

## Chapter Seven

# “Wine is not Coca-Cola”: organic wines and the challenge of marketisation



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





*'What is at issue here is whether and how the materiality of those things we choose to call 'natural' matters – both to the process of commodification itself and in terms of its wider physical consequences.'*

*(Castree 2003: 284)*

## 7.1 Introduction

How do organic wines matter? In the previous chapters, we traced the plant, microbial and chemical agencies which contribute to the making of organic wines, and examined the importance of their materiality, be it organic or inorganic, to winemaking processes, and to the ethics and discourses of organic winemaking. We followed the ongoing dance of agency (Pickering 1995) between human intention and nonhuman agency in the making of organic wine. We also explored the ethical issues involved in making space for nature (Hinchliffe 2007) at different stages of organic winemaking. Throughout the text I suggested that the ethical imperative of making space for nature expressed by many winemakers can result in wines which are problematic, which do not meet the requirements of the mainstream wine market, and which struggle to be incorporated into sales networks. In this chapter, I explore this theme further focusing on wines which show variability of taste and structure between vintages, and the organoleptic characteristics of which evolve in unpredictable ways over time. The marketisation of these wines, that is their transformation from products into goods (Callon et al. 2002) is fraught with difficulty.<sup>1</sup> As I explain in some detail in section 7.3.2, the majority of wine markets today are materially set up to work with more standardised and 'predictable' wines, and have difficulty dealing with wines the characteristics of which differ dramatically from vintage to vintage, from bottle to bottle, and from month to month. A seamless entry into mainstream wine markets requires ordering of materials and practices which aims at a pacification of goods, that is at rendering their qualities stable and knowable. The changing and unpredictable material characteristics of organic wines discussed in this chapter test qualification trials and consumers alike; as one producer put it, these wines are not easy.<sup>2</sup> Their qualities are not fixed, they are not established fully in advance, and they challenge consumers' expectations. And yet, these wines do enter the marketplace. The question this chapter aims to answer is: how do they do it?

In considering the question of product marketisation, that is of the transformation of wines from liquids in the cellar into goods available to consumers, I draw on and aim to extend the work on performativity of economic markets developed by Michel Callon and colleagues (1998). In their work, the authors admit a crucial role of commodities in their understanding of market emergence. However, the lynchpin of the marketisation theory is the ability of market participants to

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<sup>1</sup> Callon et al. (2002) differentiate between products, which are 'goods with a career', and goods, which are products temporarily stabilised for the purposes of market transaction. For products, the list of qualities is open, while in the case of goods it is temporarily closed (p. 191-200). Please see section 7.2.1 of this chapter for a further discussion.

<sup>2</sup> For a discussion of qualification trials please see section 7.2.1.

temporarily 'pacify' 'products, rendering them passive 'objects' of the market transaction. In this chapter I argue we should take a closer look at the role of products as contributors to the creation of new marketisation channels. I suggest this goes beyond the importance of 'objective' characteristics of products, and I argue that it is only through attention to the unexpected and uncontrollable liveliness of such products as organic wines, and the valorisation of this liveliness by market actors, that we can fully appreciate the constructive impact goods have on the multiplication and diversification of markets.

Drawing on the examples of un-pacified wines encountered in my fieldwork, I conclude, contra Çalişkan and Callon (2009, 2010) that not all goods have to be rendered completely passive in order to enter into markets.<sup>3</sup> In the case of some organic wines, the work of qualification (see section 7.2.1) is never complete, as the characteristics of wines continue to change from year to year and even from bottle to bottle. While the temporarily changeable material characteristics of the wines (which in many cases cannot be established in advance by buyers) prevent their pacification, as understood by Çalişkan and Callon, in that the wines 'continue to contribute multiple suggestions of their own value' to the potential consumers, the goods nonetheless undergo processes of stabilisation in order for their sale to be possible. I argue that the lynchpin of this stabilisation is not the guarantee of recognized qualification trials, but embodied understandings of the liveliness of wines established through tasting experiences, aided through direct seller-buyer relationships. This stabilisation then has less to do with a tight bracketing of all possible characteristics of a wine, and their temporal evolution, and more to do with establishing mutual understanding about a certain indeterminacy involved in buying and drinking lively wine. In this market scenario it is not the good which undergoes the stabilisation, but the market-ising network, the connection between the seller (the wine producer) and the buyer (the wine drinker). The stabilisation is both discursive, what Freidberg (2003) calls 'selling with a story', but also, crucially, material and embodied. The story alone 'does not cut it', and I argue in this chapter that the cornerstone of long and stable market relations is the development of an embodied 'tasting relationship' between a consumer and a wine. Drawing on the work of Teil and Hennion (2002) and Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy (2008, 2010) and Hayes-Conroy and Martin (2010) on taste, I argue that producers work to establish reflexive 'tasting relationships' between clients and their wines, and to involve their clients as active participants in the creation of their own taste, changing consumers into amateurs (lovers) of wine (Teil and Hennion 2002). In a 'tasting relationship' the organoleptic variability of wines is re-cast as an opportunity for a deepening of one's taste, rather than a challenge to the market transaction. This process, however, is difficult, prone to failure, and requires continuous work from the producers.

In the following section, I present the diversity of strategies wineries employ in the marketisation of their wines using the example of Valli Unite. I argue that the diversity of marketisation channels allows wineries such as Valli Unite to better adapt to the material vitality of their wines from vintage to vintage. I then proceed to sketch out the challenges posed to organic wine producers by the 'sales imperative'. I situate this debate in the context of existing scholarship on the

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<sup>3</sup> An argument developed by Gregson et al. (2012) in the context of ship recycling.

performativity of markets. I draw attention to how the materiality of organic wines impacts and shapes the channels for their marketisation, and I demonstrate the ongoing labour of producers who seek to enrol consumers into their market networks by encouraging a development of tasting relationships with their wines.

### **7.1.1 Wine marketisation: multiple wines, multiple markets**

Wineries always produce more than one wine, and they always operate in more than one market. The number of wine types a winery produces is directly linked to the kind of grapes they work with. You can only make wine from what you have grown, and what you have grown will inform the kind of wines you can make. Most wineries presented in this thesis used grapes grown in their own vineyards for the production of their wines.<sup>4</sup> The wines they produce will therefore reflect the character of the vineyards they have, not only in terms of grape type, but also in terms of vine age and productivity, vineyard slope and soil, and size of vineyard plots. This diversity of material input will result in a variety of wines available for the market. Already at the site of production, then, in one winery we encounter a great multiplicity of products differing in quality, type, maturation period and other factors. Additionally, the quantity and quality of each type of wine may differ depending on the vintage. All these different wines need to be sold, and they participate simultaneously in multiple marketisation channels.

In the following section I briefly discuss the dynamic changes to the organisation of wine markets since WWII. I suggest that these changes resulted in an 'outflanking of nature' (Murdoch and Miele 1999) understood as variability and liveliness, and a dominance of market mechanisms which produce pacification as a desired characteristic of wines. However, the mainstream wine market is not by any means the only channel available. Indeed, in traditional wineries such as the ones discussed in this thesis, winemakers are always engaged in an experimental process of multiple market construction. Most often the person who produces the wine is also the one who has to find a way to sell it. These sellers/producers do not operate as fully-informed economic actors.<sup>5</sup> Instead, they are always labouring to create stable market relationships, be it with individual clients, or with wholesale buyers (bar and restaurant owners, wine merchants, supermarket wine buyers etc.). Using the examples of the small Valli Unite cooperative winery I aim to introduce the reader to the complex and flexible mechanisms of wine marketisation. I demonstrate how wineries

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<sup>4</sup> An exception to this rule is the Perlage winery, which holds a contract with a large UK supermarket chain. As a result they need to produce high volumes of wine, and need more grapes they would be able to harvest from their own vineyards, and so they also buy grapes from contracted growers. Other wineries in this thesis have also utilized bought grapes in years of grape scarcity.

<sup>5</sup> This needs to be differentiated from the sales strategies of large and very large wine producers, typically associated with the New World countries, which spend considerable resources both on gathering market information (what do the consumers want), and on market creation through advertising (this is what consumers should want). I am not suggesting these companies are the ideal economic actors of economic theories; however, their involvement with the markets is qualitatively and quantitatively different from that of small and medium wineries.

operate in a multiplicity of markets simultaneously, and how they seek out new opportunities for wine marketisation. I also suggest that by using multiple methods of wine marketisation, and thus diversifying the income flows, the wineries are in a better position to adapt to the material vitality of their wines from vintage to vintage.

