

CLASS, CLASSIFICATION, AND CLASSISM:
THE STORY OF WINE

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Abstract

Through an analysis of the culture industry surrounding the wine trade, the relationship between wine and the greater humanities is examined. Classism, fetishism, commodification, and even a touch of rhetoric will all be examined through the eyes of the critical cultural lens. In this, it is my finding that without the stories that surround wine, it would be no different from any other commodity. As such, wine, as an artifact, must always tell a story. Is that story in the terroir, in the classist system, or in the consumption of the wine itself? The stories we communicate about wine fetishize the commodity, and influence how people see it as a status symbol.

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Introduction

The consumption of wine dates back to 6000 B.C. (Clarke, 2015). Since then, it has long been held as one of the world's most important commodities. It holds significant societal, cultural, commercial, symbolic, and aesthetic value of note. Poets and scholars alike write odes to it, and a love song would not be complete without a passing nod to this favored beverage. It is an elitist commodity, and yet at the same time, consumed and enjoyed at all levels. In this, this paper shall touch on multiple areas of the wine and culture industry, along with a little historical context. In this context, culture industry is defined by the terms set by Adorno and Horkheimer in their essay "*The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception*" (1944), being defined as the standardized cultural goods made available to the masses, no matter their socioeconomic status. This consumption, as it is, is a pleasure that is quick and straightforward, creating false bliss. It is my argument that without the "story" that precedes the wine in the glass, wine becomes like any other beverage, a consumption rather than a culture. From the beginning of the classification of wine, through marking terroir as "special" rather than just farmland, one can see the influence that society has put upon the vine making it more than other consumable commodities. The protection of the land, this sense of "place" given to the land in which the grapes are grown is unique to wine. In no other commodity will you find the exacting nature of protection or longing for a sense of place. Through this, commodification and the creation of the fetishment of wine, making it "an object of irrational reverence or obsessive devotion" (Terroir, 2017), takes place. In a unique

instance, I look at the fetish of the bottle itself, through the consumer, to celebrity and even those who counterfeit in order to exploit this fetish. Relating those connections to the culture industry as a whole draws me back to how we as consumers think of the labor involved in the creation of any mass consumer product, and how even though wine is continually perceived as a low volume classist market, it is, in reality, extremely prevalent throughout all levels of society. Reviewers such as Robert Parker have based their entire careers on telling people what type of wine they enjoy, ensuring their authority on the subject to such a level they become the highest level of perceived expert, defining what wines we drink. In addition, I examine the innovation of the terroir that has thrived in places such as Chile and Australia, creating further stories for us to consume, as well as the stories of consumers and industry professionals alike. Because when it comes down to it, that is what the culture industry is about, consumption. It is my hopes that this paper be read with a glass (or two) of wine. It will help you as a reader engage with the predominant social relation of consumption which I am attempting to give you a smattering of information on. The ultimate question that I hope you engage with while reading this is to think about the stories we communicate about wine, and the way we fetishize this commodity, both as individuals and through the power of celebrity. The symbolic power we give it, creating this elite status symbol out of an agricultural product.

Literature Review

Wine has long been a significant cultural commodity that encompasses the senses and the mind. It has strong symbolic, commercial and artistic value. The trade of wine

can be traced throughout history, and wine has been the symbol of the elite even while drunk by the poor. Reviewers such as Robert Parker have changed the way we perceive wine, becoming authorities that we trust for the way they review wines. Strangely, wine has rarely been analyzed from a communications perspective, or even a social anthropological perspective (Ulin, Roberts, 2015). This paper relies heavily on the research of Robert Ulin, Professor of Anthropology at the Rochester Institute of Technology, and the philosophy of Pierre Bourdieu and Walter Benjamin.

The criteria used in analyzing the literature is manifested in several ways: first, an analysis of the philosophers who are represented highly in this paper from a broad perspective in their focus. Second, a brief analysis of the commodification of wine as an object and an object, and an object to be observed. Third, a closer look at the terroir that enters into the heart of the story. Without the sense of place, there can be no sense of taste, and knowing the basis of the land will help the reader understand the concept of the story of wine from where it must begin--the land itself.

There is limited study on wine from a communication standpoint. Most research currently found is from a socio-anthropological standpoint, or market-value. It is my hope that this paper will help encourage positive thinking of wine as a classist commodity from multiple angles, and encourage the overall arching question “Is it a sense of place, or is it a sense of taste?”

