through a myriad of “valencies” (Elias, 1970: 135, 175n) that are reflective of basic human problems of interdependence. With that in mind, I now turn to three, interrelated dimensions of what constitutes thinking about wine as *vina aperta*, and what that foregrounds for a sociology from wine.

Wine as Processual

The first dimension of what I mean by *vina aperta* has to do with processual thinking. This is about understanding wines as open ‘things’, located within social figurations and webs of associations; as contingent outworkings of socially embedded, contextually conditional processes; as “highly complex, historically situated, richly diverse matters of concern” (Latour, 2004: 237). A processual approach is developmental in orientation. It is a recognition that particular moments in which wine is instantiated—e.g., a drinker, pausing to consider a sip, mid-conversation (Hennion, 2007: 104); a winemaker, explaining how wines ‘speak more’ if respect is given to the soil and *terroir* (Teil, 2012: 483)—are situated within long-term flows of intended actions and unintended consequences across time and space (Elias, 1997).

As an example of how wine is situated within long-term developmental processes, we might think of bud break (which marks the start of a growing season, which in turn may anchor notions of a ‘vintage’), on vines, on rootstocks, in vineyards with histories ranging from a few years and decades to centuries (which may in turn be

³ @DrunkSociology is a Twitter account, with associated YouTube channel (<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCzM8roBT9CvdXx5Hu-UfMkw>), co-created by Dr Matt Rafalow and Dr Sarah Outland.

catalogued in competitive rankings or protected registers of history-as-credibility⁴), which are entangled with knowledge and practices rooted in millennia of interaction between the human and non-human. Similarly, we might think of the wine drinker, who brings long-term processes of socialization and development to bear on experiences of wine, in which personal biography intersects with long-term accretions of social convention: e.g., competence with repertoires of tasting techniques (Schwarz, 2013) or discomfort at lacking such competence (Vannini et al., 2010: 387). A drinker's socialization into the norms and goals associated with different roles (e.g., the making of a winemaker, connoisseur, critic, host, or guest) will also enable and constrain engagement with wine (even the same wine) in different moments, be it as something to drink (for pleasure, thirst, habit, dependence), to taste (to evaluate, discern, decide, perform), and/or otherwise. We can also think of these processes extending forwards in time. To *consume* wine is not, in the original sense of the term, "to destroy, to use up, to waste, to exhaust" (Williams, 1983: 78), but is rather a moment within a longer-term process; wine may be, for example, embodied as memory and sensitivity (e.g., the development of palate), or converted into a memento (e.g., tasting notes, the 'trophy' bottle), or fed back into the winemaking process (e.g., tasting tank samples).

It is tempting to think that the long-term development of wine as a field of human knowledge would reduce the impact of unplanned and unintended forces. Approaches to wine growing, making and marketing have become increasingly professionalized and scientized, in efforts to increase control over the quantity, quality, and saleability of what is produced (e.g., Taplin, 2015; Tippetts, 2012). Systematic approaches to tasting, and numerous judgment and trust devices attempt to circumvent the uncertainty and incommensurability associated with the unknowableness of experiential goods (e.g., Karpik, 2010; Teil, 2001). However rigorous such approaches, they only ever offer partial control over wine's production and consumption. The sheer range of intersecting forces—some much more unmanageable than others—that impinge on wine ensures that the 'best laid plans' are always open to disruption. As but one example: climate destabilization is disturbing established assumptions about how viticulture is done (and where). Divergences in outcomes from planned actions and intentions of various actors should not be written off as the "mistakes and faults of others" but rather regarded as evidence of the need for a better grasp of "unplanned and unintended social structures and processes" (Elias, 1997: 360).

To that end, Elias (1970: 153-154) argues that a processual orientation is better suited to addressing the task of sociology. That task is

to make these blind, uncontrolled processes more accessible to human understanding by explaining them, and to enable people to orientate themselves within the interwoven social web – which, though created by their own needs and actions, is still opaque to them – and so better to control it.

Thinking processually is necessary for developing a more adequate grasp of how the past forms the conditions of the present, how the present is always an outcome of both planned and unplanned consequences. This is a call for a historically-oriented sociology, not a historical sociology *per se* (Inglis, 2014). Such an approach is also crucial for action-oriented research, for sizing up and seizing the space of opportunities between the present and future.