### **7.1.2 Wine markets: market multiplicity and power relations**

The world of wine sales has seen important changes in the last fifty years. While in terms of volume wine production has changed little between 1988 and 2001 (Anderson 2004), in the same periods the architecture of wine-markets underwent a significant shift. Producer countries which were traditionally also the main consumers of wine saw per capita consumption fall dramatically, while in the New World and non-producer European countries demand has been steadily growing.<sup>6</sup> While Europe continues to be both the biggest producer and the biggest consumer of wine, New World wines have been increasing their presence on the European wine market every year, challenging Old World marketing and sales strategies (Cambell and Guibert 2006).

New World wines have introduced a very different way of producing and selling wines to the one that had been dominant in the Old World. In the Old World, wine production was traditionally undertaken alongside other agricultural activities, which results in a fragmentation of wine production in Europe, and which often means that the producer and the seller of the wine are the same person. The New World companies, however, were often set up specifically to produce wine, and they were set up by people with oenological training. The most significant transformation has been the horizontal and vertical integration of the wine sector from vine to shelf caused by an increased presence of global corporations in the wine business (Unwin 1991). In a market hitherto characterised by a network of small merchants, successful alcohol corporations begun a process of vertical and horizontal integration combining production with international trade and purchasing of key retail outlets. At the same time, since the 1960s a number of technological advances in viticulture and vinification occurred, 'designed not only to reduce the cost of production, but also to produce wines of invariant quality best suited to the emergent mass market for such products' (Unwin 1991: 344). An important factor in the spread of advanced oenological technologies continue to be the so-called 'flying winemakers', that is winemaking experts not linked to any particular winery. These experts have played an important role in the success of the New World wines, casting themselves as 'genuine modernisers that set out to substitute modern technology and management for historically evolved practices' (Langendijk 2004: 13). Changes in winemaking technology made possible the creation of 'brand wines' (such as Gallo and Yellow Leaf) which promised product homogeneity divorced from vintage variation.

The growing presence of New World wines and of oenology is closely linked with a rise in power of mass retailers as principal sales outlets for wine. In 2006, forty percent of wine was sold through major retail chains (Bernetti et al. 2006), and in the UK, the world's second biggest wine importer,

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<sup>6</sup> Both Italy and France have seen annual per capita consumption halve between 1975 and 2003, from 104 to 50 liters in Italy, and from 103 to 56 litres in France (Campbell and Guibert 2006).

ten major retailers controlled about 80 percent of off-premise sales (Campbell and Guibert 2006). Since the 70s supermarkets have been contributing to the 'democratisation' of wine, with more high quality wines available to consumers at lower prices than ever before. The dominance of the supermarkets also changed how wine moved around in wine markets. Supermarkets require large amounts of wine to be available throughout the year. The wine has to be stable so that it survives the transportation and the stocking in warehouses. As a result, the wine has to be able to survive being exposed to heat and cold, to light, to upright storage etc. These exigencies have consequences on how wine is processed in the wineries, where processes such as protein filtration to prevent wine from clouding in the heat, cold sedimentation to prevent the creation of tartrate crystals in the cold, and high level of SO<sub>2</sub> addition to prevent re-fermentation or spoilage have become commonplace.

This democratisation of wine supply went hand in hand with a 'de-snobisation' of wine drinking in non-producer countries, fuelled by marketing strategies of large industry players (Unwin 1991), as well as by certain influential wine critics, the most famous (and notorious) of which is Malcolm Parker. In his magazine *The Wine Advocate* Parker introduced a revolutionary point-based system of wine scoring, dealing a hard blow to the authority of terroir-based wine valuation. The devastatingly simple system grades wines on a scale of 100 points, putting Australian Zinfandel and French Burgundy side by side, ignoring questions of terroir and heritage and focusing purely on taste as a de-contextualised experience. The increase in demand for 'quaffable' wines, and the willingness on the part of the supermarkets to both satisfy and stimulate this demand, benefited large wineries and wine cooperatives both in the New and Old World. These, due to their size and the technological investment, were able to meet the need for large orders demanded by supermarket chains, while blended wines they produced met the price and taste needs of the mass markets.

In many ways, wine production has undergone the same processes of industrialisation, mechanisation and increase in output which have been characteristic of the post-war food production more generally (see Goodman 1987). However the ongoing 'commodification of nature' (Castree 2003) in agricultural production met important challenges in the context of wine, and in spite of the ongoing consolidation of the wine market, a multiplicity of production methods as well as marketisation channels continue to exist (Jenkins et al. 2008).<sup>7</sup> Although the centralising and homogenising forces of mass production and retail have not put an end to the diversity of wines and wine markets, there is no doubt that technological advancements, the rise of wine critics and expert oenologists, and the dominance of supermarkets have all had an impact on current mechanisms of wine marketisation. Crucially, mainstream (large retail-driven) and non-mainstream wine markets do not constitute separate economic circuits, and they influence one another in important ways. Wine stability, taste predictability, and high quality in every vintage have come to be expected by buyers across markets, posing serious challenges to producers whose

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<sup>7</sup> In light of the heralded 'globalisation of wine markets' it is refreshing to remember that the biggest company on the wine market, Constellation Brands, controlled only 4.3 per cent of the global wine market in 2007 (Payne 2007).



wines are characterised by high sensibility to weather conditions, or whose wines fail to conform to the expected taste of the variety or region. The maintenance of variability and difference in some organic wines creates serious challenges for their marketisation, especially when the wines undergo qualification trials the aim of which is standardisation of products. I discuss a crucial example of such qualification trials, Denominazione di Origine Controllata certification, in section 7.2.3 of this chapter.

### 7.1.3 Marketisation channels at Valli Unite

Although the worlds of wine production have undergone a significant change in the last fifty years, they are still dominated by small winemakers, such as the cooperative Valli Unite. Valli Unite winery produces ten kinds of bottled wines every year (please see Appendix C for a full list), six reds, three whites and one rosé. The wines are made from grapes from different vineyards, and as a result differ in characteristics and quality. The more expensive reds are made from grapes from the older vineyards, where the grapes are of higher quality, while the less expensive wines will contain the juice of the grapes from younger vineyards. Apart from the sparkling white and rosé wines, all bottled wines are certified Denominazione di Origine Controllata.

The bottled wines are marketised in a number of ways. An important outlet is the cooperative store, which offers various organic produce of the cooperative, and attracts customers from as far away as Milan. Another outlet is the cooperative restaurant, which serves Valli Unite workers at lunch time, but is open to outside guests and parties Friday to Sunday. The sparkling white and rosé wines were in fact developed especially for the restaurant, which started operating in 1991, when sparkling wines were at the height of their popularity.



Fig. 7.2: Bag-in-box wine at Valli Unite.



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

Furthermore, the cooperative regularly holds festive events during which large amounts of bottled and demijohn wine are sold. Over the years Valli Unite has also established relationships with restaurants and bars in the area, which they regularly supply. Additionally, the cooperative

members also set up stalls at any number of local and regional food and wine markets, which are held regularly in most Italian towns. They also travel further afield, as far as France and Germany, to attend bigger organic wine markets and fairs such as Millésime Bio. These provide them not only with an opportunity to sell their wines directly, but also to establish relationships with interested buyers abroad. Bottled wines are also marketised through internet wholesalers, both in Italy and abroad, in Northern Europe and the United States. These too are usually befriended at international wine fairs.

Apart from bottled wines, a major source of wine trade is *vino sfuso*, that is wine sold directly 'from the tap'. In Italy, customers habitually call at wineries they have heard of or just came across along the road to taste and buy wine directly in the *cantina*. These clients can buy demijohns on the spot, or use their own containers. Demijohn wine sales are an important part of the winery's economy, and act as buffer both in terms of winery management, and in terms of vintage variation. Demijohn wine is usually the lowest quality wine, has no quality certification, and is a blend of different wine varieties. Its composition changes depending on what wine is currently available.<sup>8</sup> Demijohn wine is bought by individuals, but also provided, as a bag-in-box, to local and international restaurants, bars and pizzerias as the 'house wine' blend. The cheap demijohn wine market acts as a buffer during poor vintages as low-quality wine can be blended with slightly better wine from the maturation barrels and still get sold. The worst case scenario, should the vintage be exceptionally poor, or should there be some unexpected negative developments during fermentation, is selling the wine in bulk to a local *cantina sociale*.<sup>9</sup>

Thus marketisation channels at Valli Unite help the company respond to the variability of vintages, and the variable characteristics of wines they sell. How wine producers work to establish and maintain these multiple marketisation channels, and what is the role of their wines in this process, is the subject to which I now turn.

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<sup>8</sup> Wine is always in motion at a winery as different batches mature, precipitate sediment, clarify, and are blended or bottled. At the same time, during these different moves wine vats and barrels have to be kept full to prevent oxidation (more technologically advanced wineries use CO<sub>2</sub> or nitrogen to top up the vats). Valli Unite was rather poorly equipped, and there were always more wine types than there were containers of the appropriate size. As a result, any left-over wine for which a vat was not available was tipped into the *sfuso* vat and blended.