Wine is a classist act, and the first place to look to “prove” this is to the philosopher Pierre Bourdieu. Bourdieu, in his book *Distinction*, theorizes that each class teaches aesthetic approach to their young, passing along the dictates of the class to a new

generation and ensuring a system of classism is maintained. This fractionalization of class is made of “symbolic goods, especially those regarded as the attributes of excellence, [...as] the ideal weapon in strategies of distinction” (Bourdieu, 1984). The things worth having, so to speak, are chosen and determined by those of the elite class, who thereby ensure their “cultural capital” is distinctive, as “differences in **cultural capital** mark the differences between the classes.” Wine, as to itself, is a marker of class and classism, and in a true Bourdieuvian style, a separation of the classes. Take, for instance, the act of wine tasting. Participation alone requires a certain entry level of skill and knowledge, along with sociality and the ability to converse in terms which enable a high level of discourse. As such, even among the elite, wine takes a certain level of skill and learning to be able to master. “The habitus is a spontaneity without consciousness or will, oppose as much to the mechanical necessity of things without history in mechanistic theories as it is to the reflexive freedom of subjects ‘without inertia’ in rationalist theories.” (Bourdieu, 1990). Ulin, in 2013, associates Bourdieu with wine as well, tying Bourdieu’s symbolic capital to the land in which the grapes are grown. “There is much symbolic capital, in the sense of Bourdieu, associated with terroir in that grapes produced from circumscribed terrains, in comparison to those that are generic, bring much renown and commercial value to their properties (Ulin, 2013). Of course, once you are growing the grapes, you can not forget of the most bourgeois of all, the landowners themselves. Swinburn sites Bourdieu as “The people who own these wineries have usually had successful city-based careers.” Many of them are, to cite Bourdieu, “beyond necessity” (Bourdieu, 2007, Swinburn, 2013). In each case above, we see the social movement of

the classiest system of wine and how it relates to the humanities as a whole. Fine wine, with its cost and limited availability is undoubtedly a symbol of classism, and as such can be studied both an art form as well as a commodity. “Distinction, as Bourdieu has shown us, is marked by social class, as are consumption patterns more broadly” (Ulin, 2013).

Bourdieu

In his article *Symbolic Capital and Social Class*, Bourdieu expands upon his earlier thoughts on the symbols we choose to represent our social class.

“Symbolic capital, together with the forms of profit and power it warrants, exists only in the relationship between distinct and distinctive properties, such as the body proper, language, clothing, interior furnishings....and the individuals or groups endowed with schemata of perception and appreciation that predispose them to recognize (in the twofold meaning of the term) these properties, that is, to constitute them into expressive styles, transformed and unrecognizable forms of positions in relations of force” (Bourdieu, 2013).

Wine, unto itself, falls directly into this symbolic system, as fine wine is often attributed to higher class and elitist meanings.

“It follows that, whenever they are grasped as a socially pertinent and legitimate as a function of a classification system, properties cease being only material goods liable to enter into exchanges and to yield material profits to become expressions, signs of recognition that signify and acquire value through the complete set of gaps or distances in relation to other properties -- or non-properties” (Bourdieu, 2013).

When you have that bottle of wine that costs thirty, three hundred, three thousand, or thirty thousand dollars, your social class is construed around the meaning that the bottle entails and the thought put into it. As social function dictates a collector of fine art must also collect other fine objects, and among others specifically fine wines find a place most often, Bourdieu's impact on the structure of how wine must be interpreted as a commodity takes effect.

“Lifestyle is the foremost and perhaps today the most fundamental of these symbolic manifestations, clothing, furnishings, or any other property, which, functioning according to the logic of membership and exclusion, make differences in capital (understood as the capacity to appropriate scarce goods and the corresponding profits) visible...”
(Bourdieu, 2013).

The aesthetic qualities of the wine market directly transcribe to the social strata. The wine sphere is a perfect example of Bourdieu's work, as most people who enjoy wine do so within this defined class hierarchy and lifestyle. There are of course, exceptions to every rule, however, Bourdieu's work exemplifies this dynamic.

Benjamin

While Bourdieu teaches us that wine has symbolic capital, Benjamin shows us that wine is like a piece of artwork, to be enjoyed, savored, experienced. Drawing from Benjamin's groundbreaking piece *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, (1969), wine can be compared to that artwork that is reproduced, and yet each bottle is unique. The fact that with the mass production of each vintage comes a Warholian experience, and yet at the same time, the individuality of the bottle is savored