A historical, processual orientation to sociology (be it via a focus on wine or not) does not preclude studying concrete moments in the instantiation of long-term, ongoing, unfolding processes, provided that the snapshot of 'here and now' is not mistaken (*à la vinum clausum* approaches) for something that is fixed and finished. Sociological analyses of *vina aperta* may focus on particular *moments* between, say, grape and glass—or between acquisition and disposal, appropriation and divestment, appreciation and devaluation (Evans, 2019)—while remaining mindful of the bigger picture, which stretches back in time and reaches forward in the form of planned and unplanned, intended and unintended actions and consequences.

The second and third dimensions of thinking about *vina aperta* are logical companions to the first. To think processually is to bring into focus the highly complex, flexible "lattice-work of tensions" that are created through the "totality of [humans'] dealings in their relationships with each other" (Elias, 1970: 130). Below, I refer to these tensions in terms of interconnections and interdependencies, but this is a matter of perspective as to which processual linkages appear to be more distant or external to the thing under examination, and which are more proximal or internal. I discuss the former as interconnections and the latter as interdependencies but, really, these are two sides of the same 'connectedness' coin.

Wine as Interconnected

The second dimension relates to the need to think of wine as interconnected to external fields, institutions, discourses, and practices. To echo Bourdieu's (1990: 159) account of sport, the space of wine

⁴ Such rankings and qualification devices have multiplied far beyond much-cited French examples (e.g., the 1855 Bordeaux Classification and AOC system). For example, Australia's Barossa Old Vine Charter, established in 2009, categorizes vines of 35, 70, 100 and 125 years or older as 'old', 'survivor', 'centenarian' and 'ancestor', respectively (<https://www.barossawine.com/vineyards/old-vine-charter/>).

is inserted into a universe of practices and consumptions themselves structured and constituted as a system. We are altogether justified in treating [it] as a relatively autonomous space, but you shouldn't forget that this space is the locus of forces which do not apply only to it.

To study the cultural production and consumption of wine is to take into account (as context, if not specific focus): the production and consumption of food, drink, drugs, leisure, and culture in general; cross-field discourses of legitimacy that bestow and/or withdraw value, mobilize and/or inhibit particular practices, and coordinate and/or disrupt alliances of actors; and the various aesthetic and economic regimes within which wines are situated, making definitions of how wines could or should be made, used, priced, evaluated, experienced, and represented more or less possible.

Attention to interconnections foregrounds the ways in which wine is constituted by and constitutes other figurations. Comparative research, for example, highlights ways in which wine classification systems and prices (Zhao, 2005, 2008), or winemaker orientations to their relationship with nature and ideas of *terroir* (Cappeliez, 2017; Demossier, 2018) are interconnected with, and shaped by, different national, cultural, and climate contexts. We might also think of the ways in which wine is caught up in local and global status contests, such as how wine auctions enable performances of Chinese economic and cultural ascendancy, while Western media representations of Chinese wine buyers and drinkers bestow or withhold legitimacy in defensive response to shifts in geopolitical concentrations of influence (Smith Maguire and Lim, 2015; Smith Maguire, 2019a). More generally, being sensitive to interconnectedness reminds us that wine is shaped by socio-cultural processes that precede and exceed its own space; these include processes of qualification (Dans et al., 2019; Smith Maguire, 2013), consecration (Allen and Germov, 2011), quantification (Phillips, 2016), and social reproduction of group habitus (e.g., in terms of class, generation, nationality) and social stratification (Bourdieu, 1979).

Given such interconnectedness, *vinum clausum* analyses and models for explaining wine prices or preferences risk severe myopia by ignoring exogenous actors and forces. Wine markets are contingent outcomes of product definitions, attributes, relations of use, and definitions of competitors (and thus definitions of what else—wine or otherwise—is considered commensurable (Slater, 2002)). These are consequences of processes, practices, discourses, and institutions that extend beyond the intended actions, devices, and modes of coordination of wine producers and practitioners (Beckert, 2009). Consumers' wine preferences and practices (including interpretations of such signals as price, country of origin, and variety) are shaped by forces that exceed wine *per se*: taste regimes, logics of appreciation, and habitual modes of perception, long-term transformative processes such as democratization and informalization, and trends towards cultural omnivorousness, cosmopolitanism, and ethical-eco-consciousness (e.g., Carfagna et al., 2014; Fishman and Lizardo, 2013; Howland, 2013; Lamont and Aksartova, 2002). Attention to such external interconnections may make for a messy, leaky object of study for a sociology of wine, but ignoring the holes in a colander does not make it a bowl.

