

**"We produce under this sky":
making organic wine in a material world**

Anna Krzywoszyńska

PhD Thesis

March 2012

Department of Geography

The University of Sheffield

Abstract

This thesis explores the role of living and non-living materials as active agents in the processes of making and marketising organic wines in Northern Italy. It is concerned with the ways in which the tension between human intentionality and material agency is managed and worked with in this high-risk and ethically charged context. By applying theoretical insights of actor-network and post-humanist theories to the field of agri-food production, this thesis proposes novel ways of understanding markets, ethics, and skill in the context of organic wine, and of agri-food more generally.

The thesis traces and analyses the effects of materials key to the production and marketisation of organic wines: vines, yeast, and sulphur dioxide. A multi-sited, participant observation ethnography approach is used to follow these materials, and the practices in which they are implicated, at a number of wineries in Northern Italy. Two dominant modes of ordering (Law 1994) of organic winemaking practices and discourses are identified: pacification, and making spaces for nature. It is shown that the constant tension between these two modes of ordering expresses the ongoing negotiation of acceptable levels of indeterminacy (and so the acceptable limits of 'naturalness') in organic wine production and sales.

This thesis makes a significant contribution to current debates in post-humanist and agri-food literature. It extends the existing empirical focus of post-humanist research to spaces of high-risk human-nonhuman interactions. It proposes a move beyond conceptualising agri-food 'natures' as economically or ethically passive, and towards relational understandings of both markets and ethics of agri-foods. It demonstrates that the times and spaces of agri-food production, and those of agri-food markets and ethics, are linked through the materialities of practice and product. This thesis thus calls for a materialist politics approach to agri-food production.

Acknowledgements

A big thank you to all the participants of this research, for their generosity and friendship, and for their willingness to share their stories, and their wines.

A big, big thank you to my supervisors, Nicky Gregson, Matt Watson, and Peter Jackson. You have challenged me, reassured me, and always encouraged me to go a step further. Thank you for all you have done for me.

I am very grateful to all the staff at the Geography department for the collegiate and supportive atmosphere, which has made these past four years some of the best of my life.

Thank you to all my friends at the department, we have had some unforgettable times together. Special thank you to Roza Tchoukaleyska for feeding my heart and my body; to Matt Collins for his wacky cheer, and to Aga Nowak-Zwierz, for the moments of complete madness.

Wielkie podziękowania dla mojego taty, Marka Krzywoszyńskiego. Dziękuję, że zawsze mi ufałeś, i że popierałeś moje decyzje. Bardzo cię kocham!

Thank you to Andy Marples, for being so wonderful.

And the biggest thank you to Kevin. You make me happy every single day.

Contents

Chapter One	1-16
1.1 Introduction	7
1.1.1 “Making sense”: modes of ordering and practices of making organic wine	
1.1.2 But why organic wine?	
1.2 Thesis structure	13
Chapter Two. Literature Review	17-48
2.1 Introduction	19
2.2 Wine in human worlds: a short review	21
2.3 Agri-food literature	26
2.3.1 Commodity Chain approaches	
2.3.2 Influence of ANT on agri-food literature and the rise of Alternative Food Networks	
2.3.3 Alternative Food Networks	
2.4 Actor-network Theory and the ‘rematerialisation’ of social inquiry	32
2.5 Post-humanist approaches	36
2.5.1 What kind of non(post)humans?	
2.5.2 Absence of plants from post-humanist inquiry	
2.5.3 Beyond individual encounters and aesthetic contemplation in post-humanist inquiry	
2.6 Towards understanding the relational materialities of agri-food production	42
2.6.1 Working (with) nonhumans: practices of work	
2.6.2 Working (with) nonhumans: relational ethics	
2.7 Markets	45
2.8 Conclusion	47
Chapter Three. Methodology: towards a post-humanist ethnography	49-74
3.1 Material entanglements and post-humanist ethnography	51
3.2 Why vines, yeast and sulphur dioxide?	53
3.3 Materialist ethnography	54
3.3.1 Multi-sited ethnography	
3.3.2 Praxiography	
3.4 Researching the touchable: vines	60
3.4.1 ‘Letting go’	
3.4.2 Keeping up: some reflections on temporality and visual methods	