and enjoyed with an emotion that is individual to itself and the person who is savoring it makes it reproducible and not at the same time. “A bottle of wine, therefore, is not just an expression of place: it is thought to be the expression of a place in time. Like an object of art, a wine is thought to be unique and impossible to reproduce (Benjamin 2008, sic) (Daynes, S. 2013). As Benjamin states that “Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be” (Benjamin, 1969), so too does the same exact wine from the same harvest, the same vintage, via forms of mechanical reproduction. It is that presence in time and space that Benjamin takes into account that endeavors to push wine into that unique sphere. “In principle, a work of art has always been reproducible” (Benjamin, 1969). Wine has always been reproducible, thereby separating it from the singular of the art that Benjamin clings to. However Demossier pulls it back to the art, as “By consuming wine we are consuming space, time and symbols” (Demossier, 2001). How is that not dissimilar to the consumption of art? To further this case, again to quote Benjamin. “The uniqueness of a work of art is inseparable from its being imbedded in the fabric of tradition” (Benjamin, 1969). Wine is one of the most embedded traditional objects of class and function in almost every western society. Going back to ancient Greek and Roman times, where one could follow the rise and fall of empires on the planting of grape vines, to the modern day meal, where a glass of wine is part of the center of the conversation, wine is the artwork to be consumed.

“Mechanical reproduction of art changes the reaction of the masses toward art” (Benjamin, 1969). As wine making becomes easier with modern technology, and wine

itself becomes more accessible to the masses, there is still a definitive province to the consumption of the bottle. While the masses become less in awe of the everyday bottle, as they would of a reproduction of a Monet hanging in a dorm room rather than the original, which is still quite out of their reach, there is still the sense of awe that comes about the bottle of Latour being popped open for a taste of the good life. To continue along the theme, “Wine is a food for hierarchy and consequently it contributes to the hierarchization of society” (Guille-Escuret in Demossier, 2001). As Benjamin dictates that true artwork is for the few, so is good wine. The hierarchy that is developed through these mechanical means of reproduction only strengthen the concept of wine as art, as seen through this lens.

Fisher

People think and communicate primarily through stories. Walter J. Fisher writes as much in his discussion on the Narrative Paradigm (1986). Stories are temporal, linear, and have meaning. Stories persuade where arguments do not. We, as humans, go through life, experiencing stories as part of what makes our whole. Without these stories, we would be devoid of our cultures, our histories, as well as the subtleties that make us unique. As we are natural storytellers, we are moved to create visions around those things that we are passionate about. The story of wine is no different. From the creation of the story of terroir, where we look to the history of the Grand Chateau and the chalky earth where the vines have grown for hundreds of years, to the celebration of a birthday, anniversary, or special date, we can see the story. Wine is there playing a symbolic role,

either on center stage or as a supporting character, the story of wine is a story played out on so many levels.

As Fisher incorporates both pathos and logos, so does the story of wine. Not only does the marketing intend to assure us that we will fixate on an emotive response, but we are guaranteed to search for a story to create around it when we consume it. The story of wine, so to speak, is an act of communication unto itself, as it plays itself out in a narrative much like those we create ourselves, for ourselves.

In *Human Communication as Narration* (1987) Fisher also looks to fidelity, and in doing so, establishes five criteria, questions, that influence a stories credibility. These questions are laid out simply, and can be tied to the stories of wine, and the influence that it has upon society. Fisher questions the facts, relevance, consequence, consistency and transcendence of the stories which are told. When we take these criteria and apply them to wine, we can see that the “story” of wine holds up to the narrative of not only a brand as a commodity (Escalas, 2004), but also to the story that we create for ourselves, in that it transcends the commodity by becoming fetishized. Escalas points out that people link brands to self, so too do they link their favorite wines to themselves, creating stories out of these bottles. In the fact that each wine, each winery, is it’s own story, it’s own brand, and this “builds the connection between the consumer and the brand.” When you take in fact that wine has had thousands of years to build up this history, it has been marketing itself in our stories. This makes it extremely relevant, of consequence, of high influence and it transcendence the individual. When you look at the individual bottle, that is a single person’s story. When you look at a vineyard, a thousand people’s stories, and

when you look at the terroir of Burgundy, dating back thousands of years, imagine how many stories are tied to that wine, are because of that wine. The rhetoric of the glass is real, and the stories that it creates are too many to detail.

Commodification

Wine is intrinsically a commodity. It is bought and sold from the highest to the lowest levels. From the land and the grapes to the bottle and the box, the exchange of money for wine and the culture it represents is an exchange of commodities. You can take wine to its consumption, but prior to that, it needs to be analyzed for its value, and in that its connection to the realities of the consumerism that drives our society. Kathleen Brosnan, in her essay “Vin D’Etat” states “All economic activity, including the production of wine, generates both material goods and symbolic meanings. Commodities carry a price in the marketplace, but their producers and consumers also invest noneconomic values in them that vary from culture to culture and over time” (Brosnan, 2013). This makes wine unique in its commodity form, as it has that noneconomic value attached to it. A bottle of wine holds special meaning, from a first date to a wedding toast. Arjun Appadurai, the socio-cultural anthropologist, pushes this thought, “Nostalgia within commodity culture functions such that ‘the viewer need only bring the faculty to the image that will supply the memory of a loss he or she has never suffered’” (Appadurai, 1996). This plays into Marxism, where we look at exchange value vs. use value. In this, the exchange value is separate from the use value, as the price associated with this particular commodity is not necessarily the reason for the demand.