Recognizing wine's interconnectedness is not only a reminder to locate it within its larger historical and social context, but also an invitation to examine the linkages between wine and other cultural fields and figurations, and the implications of those linkages. For example, considerable research reveals common components of a practical and aesthetic regime of fine winemaking. While neither global nor uniform (e.g., Negro et al., 2011), there are nevertheless shared conventions, found worldwide, relating to an emphasis on *terroir* and place, heritage, artisanal craft, uniqueness, a disavowal of commercial motives, and authenticity (e.g., Beverland, 2005; Cappeliez, 2017; Demossier, 2018; González and Dans, 2018; Krzywoszynska, 2015; Smith Maguire, 2018a, 2018b; Rössel et al., 2018). Such discourses and properties are far from exclusive to wine and wine actors—as indicated by research on such products as foie gras (DeSoucey, 2016), tequila (Bowen, 2015), cheese (Paxson, 2010), and salt (Singer, 2018), and evident in the efforts in sectors such as fashion and jewellery (and luxury more generally) to hang value propositions on provenance, heritage, and transparency. We might also think of the migration of languages, roles, and practices associated with wine to (as yet) less 'legitimate' cultural fields, as part of strategies for premiumization and respectabilization (ergo, beer, cider, and cannabis sommeliers⁵). Additionally, the wine field is being reshaped through its interconnections with other domains, including: higher education as a driver of professionalization (e.g., the rise of oenology courses), neoliberal capitalism and economic migration policies as drivers of vineyard management (e.g., the use of precarious migrant labour), tourism and hospitality industries as drivers of winery development and diversification (e.g., packaging wine as part of regional destination management), and medical

⁵ For example, would-be beer sommeliers (cicerones) in the US can enrol in the Cicerone Certification Program, which "certifies and educates beer professionals in order to elevate the beer experience for consumers" (<https://www.cicerone.org/us-en>), while would-be cider sommeliers (pommeliers) can be certified by the American Cider Association (<https://ciderassociation.org/certification/>) or the UK's Beer and Cider Academy (<https://www.beerandcideracademy.org/cider-courses>), and would-be cannabis sommeliers (cannasseurs) can enrol in a Professional Interpening Course, which teaches "The Art and Science of the Cannabis Sommelier" (<https://trichomeinstitute.com/interpening/>).

research and health policy as drivers of consumer trends (e.g., WHO recommendations vis-à-vis alcohol and cancer risks, and potential labelling implications).

These interconnections are a two-way traffic. Norms, values, and practices flow between wine and other domains of practice; wine is changed by, and changes other domains through such exchanges and linkages. Wine's interconnectedness underscores the tendency towards "diminishing contrasts and increasing varieties" as a result of inter-group relations, as noted by Elias (1939: 464, *passim*) and in writings on cultural globalization (e.g., Robertson, 1995). As the gap (e.g., in conduct, prestige, norms) diminishes between established and emergent wine regions, producers, and practices, and between wine and other cultural fields—a logical consequence of wine's heterogeneous interconnectedness—there will be an increasing emphasis on grape varieties, vintage variations, and nuances of provenance through which various affiliations of wine actors attempt to maintain or improve their positions. These dynamics are readily apparent in the emphasis on the minutiae of provenance, and on new or (once) marginal regions, varieties and winemaking methods in media discourse as to what counts as 'good taste' in wine today (Smith Maguire, 2018b), in efforts to legitimate new categories of wine, such as 'natural' or 'orange' wine (Smith Maguire, 2018c, 2019b), and in discourses of emergent producers seeking to challenge established positions within a mature market, as in Champagne (Smith Maguire and Charters, 2021).

Wine as Interdependent

Sociology is the study of "the ways in which people cope with the problems of social interdependence" (Goudsblom, 1977: 127). The third and final dimension of thinking about wine as *vina aperta* thus involves foregrounding interdependence. This is central to understanding wine from a processual perspective and is, at least in part, what is distinctly (but not exclusively⁶) *sociological* in an account of wine. A sociology of wine must grapple (collectively, if not in each instance of research) with how wine is made possible through attempts to address three basic, related problems of interdependence (Elias, 1970: 156; Goudsblom, 1977: 137-38): interdependence with the physical world (e.g., seeking to gain control over 'natural events'); interdependence with others (e.g., a balance of cooperation and subordination between groups seeking to improve their chances in controlling the outcome of interactions); and interdependence with the self (e.g., attempts at mastery of one's own senses, emotions and impulses). Using the example⁷ of 'natural' wine (that is, wine made with no or minimal chemical or mechanical interventions in the vineyard and cellar), let me say a bit more about each of these three aspects of interdependence.