<sup>9</sup> *Cantina sociale*, meaning 'the cooperative winery', is the most prevalent type of winemaking company in Italy. The *cantina* typically has no vineyards of its own, and buys grapes from its members.

## 7.2 Wine is not Coca-Cola. Lively wines and performative markets theory

*'If this Coca-Cola last year was sweeter and this year is more acidic, you don't like it any more. You're used to a standard, and you want a standard product. And wine is not a uniform product for goodness sake! It's not Coca-Cola! (...) People have to be intelligent enough to understand that Barbera 2007 will be different from 2006. You may like it more, or less. But you can't, like a discussion I've had with this Dutch importer of mine – I want wines that are as natural as possible, don't use yeast, don't use that, don't use the other, don't reduce the acidity – yes! But if this wine, you like it less than the one from the previous year, will you buy it all the same? If you tell me that you'll buy it all the same, I am well happy, it takes away from my problems! But if you come and tell me this one is different from than other one – damn!'*

*(Severino, Erbaluna, 09/02/2009)*

In my conversations with wine producers about the challenges of selling organic wines we would invariably arrive at a point when someone would blurt out with exasperation – 'but wine is not Coca-Cola!'. In our conversations, producers used Coca-Cola as a shorthand for the globalising, homogenising, corporatist trends in the modern food production and provision networks. It evoked images of rootlessness and disinvestment which stood as an antithesis to the locality and embeddedness of traditional foods.<sup>10</sup> As a staple element of the McDonalds package, Coca-Cola was after all one of the fast foods protested against at the founding boycott of a McDonalds outlet in Rome which saw the founding of the Slow Food movement (Parkins and Craig 2006). Where Coca-Cola is standardised, wine is diverse, where it is predictable, wine is surprising, where it is easy, wine is challenging. Organic winemakers I spoke with employed this dichotomy between their wines and 'Coca-Cola wines' to locate their production in the space of 'alternative' (Gregson and Crewe 2003), but also to explain how the alternative-ness of their markets was materially rooted in the material and temporal characteristics of their wines. The contrast drawn between Coca-Cola and organic producers' wines, while being a mechanism for creating difference and valorising the 'alternative', was also a reaction to the real material characteristics and temporalities of organic wines.

Wine is a lively product. As the preceding chapters argued, this liveliness is rooted in particular practices of working with the organic and inorganic elements which make organic wine. Wine is characterised by a changeability which involves not only taste evolution through maturation processes, but also variation between vintages, and even between bottles of the same vintage. The sensitivity of wine to the weather, the type of fermentation, the temperature at maturation, and other variables results in a great multiplicity of tastes which is both the source of greatest value and greatest risk for the marketisation of wine, risk which is minimised in mainstream wine markets, as will be discussed below. The above quote from Severino sums up the dilemma facing

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<sup>10</sup> Although see Miller (1997) on the re-appropriation of Coca-Cola in Trinidad, and Foster (2008) on the embeddedness and multi-locality of Coca-Cola.

many small and medium organic wine producers. The production methods used in organic winemaking on an artisan scale, some of which were described in the previous chapters, can result in wines which 'respect the vintage', that is which are different in taste and structure from one year to the next. These artisan production methods may be coveted by the buyers, as is the case with Severino. At the same time, however, the lively wines which are the outcome of these methods, wines which show different taste characteristic not only between vintages, but sometimes between bottles, which may introduce unusual substances such as yeast sediment or tartrate crystals into the glass, or which may require decanting before consumption, face serious difficulties in the sales context. Their variability represents a challenge to mainstream market buyers for whom product homogeneity is an important element of stable sales networks. So, how do unpredictable wines, such as Severino's vintage-variable Barbera, become marketised? How, in other words, are they transformed from products, resting in the *cantina*, to goods, available to buyers?

### 7.2.1 The performativity of markets, and unpacified goods

To consider how lively goods such as some organic wines become tradable, and how they contribute to the construction of new markets I draw on and extend the study of commodities by Michel Callon and colleagues. The key argument of the performativity programme (see Callon 1998, 2007, MacKenzie 2006, 2007) with relation to the economy is that the economy, or rather economies (as the socio-material networks of monetary market relations) are not somehow separate dimensions of activity 'embedded' in 'society', but instead exist through their continuous enactment (material and discursive) by agents (human and nonhuman). Instead of a pre-existent, separate, socially 'embedded' economy, Callon and colleagues (Callon et al. 2002, Çalışkan and Callon 2009, 2010) argue, the space of market exchange is constructed through continual processes of economisation, that is the qualifications of certain elements of the world as economic by market participants as well as external commentators. This in turn implies an ongoing reorganisation, change and multiplication of markets as various performative actors struggle for the dominance over the definition of spaces, behaviours, organisations, institutions and objects as economic. The functioning and organisation of markets is debated in hybrid forums, involving a number of competing and collaborating participants, including economists and lay 'economists in the wild' (Callon et al. 2002).

The performativity thesis has been applied to the study of markets in Çalışkan and Callon's seminal papers on the processes of market-making (2009, 2010). In keeping with the ontological symmetry of Actor Network Theory, in their study of economisation processes Çalışkan and Callon aimed to bring research on the economy back from abstract structures towards socio-materialities of real markets. The authors identified three key agents participating in the economisation processes and debating in hybrid forums: theories of the economy; institutional and technical arrangements for the qualification (valuation) of goods; and 'the things which are being valued whose materiality influences the modes of valuation that are possible and their outcomes' (2010: 2).

For Çalişkan and Callon, the valuation of goods, a process which takes place during qualification trials, is a central element of economisation processes. Drawing on studies in anthropology, they suggested that the valuation of goods is not equivalent to ascribing 'things' arbitrary properties by powerful agents, but instead that the valuation is a joint process in which both human and non-human identities (as active and passive) are created. The process of qualification in which the value of a good is established involves a 'sequence of actions, a series of operations that transform [the product], move it and cause it to change hands, to cross a series of metamorphoses that end up putting it into a form judged useful by an economic agent who pays for it. During these transformations its characteristics change' (Callon 2002: 197). It also involves the binding of a good's 'intrinsic' characteristics to the 'extrinsic' ones. While the 'intrinsic' characteristics depend on the good in question, the 'extrinsic' ones are shaped by the device used to measure the good, as well as the formulation and explanation of characteristics by valuing agents (Ibid: 199).

The authors state that 'the very materiality of objects means that they are not arbitrary signs [; it] makes a difference both in the source of their meaning and of their destination' (Keane 2001, cited in Çalişkan and Callon 2009: 388). However, they further argue that for the qualification of goods to be possible, for the goods to be transferrable and market transactions to be achievable the goods need to be 'pacified', that is, they need to become passive participants of market transactions acted upon by active human agents.<sup>11</sup> It is worth quoting their statement at length:

'Given our previous definition of markets, is it possible to conceive of one in which goods are authorised to (...) contribute multiple suggestions of their own value (...)? The answer is a resounding 'no', for it is the passivity of things that transforms them into goods, and that enables agencies to form expectations, make plans, stabilize their preferences and undertake calculations. *By ensuring that their qualities evolve predictably*, passive goods create an environment whose stability (...) establishes the possibility of entering into cooperative or competitive relationships of exchange.' (Çalişkan and Callon 2010 : 5, my emphasis)

The authors argue that while the materiality of goods does affect their market trajectories, at a certain point in their 'lifecycle' goods have to undergo a process of pacification so that their qualities can become temporarily stabilised and legible (although open to contestation) to both parties in the transaction. The pacification of goods is achieved through qualification trials, the aim of which, as was explained above, is the stabilisation and valuation of certain characteristics of products. By establishing a number of characteristics, and attaching them to a product a 'thing' is thus temporarily transformed from a product to a good tradable in the market (Callon et al. 2002: 199). Callon et al. (2002) take wine as an example of a good which undergoes a relatively unproblematic, although resources-heavy processes of qualification. As it is established that 'a wine is syrupy, that it matures with age, that it has a high or low alcohol content, that it comes from the Médoc region or Touraine region' (198), the properties of the wine are stabilised, and the

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<sup>11</sup> This elaborates on the idea of the disentanglement of objects as a necessary element of market transactions, discussed at length in a series of exchanges between Callon (2005) and Miller (2002, 2005).

wine is pacified, meaning that the chances of the wine itself contributing 'multiple suggestions of its own value' are minimised. These processes of qualification enable a wine to be defined 'by a combination of characteristics that establish its singularity' (198), that is, that define its characteristics as similar to, while distinct from, other wines available on the market.

This double process of pacification and valuation at the heart of marketisation processes as envisaged by Callon and colleagues is challenged when we consider the problematic marketisation of some organic wines. These wines display a material vitality which is difficult to contain within the confines of the pacification requirement. The methods employed by producers result in wines the characteristics of which do not 'evolve predictably', but which instead pose a continuous challenge to both buyers and sellers. These unpacified wines, I argue, can be seen as active participants in the construction of new channels for their marketisation, and non-human participants of the hybrid forums of the economy of qualities. In challenging established qualification trials through their lively materiality, these wines contribute to the creation of new buyer-seller relationships, that is, new markets.