“We have seen that when commodities are in the relation of exchange, their exchange-value manifests itself as something totally independent of their use-value. But if we abstract from their use-value, there remains their value, as has just been defined. The common factor in the exchange relation, or in the exchange-value of the commodity, is therefore its value” (Marx, 1885).

That bottle of wine, once shared with the college roommate, the wine saved for the child's 21st birthday, these are commodities, wines, that are given deeper meaning due to the significance placed upon them by the consumer. There are few, if any, other consumable commodities that hold such significance for the public. Brosnan goes on to state the value of wine and other luxury goods as commodities in American culture in particular. “A core aesthetic of American capitalistic culture, William Leach argues, offered a vision of the good life in which economic success provided access to cultural and social amenities, and material purchases bought consumers a sense of self-worth and their neighbors’ recognition of their accomplishments” (Brosnan, 2013). This ties the intrinsic value of wine as a commodity form to the classist system of commodity formation.

Christina M. Ceisel in her essay “El Sabor De Galicia: Wine as Performance in Galicia, Space” encourages this thought on a broader scale. “Commodities and consumption are central to understanding social and cultural arrangements under late consumer capitalism” (Ceisel, 2013). Pushing this to a global scale, as commodification does not exist in a bubble, and wine is a global commodity, Ceisel asserts that wine is not only part of a commodified culture, but also nationalistic identity. As globalization becomes a greater force and has a larger economic impact locally, it “threatens” local lifestyles and pushes for often times perceived unwelcome change to microcultures. With this, people tend to gravitate towards the local, the known, that which they take pride in.

Appadurai calls this part of “disjunctive and unstable interplay of commerce, media, national policies, and consumer fantasies,” and that resultant focus on ethnicity and primordia is a global force—“slipping in between borders...turning locality into a staging ground for identity” (Appadurai, 1996). Tying this commodity to the story of wine, when identity is placed on a commodity, it becomes part of a larger “heritage” culture, and engages in a story separate from its own. The cultural capital that is associated with that locality, ie: terroir in this instance, is sustainable, even when the product is a global product in high demand. “In these cases, a product is commodified for global export, at the same time that local heritage is drawn on for political, economic, and cultural purposes” (Ceisel, 2013). The negative aspect of this is that at one point it highlights the positives of the story of the land, and at the other, it obfuscates it. No longer is the winemaker the focus, the worker, the creator of the wine, but rather the location becomes how the vine tells its story, representing the nation-state on a global scale. “Many a winemaker will tell you that all good wine is made in the vineyard. However, the commodification of wine and its sale on the globalized markets obscures and naturalizes human labor, knowledge and technology” (Black, Ulin, 2013). This leads us into the essence of the argument itself, is terroir the story of place, or the story of taste?

Terroir

When dealing with pharmacology, technical terms matter, so let us start with that first. “Vine and Wine (OIV) defines terroir as a concept which refers to an area in which collective knowledge of the interactions between the identifiable physical and biological

environmental and applied vitivinicultura practices develops, providing distinctive characteristics for the products originating from this area. Terroir includes specific soil, topography, climate, landscape characteristics and biodiversity features” (Daynes, S. 2013). This definition deals solely with the land and not with the heart of the issue, that of the idea, the concept of terroir and what it invokes in people. Robert Swinburne, in his essay *Wine Drinking Culture In France* states “The idea of terroir moves consumers beyond simple issues of wine quality by providing them with a symbolic connection to a specific piece of land and even to the people who live there when they consume that wine” (Swinburn, 2011). His conceptualization of terroir falls more to the sociality of it. Swinburne believes terroir should be seen as a “living” thing, and as such it is more than just the land that is used to grow the grapes themselves. “When people “live” their terroir, they re-embed themselves into the economy. Accounts that point only to the politics of terroir, or its socially constructed nature, fail to explain why people who already have abundant cultural and economic capital feel moved to undertake long hours of seemingly monotonous work, often in extreme environmental conditions, to produce wine” (Swinburn, 2011). It is through this cultural aspect that the importance of terroir as an artifact other than a chemical component in a liquid makeup of a commodity takes place. The consequences for terroir and wine itself as a commodity identity reach a new level through this. The farming of the wine grape is one of the few commodity callings where there is an elevation of status and identity among those who choose it as either a profession or a professional “hobby.” Rarely is heard the words “I’m growing corn for a bit of fun, why don’t you stop by for harvest” but if you replace the word corn with vinus