Wine is fundamentally constituted through the *interdependence of humans and the physical world*. As an agricultural product, wine is located at a nexus of always-entwined natural and cultural forces, including (to name but a few) the climate, weather, soil, practices of planting, pruning, and harvesting, processes of photosynthesis and respiration, and 'soil management' by microorganisms and earthworms. Consider a hypothetical vineyard of a natural winemaker. To the untrained eye, the vineyard might appear 'wild' and unkempt, and certainly verdant: lush grass grows between the rows of vines, along with what might be categorized in other settings as weeds, such as yarrow, nettles, dandelion; chickens scratch amongst the vines; the ground is slightly springy underfoot. The vineyard, however, is the outcome of conscious human decisions of how to work on and with 'nature' and is teeming with non-human actors involved in co-creating the resultant grape harvest. The grass and 'weeds' are a cover crop to be tilled in to add nitrogen, while additionally benefitting soil structure and suppressing various pests; the chickens' scratching helps control vine weevils and aerates the soil, while their droppings add further nitrogen; the 'springiness' of the soil is further evidence of good soil structure (perhaps assisted by the use of a horse and plough rather than tractor, to minimize soil compaction), and of bountiful earthworms, adding their own beneficial microbes to the soil while churning out vermicompost.

In such a setting, the fallacy of a nature/culture dichotomy comes into focus; here, wine is a sharp rebuke to *vinum clausum* binarism, and the "modernist ontology of agricultural economics and rural sociology" in which "agricultural nature appears simply as an external, inorganic medium, acted upon and manipulated by human artifice" (Goodman, 1999: 20). Wary of exceptionalism, let me underline that this nature/culture nexus of co-creativity (and this same capacity to refute the treatment of nature as a neutral, static resource) is true of *all* wine; indeed, it is true of all agricultural products and more generally of all physical products. Nevertheless, the 'natural' wine approach helps foreground human interdependence with the physical world and non-human actors (while ironically further entrenching a compartmentalization of nature through the very category label of 'natural' that attempts to set it apart from other wines). Non-human agents—including soil, grapevines, worms, and various plants and microorganisms, from the yarrow combatting cutworms, to the 'wild' yeast spores on the grape skins

⁶ Sociology has no monopoly on *vina aperta* thinking; there is a wealth of work from multiple disciplines that constitutes, informs and/or is complementary to a *vina aperta* approach to wine. As Douglas (1987: 9) remarks in an exemplary collection of such anthropological work: drinking is constitutive—"as real as the bricks and mortar"—of the social world.

⁷ The following examples are drawn from past research on 'natural' wine (e.g. Smith Maguire, 2018a, 2018c, 2019b; Smith Maguire and Charters, 2021). The vineyard scene is an amalgamation from different site visits and interviews (especially, South Africa and Australia) and media analyses.

that will drive fermentation—are explicitly acknowledged as active, vital partners in the creation of wine, and are granted (some) control and credit.

Wine is also constituted through *human interdependence with other humans*. By virtue of its empirical entry point, methodological design, and/or conceptual argument, sociological research on wine often features a multiplicity of actors implicated in the cultural production and consumption of wine. This research often reflects ‘world’ (Becker, 1982) or ‘field’ (Bourdieu, 1993) approaches to the study of cultural production. Research in both veins undermines *vinum clausum* myths of the sovereign, rational actor—consumer or producer—whose evaluation of and engagement with wine can be understood in isolation from others. For example: drinkers interact with each other, wine makers and sales representatives at wineries, cellar doors, wine fairs and tasting events (e.g. Vannini et al., 2010); wine makers and marketers rely on professional bodies, critics, consumers, restaurateurs and sommeliers to elaborate, legitimate and circulate their preferred stories and scripts (e.g., Smith Maguire and Charters, 2021; Voronov et al., 2013); journalists and critics (and increasingly amateurs, thanks to social media) shape and reshape conventions of which wines are worthy of attention (e.g., Fitzmaurice, 2017; Rössel et al., 2018). Focusing specifically on interdependence and the cultural production of wine, we can see that wine is constituted through complex, global chains of interdependence (Cook, 2004); these chains have lengthened and grown more opaque (i.e., wine is increasingly from elsewhere, if not also ‘anywhere’). As such, significant work—processes of representation, qualification, and framing—needs to be carried out to communicate credence cues through the circulation of provenance stories of how the wine was made, by whom, where, and when (Fernqvist and Ekelund, 2014; Karpik, 2010; Smith Maguire, 2013).