While the temporarily changeable material characteristics of the wines (which in many cases cannot be established in advance by buyers) prevent their pacification as understood by Çalişkan and Callon, in that the wines 'continue to contribute multiple suggestions of their own value' to the potential consumers, the goods nonetheless undergo processes of stabilization in order for their sale to be possible. I argue that the lynchpin of this stabilization is not the guarantee of recognized qualification trials, but embodied understandings of the liveliness of wines established through tasting experiences, aided through direct seller-buyer relationships. This stabilisation then has less to do with a tight bracketing of all possible characteristics of a wine, and their temporal evolution, and more to do with establishing mutual understanding about a certain indeterminacy involved in buying and drinking lively wine. In this market scenario it is not the good which undergoes the stabilisation, but the market-ising network, the connection between the seller (the wine producer) and the buyer (the wine drinker). The stabilisation is both discursive, what Freidberg (2003) calls 'selling with a story', but also, crucially, material and embodied. The story alone 'does not cut it', and I argue in this chapter that the cornerstone of long-term and resilient market relations is the development of an embodied 'tasting relationship' between a consumer and a wine. This process, however, is difficult, prone to failure, and requires continuous work from the producers.

In presenting a brief history of the changes to the world wine markets since WWII in section 7.1.2 of this chapter I suggested that these changes resulted in an 'outflanking of nature' (Murdoch and Miele 1999) understood as variability and liveliness, and a dominance of market mechanisms which produced temporarily stable qualities as a desired characteristic of wines, be that between vintages or between batches. However, lively wines are produced, and they are sold. In the following section, I present a number of cases in which the marketisations of lively wines posed challenges to their producers, and I explore how these producers worked at stabilising their lively wines in buyer-seller relationships through contextualisation of their unusual material characteristics.

### 7.2.2 Challenging wine markets: DOC/G and unpacified wines. Severino.



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

It is evening time on the 2nd February 2009 and Severino and I are waiting for a visit from Carlo, Severino's college professor, friend and long-standing oenologist of his winery. 'He is very... epidermic', Severino tells me.<sup>12</sup> He values Carlo for his oenological advice, and depends on his palate to understand the evolution of his wines. Carlo drops by every few months to taste the young wines, and every half year to do a tasting of the whole *cantina*, but this time Severino called him to resolve a specific problem. Severino needs his expertise to help appease the terroir certification committee which awards the Denominazione di Origine Controllata e Garantita (DOCG) label, and which had refused to certify one of his wines. The situation is puzzling. In the case of DOCG wines each batch – in this case, each barrel – has to be certified separately. The two wines Severino sent to the commission were identical. They had come originally from the same fermentation, were stored in the same stainless steel tank, and were sampled just after having been pumped into two separate vats. All the same, only one of them passed the certification blind tasting, even though the wines had the same composition, and underwent the same processes.

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<sup>12</sup> Epidermic here is taken to mean sensorily attuned.

This is not the first time Severino's wines have been challenged by the DOCG committee. In 2004 a wine the samples of which were already circulating at wine contests and winning Severino both the interest of importers, and prizes from critics, was refused DOCG certification after failing the tasting trial, twice. The orders were piling up, but without the official stamp Severino was not able to export his wines as DOCG certified, which could mean damage to his company's image, and a drop in price. The situation was tense, and it was only after Severino appealed to the Ministry of Agriculture in Rome that the wine was finally recognised.

We wait while Carlo studies the wines before him, the one which had passed, and the one which was refused. Nothing wrong there, he says. Just the usual animal (sulphuric) smell your wines normally have. They are exactly the same. Carlo crumbles a tiny bit of copper into the glass, mixes it well, and passes the wine to me. The aroma seems to have become much cleaner. Re-filter both wines, he advises Severino, and add a quantity of copper, re-submit, and you'll be fine.

To explain how one of Severino's wines was granted the certification while the other was refused I need to briefly explain the mechanism of terroir certification granting in Italy. The first country to explicitly link territory and wine quality was France, which developed the Denomination D'appellation Contrôlée system (AOC) in 1935. Through a seemingly obvious translation of natural environmental attributes of a territory to the characteristics of a wine produced there, the AOC system obscured both the long-term human influence over vine growing landscapes (Moran 1993), and the political power struggles which drive the establishing of and changes to Geographical Indication frameworks (Gade 2004). In Italy an analogous system was introduced at a national level in 1963, and it originally consisted of three tiers of quality: the basic *Vino di Tavola*, middle-range *Indicazione Geografica Tipica (IGT)* wine, and high-quality *Denominazione di Origine Controllata (DOC)* wine. However, the guarantee of authenticity, that is provenance, failed to guarantee the quality for DOC wines. In reaction to consumer dissatisfaction with the quality of Italian DOC wines, in the late 1970s an additional 'tier' was added for highest quality wines under the name of *Denominazione di Origine Controllata e Garantita (DOCG)* (Unwin 1991). The most important change with the introduction of the DOCG certification was the emergence of expert oenologists as key qualification agents in the certification process for the DOC and DOCG wines. Every year each region calls a commission of sommeliers to blind-taste samples of all the wines produced within the DOC/G borders.<sup>13</sup> The committee members rely on a tasting protocol (which implies a pre-existent expertise) and consultation with colleagues for the qualification of wines.<sup>14</sup>

The DOC/G certification, composed of regulations, laboratories, and what Çalişkan and Callon (2010) call 'competent individuals', can be seen as a metrological device for the establishing and fixing of qualities of wines, from bio-chemical safety (the wine is not poisonous), through

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<sup>13</sup> From this point onwards DOC/G is used to refer to both DOC and DOC/G qualification trials.

<sup>14</sup> For example the tasting protocol for the *Malvasia di Castelnuovo Don Bosco* DOC wine states that at the point of consumption the wine should have the following sensory characteristics: red, ruby-like colour, intense, characteristic smell, and a dry, calm, full-bodied taste (DPR 29 maggio 1973, available: <http://www.iviniditalia.it/disciplinari/malvasiadicastelnuovo.html>, accessed 28/02/2012, my translation).



geographical provenance (it comes from Asti), to the level of taste (it tastes like a Barbera d'Asti). Importantly, wines are allowed to enter wine markets which value the presence of the DOC/G label only when they meet the final blind tasting requirements. Severino's wine, Carlo explained to me, failed to meet their requirements not because it had a fault, but because it was too different. The problem, according to Carlo, is that Severino's wines are unusual for the region. Because Severino cannot find the time to taste the wines of others and compare himself against them, he does not realise how far from the norm his wine sometimes diverge. This is not a problem for consumers, who may not have a great knowledge of Barolo, and may appreciate the taste of Severino's wines for their own sake. For the DOCG commission though, the establishing of similarity is crucial.

Carlo (on Severino): 'Wine is a thing you need to take your time with... I told him – why don't you go with me to taste some wines? 'I don't have time.' Ok then. Because there is another company... They are five oenologists. The uncle, the brother, a lady who is an oenologist, and a son of theirs, and another one who is not an oenologist but is interested. (...) And they're all interested in wines, they all taste them together and they grow together. I can see that in companies where people taste together they grow quicker. (...) One must find time to meet others and taste.' (09/02/2009)

The blind tasting part of the DOC/G qualification trials corresponds closely to Callon et al.'s (2002) understanding of the role of qualification trials in the economy of qualities as mechanisms for the establishment of both difference and similarity. To be tradable in a market, a good has to be both singular, that is unique, and comparable, that is similar. The key aim of the qualification trial is the confirmation that a good does indeed belong to a particular market which can be understood as 'a system of differences and similarities, of distinct yet connected categories' (p. 298).

In this sense, a DOC/G qualification trial is a device for the standardisation of wines. And standardisation, Schaeffer (1993) noted, has a double meaning. On the one hand, 'standardisation' is linked with a pursuit of quality. It is an effort to create 'standards', meaning industry benchmarks the achievement of which would guarantee an increase in the quality of goods across the market. At the same time, however, 'standardisation' is also a process of standardising, that is of making the goods available more uniform. The efforts to achieve quality and the efforts to achieve consistency, Schaeffer demonstrated, are linked, especially in the context of markets where sellers rarely meet face to face, and, I would add, where consumers rarely have a chance to try before they buy. As in the markets for fresh food discussed by Schaeffer, or for milk discussed by Atkins (2006), in wine markets both meanings of standardisation have become important in the latter part of the 20th century. And one of the most important standardisation mechanisms has been the introduction of protected geographical origins designations for wines.