vinifera, then you would have a section of people clamoring to help pick. Using the argument that terroir is synonymous with the finer things in life, Ulin calls for a reconfiguration of terroir in this instance, rejecting the subjectivity of the land itself, and pushing for a broader approach that embraces the feeling of the bottle. “Terroir, in my estimation, needs to be refigured in accordance with the history of wine regions and the culturally mediated subjectivity of taste” (Ulin, R. 2007). As wine is dissimilar from other commodity forms, so to is the land it comes from. The land is elevated in this form, both in its historical context and in its modern day usage.

Sarah Daynes, in her essay “The Social Life of Terroir among Bordeaux Winemakers,” finds two distinct definitions of terroir. “The first contends that terroir is everything: there are absolute and insurmountable qualitative differences between different terroirs, and a mechanical relationship between physical terroir and the wine produced. Social practices are embedded in this relationship in the form of techniques, gestures, ways of doing and thinking that are specific to a given place and thought to impact on the wine produced. Thus reproduction is impossible. The second idea contradicts the first, by arguing that terroir does not matter at all: with sufficient science and technique, the “kind of wine” produced somewhere can be reproduced elsewhere, bypassing both the physical and socio cultural specificities of place” (Daynes, S. 2013). As you can see, the concept of terroir is a contradiction even to the experts, and it is through these contradictions this paper will explore the multifaceted breadth of what terroir not only is but means on a sociocultural, political and economical landscape. “Far from being an unchanging, timeless geographical space, terroir is not only a vibrant,

constantly changing, discursive strategy for advancing the claims of individual, regional, and even national interests, but also a means of negotiating change by anchoring...wine in a fixed and territorial defined conception of nature” (Demossier. M. 2011). The importance of wine and terroir as a social concept can not be underestimated. It is unique in its commodity function, as it transcends the simple economy of value placed upon it, and becomes an aspect of societal function, embedded in rituals throughout history to modern day. From the simplistic relaxation over dinner with a glass, to the religious meanings wrought through Judeo-Christian observances, wine is embedded in western civilization.

This review aims to explore the current trends in wine writing and how they engage with topics of commodification and class. It is clear from the research reviewed that the evaluated commentary, while immersive, is not as connected as it could be in the critical cultural sense. Along with this, the study of wine from a social anthropological perspective is still a relatively new field of study. This field of inquiry is important for study as I believe there are many broad aspects of this unique commodity which can be explored from a critical cultural sense. While this paper glances upon multiple topics, from fetishization to the culture industry of wine, all are potential for deeper and more sustained research.

A Very Brief History

“Wine has been with us since the beginning of civilization. It is the temperate, civilized, sacred, romantic, mealtime beverage recommended in the Bible. Wine has been praised for centuries by statesmen, philosophers, poets, and scholars. Wine in moderation is an integral part of

our culture, heritage, and the gracious way of life.” (Prial, 1991)

The birthplace of wine is in dispute. The Mediterranean is often thought to be the cradle of wine and, to be fair, that is where the Greeks and Romans cultivated it. However, the first vineyard was found to be in Armenia, around two thousand kilometers to the east of Greece (Robinson, J. 2015). Hardly in the same neighborhood, and decidedly not under the same cultural influence. However, as Greece and Italy are where the culture of wine developed and moved across what is now modern day Europe, it is to there that we shall go to peek into a brief synopsis of the history of this beverage. The word “wine” itself can be traced back to Latin, where the ancient Romans used the term *vinum* to describe their drink of choice. However, prior to this the Greeks used the *woinos*, (Katovsky, 1986) so arguably, the linguistic connection can be seen. Surprisingly to some, the first flourishing of the cultivation of wine grapes took place under Pharaonic Egypt. As Janis Robinson writes in *The Oxford Companion to Wine (2015)*, it was with trade to the rest of the Mediterranean that wine itself took center stage. As a primary economic export, wine was traded throughout the important centers of the ancient world, and through it, culture and language (Robinson, J. 2015). Ancient Greece is where wine really took hold, however. What we know is that around 2 BC vines were planted all throughout Greece, and that it played a huge part in the culture and economy. In addition, the Greeks had a reputation tied to their wine that was not found elsewhere to the same extent in the ancient world. Their wine was good, and as such, was in demand. Exports from Greece went as far as modern day Russia. The Greek cultivated wine and studied it. They were the first to realize that the soil composition, weather conditions, and grape

variety played a huge difference in how the wine tasted. Later, the Romans would see that lower yields lead to higher quality, thereby furthering the development of the science behind the creation of wine.