3.5 Researching the un-touchable: yeast and sulphur dioxide	64
3.5.1 Ruptures	
3.5.2 Controversies	
3.6 In the field	65
3.6.1 Access and key research sites	
3.7 Positionality in 'working abroad', translation, and analysis	68
3.7.1 'Problems' of translation	
3.7.2 Making sense: a reiterative process	
3.7.3 Co-constructed text	
3.8 Conclusion	74
Chapter Four. Taskscapes of vine work	75-112
4.1 Introduction	77
4.1.1 Intentionality and temporal emergence in vineyard work practices	
4.1.2 Why Valli Unite?	
4.2 Introduction to vines: vine as a historical and material hybrid	82
4.2.1 A (very) brief social history of the vine, and how phylloxera made modern viticulture	
4.2.2 A visit to a vine nursery: Giuseppe Pinat, Perteole	
4.2.3 The ongoing labour of hybridity	
4.3 Working with vines	87
4.3.1 Winter vineyard	
4.3.2 Vine pruning and <i>natura naturans</i>	
4.3.3 Affordances and affectability in vineyard practice	
4.3.3.1 Spring vineyard	
4.3.3.2 Sensual encounters	
4.3.3.3 Summer vineyard: fatigue	
4.3.3.4 Mistakes in Davanti Ottavio	
4.3.3.5 Understanding practice breakdown	
4.4 Vineyard taskscapes, temporal emergence and indeterminacy	104
4.4.1 Vineyard stories and caring relationships	
4.4.1.1 Training vines	
4.4.1.2 Lifeworlds of vineyard work	
4.4.2 Vineyard stories and acting in an uncertain world	
4.4.2.1 Grape scarcity	
4.4.2.2 Indeterminacy of action in the vineyards	
4.4.2.3 'The wrong place'	
4.5 Conclusion	111

Chapter Five. The making of yeast: wine micro-bio-onto-politics	113-146
5.1 Introduction	115
5.1.1 Towards ‘humanist post-humanist’ ethics	
5.2 Contested history and contested present of human-yeast relations.	117
Domesticated yeast in scientific debates.	
5.2.1 Entangled species	
5.2.2 There is a yeast for every wine: oenological understandings of yeast	
5.3 Working with yeast	125
5.3.1 Perlage: plug-and-play	
5.3.2 Making yeast ethical	
5.3.2.1 Angiolino	
5.3.2.2 Walter	
5.3.3 Naturalness and ethical identities	
5.3.3.1 Making spaces for nature	
5.3.3.2 Ethical identities	
5.4 Conclusion	145
Chapter Six. Sulphur dioxide multiple	146-174
6.1 Introduction	148
6.1.1 SO ₂ as a precarious black box	
6.2 Ontology one: SO ₂ in oenology	152
6.2.1 Historicity of things: the birth of oenology and the emergence of an SO ₂ network	
6.2.2 Historicity of things: Ottavio’s tale of Italian oenology in Piemonte	
6.2.3 <i>Animae</i> and absent presence of SO ₂	
6.3 Ontology two: SO ₂ as a facilitator of marketisations	157
6.3.1 ORWINE and the pan-European organic wine legislation.	
6.3.2 ORWINE research: strong and weak SO ₂ networks	
6.3.3 Testing material networks. The attempted legislation.	
6.3.4 SO ₂ and market participation: spatiality	
6.4 Ontology three. The latent ethical presence of sulphur dioxide	162
6.4.1 Organic and sulphur dioxide: an uncomfortable relationship	
6.4.2 The unease of dealing with SO ₂ . Ottavio and a ruptured ethical identity	
6.4.3 The unease of dealing with SO ₂ . Changing the conversation	
6.4.3.1 Daniele: spatialising ethics	
6.4.3.2 Ricardo: incommensurable practices	
6.5 Conclusion	173

Chapter Seven. “Wine is not Coca-Cola”: organic wines and the challenge of marketisation	176-204
7.1 Introduction	178
7.1.1 Wine marketisation: multiple wines, multiple markets	
7.1.2 Wine markets: market multiplicity and power relations	
7.1.3 Marketisation channels at Valli Unite	
7.2 Wine is not Coca-Cola. Lively wines and performative markets theory	185
7.2.1 The performativity of markets and unpacified goods	
7.2.2 Challenging wine markets: DOC/G and unpacified wines. Severino.	
7.2.3 Challenging wine markets: DOC/G and unpacified wines. Angiolino.	
7.3 Wine is not Coca-Cola, but it needs to sell. Working to create ‘tasting relationships’.	195
7.3.1 Rovero. ‘You have to try.’	
7.3.2 Terra d’Arcoiris: ‘We ask for some sacrifice.’	
7.3.3 Erbaluna and La Jara. Offensive materialities and the ‘yuck factor’.	
7.3.4 Perlage. Living with demijohn wine.	
7.4 Conclusion	204
Chapter Eight. Conclusions	206-219
8.1 Introduction	208
8.2 Overview of arguments	208
8.3 Contributions	211
8.3.1 Lively materiality and the issue of time	
8.3.2 Lively materiality and indeterminacy	
8.3.3 The contribution of post-humanism to the understanding of skilled practice in agri-food	
8.3.4 The contribution of post-humanism to the understanding of ethics of production in agri-food	
8.3.5 Contributions of post-humanism to the understanding of agri-food markets	
Appendices	220-237
Bibliography	238-256