The DOCG qualification trial is, then, deeply performative, and impacts both on the shape of the markets, and on the production of goods aimed at participating in those markets. When Carlo advocates a practice of self-positioning with regard to other wines of the same DOCG origin on the market he is in fact suggesting that the qualification trial of the DOC/G commission should be internalised, affecting Severino's winemaking practices and becoming a form of self-regulation. At the same time, the dominance of authorised oenologists in this key qualification trial results in a

dominance of a particular 'educated' taste on the DOC/G market. This self-perpetuating cycle in which goods which are admitted onto the DOC/G market are 'high quality' and those which are 'high quality' are admitted onto the DOC/G market creates a serious challenge for producers of those wines the organoleptic characteristics of which fail to conform with the prevailing understanding of 'high quality' in every vintage. In the case of Severino, the high premium he obtains as a DOCG certified producer keeps him applying for the certification in spite of the challenges. He is also willing to intervene into the material composition of his wines to a certain extent in order to please the DOCG commission. Other producers in my research dealt with the DOC/G hurdle by submitting false samples of supermarket-bought wine. However, not all producers need to go to such lengths, as the DOC/G market is not the only one available. Other producers, such as Angiolino, have succeeded in finding markets for wines which do not conform this easily to the expectations of the more mainstream marketisation channels.

### 7.2.3 Challenging wine markets: DOC/G and unpacified wines. Angiolino.

Achieving DOC certification is not necessarily a pre-requisite for marketisation; while it is indispensable for partaking in a certain type of market, such as the high-end overseas specialised wine stores Severino is aiming at, there is a multiplicity of wine markets available, and multiple possibilities for the marketisation of organic wine. Sometimes discovering these marketisation channels is a stroke of good fortune, such as was the case with Angiolino and the Japanese natural wines market.

As was the case with Severino, although Angiolino's vineyards fall within the required DOC territory, his white wines, which undergo long maceration and natural fermentation in open vats, consistently failed to display the organoleptic characteristics required by the DOC commission. A break-through for Angiolino's company was establishing an important personal connection with a Japanese wine importer, which made it possible to marketise his wines in spite of the absence of a sensorial quality assurance certification. Although he had been working hard to advertise his idea of natural winemaking, it was this chance meeting which was his big break.

Angiolino: 'It started, first the dioxin, then the mad cow, and people started to think about nutrition, about how things should be done. And in this period of the mad cow every week I was away [at tastings and wine fairs] to talk about natural wine, about how one should eat natural foods, and so on. And my success came at that time. Thanks to that...

Anna: And what was the role of Japan?

Angiolino: Japan, I was lucky (...) So, it was probably the case of the right person at the right time, his name is Isa Ota, the name of the company is Vinai Ota, (...) we started [working together] in '96 I think – before '96, Anna, I produced 10 thousand bottles, and the rest of the wine I sold in bulk [to a *cantina sociale*], that pays nothing, very little. I produced 10 thousand bottles, and I had real problems selling them. (...) And it so happened we met. Many Japanese speak perfect Italian, they

*Chapter Seven. "Wine is not Coca-Cola": organic wines and the challenge of marketisation*

come here and learn Italian. (...) And he came around, to my house, this young man. (...) I spoke with him of natural wine, and he was stunned by this idea, he went back to Japan, wrote about it on his site, he changed the companies, because he was already working with conventional companies, he changed the companies and now he works only with natural wines, he has become famous in Japan as the person who sells natural wines. (...) I am the biggest client he has. (...) Anna, 'Il Sassaia' [one of Angiolino's wines] is the most sold Italian natural wine in Japan. (...) It's a wine that sells itself now.' (21/09/2008)

It was this lucky break which made it possible for Angiolino to continue as a natural winemaker. Otherwise, he may have well given the venture up, as producing wine for sale in bulk is not a profitable enterprise. His 'stubbornness' about natural winemaking methods, he admits, is directly linked with how easy he found selling his unusual wines on the Japanese market. The level of acceptance of wines the organoleptic and material characteristics of which are far from what is considered 'the norm' is such in Japan that Angiolino is constantly surprised as he succeeds at selling wines which even he considers a bit problematic.

Angiolino: 'I would like you to write one more important thing about me in your research. If I am as stubborn as I am, that is because I have had the luck to insert myself into the Japanese market. That, for wines such as mine, is in fact almost too easy. For example, Anna, it happens that sometimes my wines are not perfect. Such as, they may be a little bit cloudy in the bottle. (...) I do not use a filter (...) and I sell them regardless. (...) For example the 2003 vintage, I think, after going in the bottle got slightly oxidised. (...). For the Japanese, it's natural, that a wine should oxidise, to mature is natural. For the Europeans, it is not normal. So that, they question the wine. I am not saying that, because the Japanese like everything, and I have it easy, I can allow myself the luxury of not being careful (...), but it has been a great help to me. (...) and I have to acknowledge that, this advantage I've had over other producers. I have made two trips to Japan, where I talked about, as I am doing to you, my weak spots, practically. (...) And they would say: 'But to oxidise is natural', 'Yes, but I cannot sell you a wine that after three years is already oxidised'. (...) 'But no, it's natural it should be like this, I could drink a bottle a day of this wine', yes, Anna, I have to acknowledge it has been a great helping hand, had I had to market my wines only in Europe, and Europe would not accept some defects in the wine, it may be that my ideas would have changed.' (30/07/2008)

In refusing to pacify his wines, that is to render their characteristics more acceptable to the majority of wine markets through standardisation and material pacification, Angiolino put his company on the brink of bankruptcy. He failed to establish a local market which would be accepting of the lively and changing character of his wines as desirable, not disruptive. In this situation, the majority of producers would 'simplify their lives' and change the production practices to align them with the pacification requirement. The 'stubborn' Angiolino was saved by the geographical reach of his market connections, to a faraway place where the liveliness of his

wines is embraced to an extent which continues to surprise him. While Angiolino offers some tentative explanations for his wines' success, even he finds the behaviour of consumers in the Japanese market puzzling, and he is not certain why exactly it is that his wine sells so well amongst the Japanese. His discussion with an imaginary Japanese drinker on the problems of oxidation clearly indicates that the level of acceptance for what are usually considered wine faults amongst his Japanese clients continues to take Angiolino by surprise. His way of dealing with the unexpected behaviour of these market actors is to imagine them as sharing the same normative principles as he does, that is evaluating the wines according to the same criteria as those Angiolino employs, for instance holding the 'naturalness' of the wine a more important quality than its biochemical stability. However, Angiolino has no guarantee that his theory is correct, and his rationalisations are purely speculative.

Wine producers, I suggest, habitually work in a state of uncertainty as to what makes their wines 'work' within certain markets. They do not operate as fully informed economic actors, but instead are engaged in an experimental relationship with their markets, constantly oscillating between the two extremes of wine sale strategy: 'I produce what sells' and 'I sell what I produce'. In the following sections I argue that in order to increase the predictability of selling lively wines producers labour to 'educate' their clients to share the winemaker's normative principles when it comes to wine evaluation, and to for instance put 'naturalness' before 'stability'. I further suggest that winemakers work to make their consumers into wine amateurs, that is into drinkers who are active and reflexive participants in the production of their tastes (Teil and Hennion 2002). The 'ideal consumer' for a producer of lively wines, and the one that facilitates the market survival of their company is, I suggest, a consumer who establishes a long-term 'tasting relationship' with the producer's wines.

In the following section I argue that while some wines can remain unpacified, that is their characteristics may remain open to contestation even at the moment of purchase (and beyond), they do need to become stabilised in the context of their markets. This stabilisation is different to pacification, in that it is not obtained through material intervention into the material properties of wine, as was the case with Severino's wines which were filtered and had copper added to become acceptable to the DOCG market. Instead, the stabilisation of some organic wines, I argue, can reside in the embodied 'tasting relationship' between the consumers and the wines. The stability of the relationship resides in the openness and curiosity of the consumers towards the material characteristics of wines.

In what follows, I discuss how producers seek to establish these 'tasting relationship' between their customers and their wines. By situating a wine's liveliness in a particular context of production, and by acting as knowledgeable intermediaries in consumers' tasting experiences, producers work to upset the habitual understandings of wine taste amongst their clients, and to encourage an experimental approach to tasting characteristic of amateurs (Teil and Hennion 2002). This approach necessitates face-to-face sales relations, be they with individual clients, or with restaurant or wholesale buyers. I demonstrate that without the stabilisation through a 'tasting relationship', consumers are susceptible to the 'yuck' factor when encountering unusual lively

wines. I conclude the chapter with an example of a 'perfect' lively wine consumer, the consumer of a "Do It Yourself" Prosecco wine.