Of course, the wine trade continued to assist in creating economic success, and with that established trade routes that might otherwise be available. Through wars, trade routes, and development, wine was introduced to Italy, France, and Sicily. With the rise of the Romans, they took viniculture to new levels, and new places. Wherever the Romans went, so did their thirst for wine, and new grapes were planted in modern day Germany, Austria, and most importantly to some, France. Through the Romans, Bordeaux received its first plantings, to be later developed by the Catholic Church before moving into private hands. “The notion of terroir has become associated with France, in particular Burgundy, because of the disciplined attention to detail of the Benedictine and Cistercian monks that attended the vines there for nearly a thousand years,” (Swinburne, R. 2011). It is this church that brings wine to the new world, planting vines wherever they go, including the “mission grapes” in the California territories. Wine and wineries develop, and winemaking in the United States takes off, particularly in California, where the weather and climate are conducive to grape growing. Tough times abound, however, with the phylloxera blights in 1863 (a pesky aphid that loves to eat vines) in France. Only by splicing American rootstock onto French vines was the French wine industry, much to their dismay of having to rely on the new world, able to save their vines. In the United States, from 1920’s to 1933, Prohibition hit the US markets hard, almost completely devastating the wine market. Through bootlegging and selling blocks of concentrated

grape juice “not to be added to water and left in a cupboard for 21 days, or it would be turned into wine” (Blakemore, E. 2015) is the US market saved, though devastated. One area in California, the Napa valley region, bounced back and excelled, thanks to the climate, soil, and marketing efforts of the passionate winemakers, some of whom will be mentioned further on.

The 1855 Classification and Judgement of Paris

What is the aesthetic value of wine? Like a piece of artwork, it is tied to the emotive response that the consumer feels for it. The socio-economic concerns and contributions that surround it pale in comparison to the simple act of tasting, where the individual relishes that moment of liquid judgement. It is not until this moment that the truth of the wine is revealed, through its history, social value, and the recognition of its sense of place. When we judge wine, we do so as a consumer, judging not only the market value, but what it embodies. Through this analysis, it is still hard to determine a wine’s subjective and objective value. Subjectively, if a wine has a high price, it promises a certain social view on life. Similarly, if the salesperson assures you, as a consumer, that the wine is excellent, with high ratings and other such status symbols, your perception of the wine will be directly reflected in this emotional investment. This allows for a greater attachment to the wine than the sticker price reflects. The value of the wine is simply not just tied to the price tag, but also the feeling that the consumer gets when they open it. A wine’s value is all about its subjective context.

To further delve into this critique, one has to look no further than two definitive

moments in modern wine history, the 1885 Classification and the 1976 Judgement of Paris. The 1885 Classifications of the wines of Bordeaux was developed for the Exposition Universelle, under the reign of Napoleon III. In this, the wine was ranked by price categories. This set the Premier Cru wines in their own category, and classified fifty seven other chateaus in the Bordeaux region into five levels of greatness. The top level being “First Growths,” those that are the most expensive (and therefore best), working down to “Fifth Growths.” This list, created in 1855 has hardly been touched since then. This Classification created a dialectical image of wine, placing value to even those who know not about the quality. The price and classification set in 1885 is still creating a value image for the consumer today. With more than 5 million visitors at the Exposition, this Classification set Bordeaux wine up for world-wine influence and domination. Though there are those in the wine world (Robinson, 1999, Parker, 2003), who see this classification (and the lack of “updating” this list) as a hindrance to the enjoyment and perception of wine, it is still a benchmark for the layman for perception of good wine. Never before had such an event affected the perception of wine as much as this. However, in retrospect, this classification was made before phylloxera, before modern advances in technology, before the global wine revolution we are experiencing today, with “New World” wines and wine practices. To still have this 1855 Classification as a benchmark for wine tells the story of how closely intertwined the sense of place and history are to the palate.

As this Classification serves as the standard for winemaking, it affected New World winemaking styles. As Napa Valley was coming to play on the international stage,

Bordeaux wines, especially Premère Cru, set the standard to beat. Winemakers often tasted their own wines against those of Bordeaux (Mondavi & Chukow, 1998), as a determination of the quality of their own wines. Through this Classification, the commodification of culture can be seen. Wines are given an almost aristocratic value, separating them from the common. As the Classification moves further into the past, so the meaning of it has changed. It is not rational to associate good wine with a standard set years ago, however, that is what has happened. Creating this hierarchy of wine moves it past the rational level of commodification into the world of art and form by creating a demand for a culture that did not exist previously, and putting it in a societal context of prestige and luxury. If you can afford this, you can have a piece of the better life. The contradiction of this is exemplified time and again in the culture associated with the wine world, where the name is often more important than what is in the bottle. This is especially hard to consider today, where wineries such as Chateau Palmer, a “Third Growth” are commanding prices and are considered superior to many second growth wines, and even some first. Unless the Classification system is revisited, perhaps with a blind tasting, the very best wine may very well be classified lower than deserved.