Let’s consider this communicative interdependence for our hypothetical natural wine, as it travels from vineyard and cellar in, perhaps, South Africa’s Western Cape to distant markets. The wine’s provenance story travels with it on the limited discursive space of its labels (cf. Singer, 2018); it might also be available on an ‘about us’ webpage (Koontz and Chapman, 2019), provided the winery has a website (not always the case with such small producers). Nevertheless, the winemaker/vigneron shares richly detailed stories (e.g., of anxious September days and the threat of frost; the different personalities of the plough horses) with vineyard visitors, including importers (e.g., from Paris, New York, Melbourne, and Hong Kong) who make annual visits in order to be able to personally vouch for all of the producers they list. An importer then further crafts the provenance story (e.g., the first taste of the wine, while standing in the cellar; the winemaker’s tale of September frost; the springiness of the grass while walking the vineyard, and the warm, cabbage-y smell of yarrow), and shares it through their social media (with photos or videos of the chickens among the vines), website, and in-store recommendations. We might follow the storying chain further, as the importer chats with a sommelier, who then selects the wine for their natural wine bar, and whose own rendition of the story (served as an accompaniment to the pouring of a glass) is passed on to the wine bar patron, and so on. This storying work is critical not (only) because ‘stories sell’ (that is, because stories are devices of influence, used to improve the control-chances over the outcomes of interactions with others), but because provenance goods like natural wine require representational work to complete them, rendering provenance as credible, legible, and available to others who were not there with the winemaker, in the vineyard or the cellar (Smith Maguire, 2018c). The global circulation of natural wine thus relies on communicative chains of interdependent storytellers and stories. More generally, in practical terms, ‘doing’ wine (from vineyard to cellar, making to marketing, selling to serving, judging to regulating, tasting to drinking) is contingent on a highly distributed array of interdependent social actions and actors.

Finally, wine is constituted through *humans’ interdependence with themselves*. For Elias (1939), this has to do with the long-term development of forms of self-control (e.g., controlling and channelling impulses, energies, and emotions, deferring gratification, restraining appetites, observing etiquette protocols) that constitute “civilizing processes” (Elias, 1978: 156-157; Goudsblom, 1966: 138, 140). In the case of wine, we might think of this as the manifold ways in which the making, talking, tasting and drinking of wine are contingent on people’s relationships (intentional and unthinking, pleasurable and uncomfortable) to their own embodiment. (If this is often a personal and internal relationship, it is nonetheless intensely social; it is only through interrelationships with others that such interdependencies of self can develop.) For example, learning to drink wine entails (and learning to make wine largely requires) overcoming initial impressions of wine as ‘sour’ or ‘bitter’; focusing and adjusting perceptions and ‘attention’ (Hennion, 2007) to discern particular qualities of wine or inebriation (in comparison with other liquids, other wines, other drugs); mastering techniques (and the selection of techniques appropriate to different situations) through which to parse flavour, recognize pleasantness, or judge quality (Schwarz, 2013); and sorting sensory data into sense-making categories, such as varieties, styles, and groupings of personal preferences or aversions. Sociological accounts of tasting (Hennion, 2007) and tasting techniques (Schwarz, 2013) usefully underline that bodily engagements with wine are the preserve of neither ‘spectacular’ wines nor elite connoisseurs, and are not reducible to cultural conventions of legitimacy that align the taste for particular wines with notions of ‘good taste’ (while Becker’s (1953) account of learning to smoke marijuana underlines that such processes are not the preserve of wine).

In the case of natural wine, we might note the ways in which a newcomer learns to ‘do’ wine differently: to make sense of aromas, flavours, appearance, and structure (e.g., funkiness, yeastiness, cloudiness, spritziness) that do not comply with expectations. Similarly, in the case of the natural wine winemaker and vigneron: they require new or different senses, forms of perception, modes of attuning to the soil, vines, and other forces—in ways that may entail new or resurrected forms of work, alternative orientations to their marketplace, and departures from (if not also arguments with) their predecessors (Smith Maguire and Charters, 2021). Abandoning the use of herbicides and tractors, encouraging and utilizing complementary plants to control pests and improve soil, coming to regard earthworms and soil as active partners in winemaking, learning to see *terroir* as an actor, rather than as a source or a consequence: these are all contingent on a winemaker/vigneron’s interdependence with the physical world (e.g., soil, worms) and with others (e.g., mentors and peers who enable (re)learning how to work without commercial chemical fertilizer). They are also, crucially, forms of self-interdependence: they rely on particular kinds of senses—and engagement with those senses—to be possible (Smith Maguire, 2018a). That is, sociological accounts of wine invite a consideration of senses beyond sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch, to consider the