### 7.3 Wine is not Coca-Cola, but it needs to sell. Working to create 'tasting relationships'.

In the following interviews with producers of (lively) organic wines I explore the importance of materialities of wine to their marketisation. I suggest that producers seek to mediate in the consumer-wine meeting as knowledgeable individuals to aid the development of a 'tasting relationship' between consumers and wines, hoping for an emergence of stable marketisation networks, where even very changeable and unusual wines can be sold. After Teil and Hennion (2002) I suggest that taste, which is, after all, at the heart of food and drink markets, needs to be understood not as a static property of goods, nor as an unchanging competence of individuals, but as an evolving relationship in which human and nonhuman bodies are brought together in forever new configurations. Producers recognise that the 'tasting relationships' between consumers and unpacified wines can be challenging, and so work to make their clients into amateurs locked in reflexive and experimental relationships with their own wines. The deeper the 'tasting relationship' is, I suggest, the more durable the marketisation channel, and the more resistant it is to the changing and challenging materiality of wine.

#### 7.3.1 Rovero. 'You have to try.'

In the following interview with the owner and principal winemaker at an organic winery in Piemonte (conducted 12/02/2009), I explore themes typical of many conversations I have had with organic producers on the challenges of marketisation. While wine can be made to be Coca-Cola like, it is the withdrawal from intervention, and the valorisation of the wine's telos which is seen as an ethical imperative for many organic wine producers, an ethical pull I have been terming making space for nature. At the same time, the making space for nature in wines results in wines which demand a certain amount of investment from producers and consumers alike to be marketised.

Enrico: 'The production philosophy [of our company] is first of all to respect the client, to work in such a way so that the client is happy, it is not the client who has to adapt to us, it is us who have to come forward to the consumer. At the same time, we have to do what has to be done in the *cantina*. (...) There is a massive difference if we harvest today or a week later. (...) [T]hings change from year to year, and they change quite a lot... We do not do vintage blends to try to maintain a wine line which is always constant, the same, ideal. (...) Wine is not made with four operations, otherwise we all do the same four things, we'd [all] produce the same wine, we'd codify it (...) to suit the consumer; [on the contrary] it is a very wide worlds, and indefinable. (...) [But] if we engage in the production of a given product, and we want to be proud of that product, than we have to also try and be sustainable as a company, and so accept compromises. (...) Definitely I don't feel like changing the style of our products completely towards the consumer's taste. (...) Perhaps I do it partially, but not totally, I try to respect what is my idea as well.' (12/02/09)

In the first two sentences of the above excerpt Enrico identifies two conflicting forces in the marketisation of his wines. On the one hand, the clients who constitute Enrico's market express demand for a certain type of wines. To survive in the marketplace one has to satisfy this demand by adapting to the taste of the consumers. However, Enrico is quick to qualify this statement by stressing that while the demand of the market may be of a certain kind, in the *cantina* the wine has its own demands as well. With each vintage, the wines present Enrico with new challenges, and in the dance of agency (Pickering 1995) of the vineyard and *cantina*, work the final outcome, that is the taste of the wine, cannot be determined in advance. The conflict for Enrico is between 'being proud' of the work done in the *cantina*, being proud of his wine as an expression of what he believes the wine of his land should taste like, and the changes which have to be made to the wine to meet the consumers' tastes.<sup>15</sup> This conflict is played out in every vintage, and poses a continuous challenge to Enrico, and to the financial sustainability of his company, as he explained remembering the 2002 vintage:

Anna: 'So, there have been years in which consumers told you they did not like your wines?'

Enrico: 'Daily. We preferred the other vintage, they say, or... I remember a particularly bad vintage, 2002, it was a disaster, it was very rainy, we had problems of rot, product loss, we did not go out with some of the products, we made the most important products but the quality level was not sufficient, our, the principal product shall we say, the one with the high turn-over, the most well-known one, we bottled, we went on to tastings, according to the market it was a bit too mature... We took a bit of a scare because they remembered, those who had tried the 2001, it was a completely different vintage, on the level of structure...'

The market in which Enrico places his wines is highly reflexive, and is a prime example of Callon et al.'s (2002) economy of qualities. Qualification trials are re-employed anew every year, and previous transactions are no guarantee of a positive outcome in the following season. Furthermore, buyers are directly involved in the valuation and qualification of wines. This ongoing qualification, and the power of the buyers in the qualification processes, places Enrico's company in a situation of constant uncertainty as each year market relationships are reinforced or weakened on the basis of new vintage qualification. The example of Enrico's wines suggests that in the annually renewed qualification of wines, and the annually renewed buyer-seller relationships, the material characteristics of the wines are of key importance. These material characteristics, however, do not exist 'out there' in an objective reality, but are instead relational and change as the buyer-product relationship evolves. As Enrico goes on to explain, while the 2002 vintage was initially met with diffidence, with time something changed, and the vintage became not only accepted, but sought after.

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<sup>15</sup> The importance of wine making practices to individual ethical identities of producers was explored in chapter five.

*Chapter Seven. "Wine is not Coca-Cola": organic wines and the challenge of marketisation*

Enrico: 'I mean, the structure respected two different vintages, the one hot and dry, the other wet, cold, with problems of rot... So at the beginning it was difficult. With time, as they (the clients) understood the product, when it had finished and we moved on to [the] 2003 [vintage], they started asking for 2002. It will also have been the product, the maturation in the bottle, the fact that a year had passed, but, just to say, there are no absolutes. (...) They remembered 2001 so the product had to be like that, while 2002 had different characteristics.'

Anna: 'So it was not less good.'

Enrico: 'It was different. They were different vintages, so the products were different. (...) Similar, but different! (...) It is an advantage, because it is a diversifying element, it introduces the factor of curiosity for the consumer. Otherwise you'd buy yourself a generic Barbera d'Asti, and you'd drink that. On the contrary, you buy it from different locations, and producers (...) Because (...) we have a variability from year to year, which is in my view a positive thing, because every year the consumer is stimulated to try different things, otherwise you drink Coca-Cola, you know what you drink. On the contrary, you drink wine, and you're not sure what you're drinking you have to try... (...) [I]n our small companies, which respect the vintages, I don't know, perhaps one vintage the Barolo is 13.5%, and the next 15.5%. It is worked differently, it rained less or more, we harvested on a different date (...), we did not add water, we did not add sugar, in the case of the 13.5% that is how the vintage went, and we respect the vintage.'

In his explanation of the changing relationship his clients developed with the 2002 vintage, Enrico argues that the wine's organoleptic characteristics were both a destabilising and a productive force in the market relationships. Enrico's interpretation of the change in demand for the 2002 vintage suggests that the qualities of the wine, those which make it acceptable or not acceptable to the consumers, are not stable neither in an 'objective' nor 'subjective' sense. As the wine matured its bio-chemical properties, that is its 'objective' characteristics (Ingold 2007) could have changed, turning a 'low quality' vintage into a vintage which was sought after. However, Enrico also suggests that a change occurred on the level of the embodied relationship between the wine and the drinkers, and so the 'subjective' dimension of the wine's qualities. Tasting, Enrico suggests, leads the consumers to an 'understanding' of the product which they did not possess at the initial encounter. The taste of the wine, and the drinkers' reaction to it, can therefore be seen as a quality which is not stable and fixed, but which is changeable and relational. As Teil and Hennion demonstrate in their analysis of taste relationships of wine and music lovers, taste is not simply a property of goods, or a competence of people, but a way of building relationships between people and things (2002: 25). The interview with Enrico suggests that in the context of organic wine, the characteristics of which change with every vintage, and in contrast with Coca-Cola, the characteristics of which are always the same, consumers are expected to establish a 'tasting relationship' which requires an amount of investment on the side of the consumer – 'you have to try'. Enrico understands the consumers' process of wine qualification as an ongoing process, not a

one-off occurrence. The importance of time and embodiment in the creation of this 'tasting relationship', and the centrality of this relationship to the marketisation of lively wines, will be further discussed in the remainder of this chapter.

The variability of vintages is not impossible to counteract, and Enrico suggests some of the methods which can be used to create more uniformly tasting wines, such as adding water, adding sugar (in the form of grape must), or vintage blending. Wine is a product which is sensitive to the conditions of its production, but this sensitivity has to be maintained through particular material interventions, or the lack of thereof. As was the case with yeast fermentations, the nature of the wine emerges as an outcome of particular interventions and withdrawals, underlain by an ethical paradigm of respect for the wine's telos. Similarly to the case of natural yeasts fermentation explored in Chapter Five, for Enrico 'respecting the vintage' emerges as an important element of his ethical identity as a producer (Holloway 2002).