In 1885: *A History of the Bordeaux Classification* (Markham, 1998), Dewey Markham Jr. researched the creation of the Classification system, and in it he found that wine was not the first commodity to be chosen to represent Bordeaux at the Exposition, but rather rope was. Wine was found to be made rather than manufactured. This separation puts wine in the realm of the arts, belonging to the painter, the sculptor, the poet, rather than the hands where it truly lived, that of the corporation, the negotiant, the

bourgeois landowner who saw the industry of the act rather than the cultural response. As the Bordeaux negociants were brought in to assist in the creation of this new hierarchy of wines, they were afraid that those coming in would not appreciate the wine as it should be. Instead of opening the bottles for the consumer to form their own determination, the bottles were to remain closed, thereby ensuring that the mystique of the wine itself would be maintained. This is a point that differentiates the wines of Bordeaux from the other wines from around the world in attendance. The other wines, from places such as Spain or Algeria one could taste, could sense, engage with. Let these other wines be good enough for the common man, the wines of Bordeaux are to be lusted after, and consumed by only those who have earned the right. In a mark of a strange turn, it was not this Bordeaux display that was awarded at the Exposition, but rather the non-classified wines (those that did not make the cut for a “growth” label) were displayed in the “Domestic Economy” section (Markham, 1998). They were awarded honors, tying them to the thought of high quality at low price. This endowed the consumer to then realize that if the unclassified wines were of such strong quality, what must the higher priced wines be like? With this, the mystique and myth of the Bordeaux wine tiers was reinforced and still serves as a mark of quality today.

The Judgement of Paris

1976, the year that put California wine on the global map and changed the wine world as it is known today. Called The Judgement of Paris, this small event was put together by one Steven Spurrier, an Englishman who ran the Academie du Vin, a well-to-

do wine shop in Paris. Choosing the bicentennial as an excellent time to shake up the establishment and perhaps have a little fun, Spurrier invited notables such as The Secretary of the Grand Crus Classé in Bordeaux, Michelin restaurateurs, and owners of grand Burgundy Estates. These people had made it their lives defining what taste and sophistication should be considered in fine dining and wine (Ashenfelter, 2006). It was not until they arrived at the event that Spurrier told them that French wine would be included in the blind tasting, afraid some of them would bow out or refuse to taste. They stayed, and much to their shock and chagrin, they learned that they had accepted two Napa wineries, Chateau Montelena and Stag's Leap as top scorers against some of the largest and best loved French houses. The judges cried foul, one even attempting to change their score, saying they had been tricked. The French press chose not to report on the event, instead ignoring it. If it had not been for George Taber of Time magazine, who reported on it, Napa may never have risen to the predominance in our minds that it holds today. One instance, almost overlooked, gives us a sense of time and place, and helped install an American institution. It was a bottle of the Stag's Leap which took predominance over the Bordeaux first growths, and a bottle of Chateau Montelena chardonnay which beat the prized white wines of Chablis in Burgundy. After the Judgement of Paris, California wine rose in prominence, and could no longer be ignored on the world stage. They were now considered worthy of the titles of elegant, and could now be accepted at the finest dinner tables in the world without condemnation. "That 1976 tasting was not just a defining moment for California winemakers, it also invigorated the global wine industry and inspired grape growers and winemakers from

unknown wine regions in Chile, Spain, Argentina, New Zealand, Australia and the great states of Washington and Oregon to expand their ambitions” (Western Farm Press, 2011).

Terroir, To Kalon and Champagne

Blind tastings remove the story from behind the wine. When there is no story, how can one envision the sense of place, close their eyes and think of the rolling hills or valley floor? How can they experience the terroir, the culture, the feel of the wine? How much is lost when one does not know where the wine comes from? These are a lot of rhetorical questions, perhaps with little answer other than “quite a bit.” A sommelier participates in numerous blind tastings, where they are to “seek out” the sense of place in a glass of wine. Is it old world, or is it new? If it is new, what country does it come from? How old is it? They train continuously to be able to find the story in the glass itself. Knowing a sense of place in a wine separates it from other commodities, such as a box of Oreos or a Pepsi. These things can be produced all over the world, but that one glass of wine, well, as an example, it can only be created on the chalky Sonoma Coast, high in the mountains, where the fog settles in the evening, only to be burnt away by the heat of the intense sun, giving the Pinot Noir grapes a unique characteristic intensity and lushness with a balanced complexity. That glass of wine was harvested at the peak of ripeness, as the brix (sugar) levels in the grapes were just right, and then aged with a lovely acid and tannin balance. In that glass of wine you find the story of the winemaker, the story you can tell your friends, of how you visited the winery on your vacation, touched the grapes yourself, maybe even met the winemaker in passing. That is the story of wine that you

cannot find in another mass consumer product, and that is why terroir is so important.