List of figures

Chapter One

Fig. 1.1: Winter vine pruning at Valli Unite.

Chapter Two

Fig. 2.1: Vat of fermenting grape must at La Bianca.

Chapter Three

Fig 3.1: A 'god's perspective' on an ethnographic site. Source: Google Earth™.

Fig 3.2: The messy vine.

Chapter Four

Fig 4.1. Vineyard team at work in a spring vineyard at Valli Unite.

Fig. 4.2.1, 4.2.2: Lucille pulling down pruned branches.

Fig 4.3: A spring vine 'crying' sap.

Fig 4.4: 'Original propagating material' saplings.

Fig 4.5: American vines.

Fig 4.6: Vine and rootstock pre-grafting.

Fig 4.7: Grafted vine saplings.

Fig 4.8: American vine sprouts from the rootstock.

Fig 4.9: 'Crucified' vine.

Fig 4.10: From the left: Ottavio, Zita, Dirk and Lorenzo, looking at a vine.

Fig 4.10 to 4.12: Ottavio makes a cut.

Fig. 4.13: Ottavio moving on.

Fig. 4.14: Paulus makes a cut.

Fig. 4.15 to 4.17: Ottavio's telling gestures.

Fig. 4.18, 4.19: Ottavio aligns a cane with the wire.

Fig 4.20 to 4.24: Lucille pruning a double shoot.

Fig. 4.24 to 4.27: A vine before pruning, Lucille's intervention, and the same vine after.

Fig. 4.28: Leafs of a young vine.

Fig. 4.29 to 4.32: Back-breaking work of pruning. Fig. 4.29 author, Fig. 4.30 Paulus, Fig. 4.31 Dirk, Fig. 4.32 Dirk at rest.

Fig. 4.33 & 4.34, vine before and after green pruning.

Fig. 4.35: The vineyard team in Vignia Nuova (can you spot them???)

Fig. 4.36: Dirk indicates next year's bud.

Chapter Five

Fig. 5.1: A culture of brewer's yeast in an oenology laboratory (scale 1:4).

Fig. 5.2: Research laboratory at the Conegliano School of Oenology.

Fig. 5.3: Preparing environment for the yeast.

Fig. 5.4: Australian yeast.

Fig. 5.5: The 'recipe'.

Fig. 5.6: Adding the yeast.

Fig. 5.7: The yeast 'growing'.

Fig. 5.8: Angiolino oxygenating Merlot must.

Fig. 5.9: Walter in his vineyard.

Chapter Six

Fig. 6.1: Warning and instruction label on a container of oenological sulphur dioxide.

Box 1: Oenological uses of sulphur dioxide

Box 2: Prosecco and SO₂ regulations

Chapter Seven

Fig. 7.1: Severino and barrels of Barolo at Erbaluna.

Fig. 7.2: Bag-in-box wines waiting for labelling at Valli Unite.

Fig. 7.3: Bottled wine sold at a music festival at Valli Unite.

Fig. 7.4: Carlo (left) and Severino (right) trying lively wines.

Chapter Eight

Fig. 8.1: Prosecco grapes ready for musting at Perlage.

Appendices

Fig. 9.1: Wine regions in mainland Italy.

Fig. 9.2: Part of the winery floor at Perlage.

Fig. 9.3: Fermenting wine at La Biancara.

Fig. 9.4: Working with wine at Valli Unite.

Fig. 9.5: Carlo and Severino working on the wine at Erbaluna.

Fig. 9.6: Map of vineyards at Valli Unite, section Montesoro.

Fig. 9.7: Map of vineyards at Valli Unite, section Piazera.

Videos (CD attached)

Video 1: A five minute visual tour of some practices of making organic wine.

Video 2: Winter pruning as a violent intervention.

Video 3: Lucille explains green pruning to me.

Video 4: Dirk explains green pruning of Barbera vines.