### 7.3.2 Terra d'Arcoiris: 'We ask for some sacrifice.'

The Tuscany-based Terra d'Arcoiris, and their biodynamic production methods were introduced in Chapter Five. The company produces exclusively heavy, red, matured wines. The wines ferment with indigenous yeast, very low levels of sulphur dioxide are added, and the wines are refined through neither chemical nor mechanical processes. Walter and Paola employ the help of a French oenologist, who advises them 'remotely', analysing wine samples they send him. This geographical distance, they explain, helps them maintain the relationship with their oenologist in spite of their differing opinions on vineyard management and winemaking techniques; in other words, they can ignore his advice when they choose to, and he can do nothing about it. In Italy, they sell the lion's share of their wines through face-to-face sales on farmers' markets, wine fairs and 'at the farm gate'. Their direct sales network also extends abroad, and Paola travels to Germany and France to sell their wines on local markets. Abroad their wines can also be found in specialised wine shops and from mail-order importers. The marketisation channel used will be heavily dependent on the material characteristics of the wine sold. Some wines are so unusual, and their characteristics so unstable, that they can be marketised only in direct sales relationships, while others are 'pacified' enough to be absorbed by more mainstream marketisation channels.

Walter and Paola's wines are very sensitive to vintage variations. Rather than hiding this variability, Walter and Paola valorise it and communicate it to the consumers through an unusual system of wine labelling where labels do not correspond to grape varieties or wine 'styles', but to wine quality.

Paola: 'Our image is of a very serious company [but] asking for some sacrifice from our clients. We have five labels, of wine, which go in order: green, yellow, red, blue, and black. And we don't carry all the labels each year. Because not doing any strange blends or strange transformations in the *cantina* (...) does not allow us to make all the labels each year. For example in 2002 we only made the yellow label, in 2004 on the other hand we only had the yellow and the red. (...) So our clients have to get used to this lack of continuity (...) Our clients have understood the message, they have



*Chapter Seven. "Wine is not Coca-Cola": organic wines and the challenge of marketisation*

understood that these wines are honest to the extreme, and they appreciate it a lot, even if it may be a bit more complicated for them.' (05/11/2008)

This colour-code system of labelling is unusual, and goes against the imperative of maintaining recognisable wine lines from one year to the next. Instead of capitalising on existing consumer relationships with a certain wine label, Walter and Paola present their consumers with a challenge of trying new tastes and structures when they have to switch between labels from one vintage to the next. This challenge precludes marketisation in a context where stability, predictability and continuity are praised. However, Paola suggests it also opens a possibility for new and potentially deeper relationships between consumers and their wines. The vintage variability, and the resulting exposure to new tastes and structures with every year, Paola argues, encourages and produces consumers who like having their curiosity stimulated.

Paola: 'For example when we refuse to acidify a wine, [our oenologist] says: this one you'll have to drink yourselves!, and on the contrary we sell it all, which means that, in the end, direct sales allows us to figure out the taste of the consumer and understand that you can educate people about a different taste, which is a natural taste, that is one year the wine is softer and more delicate, another year it is more acidic and tannic (...) this depends on the year, and you manage to teach people about taste, teaching that not all the vintages can be the same you stimulate curiosity of those who drink to look for this naturalness up to the point of wanting a vintage to be different from the other, so they can identify it.' (05/11/2008)

By being exposed to different wines with every vintage, Paola suggests, their clients 'develop a taste' for naturalness. This is a radically different understanding of taste to that which dominates in more mainstream wine markets, where, as we have seen in the example of Severino's wines, the taste characteristics of a wine need to conform rather than challenge consumers' expectations. In the context of Paola's market, taste is understood not as an unchangeable property of consumers, but as a relational process. Consumers' taste is not seen as an ultimate point of reference, because taste is not an immovable unchangeable 'thing', but rather a relational and evolving 'meeting'.

Latour's (2004) understanding of the body as less of an essence, and more of an 'expandable interface for sensually being in the world' can be helpful here. Drawing on the example of professional perfume 'noses', Latour argues that the body is relationally constructed through its engagements with stimuli in the world. The more stimuli it is capable of responding to, the more 'alive', that is, the more active a body (somebody) is. As new wines are tried ('met'), so the bodies of consumers 'expand' (Latour 2004) as they learn to respond to more and more stimuli – tastes, structures and odours. As the consumers develop an 'understanding' of the wines (to use Enrico's phrase), they enter into a relationship with the wines which is best described in Teil and Hennion's (2002) study of wine and music amateurs. Moving beyond the nature/culture dualism in understanding taste (we like something because our body likes it/we like something because our buddies like it) they use the experience of amateurs to describe taste as neither a property of goods, not a competence of people, but as a relational activity which happens between the objects of taste and their consumers. Neither a property of things, nor a capacity of people, taste is re-cast

as a relationship. And like any relationship, taste can be more or less superficial, and more or less involved, depending on the time and resources invested. For amateurs, that is those who seek to intensify their 'tasting relationships' with certain things, taste is constantly challenged and experimented with as they seek exposure to new experiences, and as they contextualise and challenge those experiences in meetings with other amateurs and other 'tasty things'. From an unchangeable property, taste becomes an evolving process, and 'an accomplishment that continually takes into account its own results to modify itself and its procedures' (p. 25). It is this reflexivity of taste that Paola (and, in the previous interview, Enrico) refers to when she notes that her clients desire changeability from one vintage to the next, so that they can perfect their 'taste for naturalness'.

From a 'complication', Paola recast vintage variability as a desirable complexity, an opportunity to engage reflexively with taste and to challenge one's expectations. She performs the role of a mediator of their customers' taste, encouraging them to become amateurs engaged in a 'tasting relationship' with Terra d'Arcoiris wines. For an amateur taste, Teil and Hennion argue, 'is not about liking something from what we already know, but about changing our ability to like from the contact with the new thing, most often pre-presented by other amateurs who serve as mediators of one's own taste' (2002: 32). In this understanding, the person doing the tasting and the object being tasted do not exist in a vacuum. As Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy (2010) note, 'differences in the feel of food result from the heterogeneous ways in which memories, ideas, discourses, moods, tastes, and so forth come together in the body' (2966). A 'tasting relationship' requires an investment from the consumer – an interest, a curiosity – but it is also influenced by other stimuli. As we have seen in the above example of direct sales relationships at Terra D'Arcoiris, the knowledgeable wine seller, be it the producer or a wholesaler, can contextualise the experience of new taste, and influence the establishment of the 'tasting relationship'. This presence of a 'mediator', I suggest, can be extremely important when the material characteristics of wines vary greatly from consumers' expectations. Left alone with matter we find offensive and inappropriate in a glass of wine, we are all prone to the 'yuck' reflex, which can be the undoing of markets for lively wines.

### **7.3.3 Erbaluna and La Jara. Offensive materialities and the 'yuck factor'.**

*'The problem is that if I send my wines to America, the only thing they know is what is on the label (...) and then they try the wine, but they know nothing about all the work that is behind it all.'*

*(Alessandro, winemaker, Valli Unite, 07/10/2008)*

Severino, whose DOCG troubles were discussed earlier in the chapter, depends on the foreign wine market and distributors for the sales of his premium red wines. While vintage variation is a characteristic he embraces in his wines, some phenomena have to be excluded in order for his wines to achieve marketisation abroad. In contrast to Terra D'Arcoiris, Severino depends on wine buyers, such as wine store owners and wine wholesalers, to marketise his wines. As a result, he has

*Chapter Seven. "Wine is not Coca-Cola": organic wines and the challenge of marketisation*

to minimise the demands his wines make on his customers. Especially, he needs to ensure no 'offending substances', such as protein or tartrate deposit, find their way to the bottle.

Severino: 'I mean our wines have very little or no deposit (...) we stabilise them, sort them out, filter them twice, I want to have a wine which you can drink up to the last glass, which can be sent to Japan, to the US without problems. (...) If someone knows absolutely nothing about wine, and he sees a tartrate crystal in the wine he'll go (whines) 'what is that!?' (28/10/2008)

While Severino preserves the diversity of his wine on the level of taste, he makes them more 'like Coca-Cola' on the level of material make-up. In transport, wines may be rapidly heated up or cooled down depending on the temperatures they are exposed to. If a wine is not filtered to get rid of proteins, and stabilised (cooled down) to sediment tartrate, it may become murky, or a fine 'sand' of tartrate crystals may be found at the bottom of the last glass. This 'matter out of place' (Douglas 1966) can provoke an immediate reaction of displeasure and even disgust ('what is that?!') in a consumer who is not knowledgeable about winemaking practices, and finds themselves with a glass full of sand.

At La Jara, this 'yuck factor' (Burke 1998) prevented the company from creating a stable market for another unapacified wine. Following old traditions of champagne making, La Jara created an unusual Prosecco which obtained its fizz from a secondary yeast fermentation which took place after bottling. Very little sulphur dioxide needed to be added, as the secondary fermentation replaced oxygen in the bottle with CO<sub>2</sub>, acting as a natural preservative. However, as a result of the in-bottle fermentation a fine sediment of dead yeast was left at the bottom of the bottle once the fermentation was finished. The presence of a fine sediment demanded a certain care and knowledge about wine storage and serving. The bottle had to be stored upright for a few hours before use, the wine had to be poured carefully so as not to upset the sediment, and it could not be drunk to the last drop. While the producers thought the wine was 'exceptional' on the level of taste, the presence of dead yeast damaged the sales and the product was dropped from the winery's line.