sense of necessity and the sense of duty, the sense of direction and the sense of reality, the sense of balance and the sense of beauty, common sense and the sense of the sacred, tactical sense and the sense of responsibility, business sense and the sense of propriety, the sense of humour and the sense of absurdity, moral sense and the sense of practicality, and so on (Bourdieu, 1977: 123, 124).

The processual acquisition of embodied senses is necessary for particular ways of doing. This is not restricted to natural wine (e.g., intergenerational changes to viticultural approaches are observed across the long history of wine making), nor to wine more generally; however, natural wine helps to bring this dimension into focus. Learning to articulate, defend, and operationalize a sense of duty to one’s *terroir* (and/or to one’s worms, clients, descendants, planet) requires particular modes of paying attention, different palates for detecting uncommon flavours of success, novel tastes of and for market relations that do not comply with contemporary conventions.

TOWARDS A SOCIOLOGY FROM WINE

I have outlined several caveats about pursuing a sociology *of* wine, in terms of the pitfalls of sub-disciplinary specialization in general, and the limitations of *vinum clausum* thinking in particular. In contrast, I have sketched out the dimensions of a *vinum aperta* approach to studying wine and, in so doing, tried to offer an argument for what sociology might gain from thinking about and through wine in this way. To advocate for such a sociology *from* wine, I have touched on wine- and wine research-related examples that foreground wine’s interrelated dimensions as processual, interconnected, and interdependent. Arguing for a sociology from wine is not, however, a claim that wine is exclusively useful in this regard, nor that sociology has a monopoly on *vinum aperta*. Rather, to borrow a phrase, I would suggest that wine is “enormously good to think with” (Jenkins, 1992: 11), offering a route towards a more historically- and processually-oriented sociology.

Wine is an especially apt lens through which to examine interdependencies with the natural world, each other, and ourselves. Wine could not exist but through sustained relationships with ‘nature’, coordination between an immense range of actors (human and non-human), and focused engagement of embodied senses. In this, I think, lies the nub of why wine is such a rich and ready focus for sociological research: *all* things are interdependent, but wine is *manifestly* interdependent. Indeed, if I were to indulge in a little reification and anthropomorphizing, I would say wine both wallows and glories in interdependence. (Having said that, it strikes me that interdependence with others is often decoupled from celebrating interdependence with nature and self, at least in the promotional discourse of natural wine; worms, yarrow, horses and so forth are given more prominent credit than vineyard and winery labourers. The capacity to generate distinctive storytelling content thus overlaps with forms of inclusion and exclusion from the economic value chain.)

Tastes of and for wines are shaped by social relations, between humans and non-humans, others, and themselves. These relations are immediate and interpersonal, as well as extending across time and space through communicative action, techniques, rituals, and conventions that enable and constrain different ways of doing wine. The multiple dimensions, instantiations, human and non-human actors, places, and histories of wines offer routes to better conceptualizing the processual nature of cultural production and consumption. As a research focus, wine offers an invitation to emphasize (if not resurrect) sociologists’ historical and processual senses, and their taste for connectedness.

To return to my critique of specialization, I would also suggest that wine is good for thinking about (and ideally, attempting to overcome) the fragmentation of sociology and social sciences, inviting (re)connections across sub-disciplinary and disciplinary borders. Rather than hiving off sociological analyses of wine into a sub-disciplinary fortress, sociologists studying production, consumption, class, identity, markets, value, the environment, and so forth might profitably use wine as a launchpad for more robust, cumulative advances in knowledge of what it is to be human, and the human condition more broadly, that link up insights from across anthropology, history,

economics, critical market studies, alcohol studies, food studies, and beyond. Such advances are necessary if social science is to be up to the task of addressing the wicked complexity of contemporary social problems (particularly when such problems are repeatedly met by research and policy that hinge on *homo clausus* myths).

Thus, in closing, I raise my glass to a sociology from wine, to a sociology attuned to and better able to contribute to our interdependent future, to studying social life in situ in ways that do justice to who we are, and who we might be, in the company of human and non-human others, ourselves and our planet.

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