Pablo: 'I mean, if you bring it to someone at a restaurant, and you pour them a wine like this, where maybe the last glass is a bit cloudy... (...) Also at home, for you, it will not be practical! You have to take care [when pouring]! It's unpleasant, maybe the last drop in the glass, you won't be able to drink it, and you've paid for it!'

Valerie: 'We made it [the wine], and the next year we did not make it any more, because there was no demand from the market.'

Pablo: 'No demand... That is, there was demand here, from the locals, who came here, they liked it, yes. I mean, when they came here we explained to them what it was, what kind of processes it underwent, and so they understood, and bought it. But then, we sent pallets around to pubs, restaurants... and no one wanted it'. (02/08/2008)

Taste, then, is not all that counts in the 'tasting relationships'. The physical structure of the wine, especially the presence of 'matters out of place' can put an immediate end to embodied wine-consumer relations. Applying Sartre's (1984) *Being and Nothingness* to the problem of dealing with dirt in car repair workshops Dant and Bowles (2003) argue, contra Douglas (1966), that it is the visceral, phenomenological reaction to dirt rather than symbolic understandings of it which informs human feelings of rejection and disgust. After Sartre, they argue that dirt, especially in the form of slime, causes an automatic repulsion as we are confronted with an ambiguous material which challenges the boundaries between our bodies and the outside world. The slimy, murky consistency of yeast sediment may well have caused just such a reaction in some of the consumers, but, crucially, not in those for whom the experience of the slimy yeast sediment was contextualised at the winery. The visceral disgust (Miller 1997) was modified by the producers' explanation of the provenance of the sediment, and of its role in the wine as a whole. The consumers were challenged to the extreme, but the stabilisation of meaning enabled the wines to be marketised in face to face encounters. However, La Jara principally depends on wholesalers and restaurants rather than face-to-face sales, such as was the case with Terra d'Arcoiris. As a result it was impossible for them to continually influence the drinkers' visceral experience, and make the make this unusual 'tasting relationship' work.

Establishing a 'tasting relationship' between consumers and wines requires an active participation of producers or other knowledgeable agents so that the unusual, unpacified materiality of these wines can be 'domesticated', normalised and stabilised. As was suggested in the examples of Terra D'Arcoiris and Rovero, it also requires a willingness to be affected on the part of the consumer, it requires an interest, and an openness to the unexpected. In the closing case study of this chapter, I consider the long-term 'tasting relationships' some consumers create with home-bottled wines. These 'Do It Yourself' winemakers deal with a product the characteristics of which are very similar in structure to the failed product at La Jara. Not only do these wines produce sediment, but also introduce additional material and temporal challenges to their consumers. They require sacrifices of time, space and money, and they give no guarantees of successful outcomes. This surprise and changeability, however, are managed as a part of a 'tasting relationship' in which the DIY home-winemaker takes responsibility for the developments in their wine. These craft consumers (Campbell 2005) are true amateurs in Teil and Hennion's (2002) understanding of the term, that is those who love being affected. The most interesting relationships, as Despret (2004, 2005) notes, happen between bodies (human or nonhuman) which are open and attuned to one another.

#### **7.3.4 Perlage. Living with demijohn wine.**

(based on field diary 27/02/2009)

Demijohn wines continue to be an important part of the sales networks at Perlage, Claudio tells me as I help him shift the heavy bottles outside, to be put in a large lorry later. It is a traditional market, which, although smaller than ten or twenty years ago, remains reliable and brings in a good profit. Over the years, the company has established a network of clients who pre-buy the

wine for at-home bottling. The same buyers return every year to collect demijohns from a market square, and initiate a process of DIY home-winemaking.

At-home bottling is a traditional way of consuming wine in Veneto. A year's supply of wine is bought at once, transported in 50 litre demijohns and bottled by consumers at home. The case of the fizzy white Prosecco, which is the wine Perlage sells, is especially interesting. The still white wine is re-inoculated with manufactured yeast before being pumped into demijohns. By the time it is bottled by the consumers at home, the yeast is ready to undertake a second fermentation, and create a bespoke fizzy white wine in each bottle. This kind of wine is expected to be drunk throughout the year, and the consumers are informed that during that period it will undergo a dynamic evolution in taste and in structure. Bottled between February and March, the wine is supposed to have finished re-fermenting around August. The readiness of the wine has to be judged by the consumers themselves. Straight after the fermentation it is a light, fruity wine, perfect for hot afternoons. As time goes by the dissolution of yeast cells, still present in the bottle, affects the wine's taste, and it starts to recall sur-lie champagne. The wine has hardly any sulphites added, as the second fermentation is the best guarantee of longevity – all oxygen within the bottle is consumed, and the wine is preserved naturally by the presence of CO<sub>2</sub>.

Home-bottled demijohn wines turn consumers from drinkers into co-producers; in fact, bottling your own Prosecco is the closest one can get to making wine without actually owning a vineyard. These 'craft consumers' have to invest skill, knowledge and passion into the making of their DIY wine (Cambell 2005: 23). They need to invest in specialised equipment, such as the bottling machine, bottles and caps. They need to have a lot of space available for a wine cellar, preferably with a stable temperature and humidity, where hundreds of bottles can be stocked.

Most importantly this 'craft consumption' requires the consumers to be knowledgeable about the changeable and unpredictable tastes the wine can develop during the year. They must give the yeast the time it needs to complete the fermentation, and so know to taste and smell the difference between an ongoing and a finished fermentation. They must not be surprised to find sediment of dead yeast cells at the bottom of their wines. They must accept the changeability of taste, and the unpredictability of fermentations – there is no guarantee that this year's wine will end up being similar to the previous year's, or that an unforeseen event – like a badly cleaned bottling machine – will not ruin the whole supply. By carrying out a fermentation in their own cellar, the amateurs of home-bottled Prosecco transform a mass-produced wine into their personal wine as the same wine, with the same yeast, will ferment differently in different spaces and temperatures, so even those that buy the wine from the same supplier can note differences between one wine cellar and another.

The changeability and diversity can be, and clearly are, a source of pleasure for the home bottler. This is an extreme example of a 'tasting relationship', and, as the ongoing business at Perlage suggests, it is a very stable one. Cambell (2005) and Watson and Shove (2008) suggest that in DIY consumption, consumers invest material and emotional resources into the production of 'craft goods'. Furthermore, Watson and Shove (2008) note that the relationship between DIY practitioners and their tools is transformative, as each successful engagement leads to an

increased ability and interest in the practice. Similarly, in case of DIY winemakers, it seems that the source of the stability of this marketisation channel lies in their continued interest in the experience of making your own wine, with all the material and organoleptic diversity of wine this implies. By taking partial responsibility for the development of the wines, these consumers are recast as 'at home producers', and they too have to learn to live with the uncertainties and surprises inherent in the production of lively wines.

#### **7.4 Conclusion**

The moment of sale is the culmination of a wine's journey, but the work does not stop there. Everything that was done during a wine's production was consequential. Each practice entailed the choice of a possible future, and was thus an act of ontological politics (Mol 2002). For some producers, enabling the 'natural' unfolding of processes and entities in their wine making through withholding interventions resulted in wines which vary from vintage to vintage, show flavours and scents unusual for their region and variety, or present consumers with unexpected material characteristics. These wines are not pacified, and they are not passive. By challenging the mainstream channels and standard mechanisms for the sales of organic wines, they contribute to the creation of new wine markets, one for each product.

In this chapter, I have demonstrated the work which goes into establishing and maintaining these alternative markets. While motivated by the ethical imperative of non-interference exercised by some organic producers, the alternative-ness of these markets does not primarily lie in their ethical agenda, but in the fact that they enable the sale of products which do not fit to the pacification requirements of mainstream markets. When, during production processes, spaces are made for nature, the resulting material characteristics do not fit well with the pacification requirement of many sale channels. Establishing and maintaining market solutions for alternative, lively organic wine, I have argued, requires investment on the part of producers and consumers alike. I have demonstrated that producers of lively organic wines work hard to create relationships between their wines and their consumers, relationships which are not rooted (exclusively) in 'stories' about the products, but, more importantly, nourish an openness to the unexpected and challenging tastes and structures of the wines consumed. I have employed Teil and Hennion's (2002) figures of (wine) amateur and Campbell's (2005) craft consumer to think about 'perfect consumers' for lively wines, that is consumers who invest interest and skill in the consumption of wines. I have also drawn attention to the work of producers as knowledgeable intermediaries who enable the creation of tasting relationships. Together, the work of lively wines, motivated producers and interested consumers results in a collective performance of alternative wine markets where uncertainty is an accepted part of the game.