As a more technical version of the definition of terroir was mentioned earlier in the literature review, I would like to touch on the definition in a more simplistic sense. Taking *Webster's Dictionary*, which is an excellent place for a basic definition, we see that it defines terroir in two ways. The first, having to do with the soil, topography and climate in which the wine is produced. The second, the taste and flavor imparted in the wine by the environment in which it is cultivated (Websters, 2016). The difference in these definitions is the difference between a sense of place and a sense of taste. In the culture of wine, terroir is called upon when noticing the subtleties in the flavors of the earth in wine. This can come from the rocks, stone, sand, limestone, chalk and clay in the soil. A winemaker who listens to what the land has to impart reflects this in the wine they create, enabling a layman who is tasting their wine to experience the land itself, should they seek it out in their glass. Terroir is used as a reflection of the culture of not only the grape, but also of the place where the wine was produced. When these two definitions are looked at in combination, they reflect the totality of the vine, the grape, the process and the wine. Terroir is often found with the import of fine wines, rather than in boxed, inexpensive, jug wines. It is associated with the finer things in life, and as such should be looked at from a cultural construct. "Terroirs foundation in both the sensorial and the traditions of the quotidian infects its defining duality of singularity on the one hand, and a potential to be exported beyond the crucial geographical site that is the source of its essence, on the other" (Davidson, 2007).

When the winemaker pays attention to terroir, it translates--into dollar signs for

the winemaker and the region. The question then becomes as to whether terroir is real, or a marketing ploy to placate the masses into purchasing a wine for a higher price? There is no reliable scientific method for determining terroir in a glass of wine. However, there are some regions that impart certain flavors to the wine, through the climate and soil (Furrow, 2013). It is up to the wine connoisseur to pick out these flavors, and determine the sense of place from them. However, not everyone is in agreement. Steve Heimoff, a wine critic for the popular and much recognized wine magazine *Wine Enthusiast*, has added “fuel” to the fire of the debate. As a scholar of wine, and of the taste of wine, he states,

“Personally, I always had my doubts. While I could certainly tell that Napa Valley Cabernet was better than Cabs from elsewhere (as a general rule; not always in every instance), I always felt some skepticism when someone told me about how radically different Rutherford and Oakville were, or Howell Mountain and Mount Veeder. I didn’t see it quite that way. But one learns to keep one’s mouth shut in such cases: I feared that perhaps it was my lack of ability that prevented me from detecting what seemed so obvious to others” (Heimoff, 2013).

Focusing on Bordeaux, Heimoff goes on to say that winemaking styles are becoming more and more similar. Cabernet is being planted in favor of Malbec or Merlot, grapes are being picked at riper stages, making for more fruit-forward wines. Benjamin Lewin, in his book *Claret & Cabs* (2013) expands on this by stating “I suspect...that [terroir] differences were brought out in the past by marginal conditions” (conditions rarely found in modern day Bordeaux) “it would be a fine taster who could always tell the difference between St. Julien and Pauillac.” The uniformity which is now found in many wines, along with modern winemaking techniques, make the theory of terroir almost irrelevant as anything other than a marketing technique to some. While there are regions, such as

New Zealand, with its Sauvignon Blanc which is so indicative of the region that in 2004, a scandal erupted when several of South Africa's top winemakers were charged with adding green pepper extract to their wines (Lechmere, 2004) to replicate the taste of these popular wines' terroir. Over 60,000 liters of wine had to be destroyed for being altered, all because of the sense of place that is in debate. When the sense of place, terroir, is of such import that winemakers are willing to break the law to replicate it, it can't be "just marketing" on the whole. On a large scale, terroir is an indicative mark of wine.

However, one needs to see the broad brushstroke of geography in order to put this in a subjective mind. While Bordeaux wines may be tasting similar as time goes on, Bordeaux is still easily discernible from Napa wines. Without alteration, South African Sauvignon Blancs would taste far different from New Zealand wines. Site specificity may not play as grand of a role, but location does mean something. In Amy Trubek's book *Taste of Place: a Cultural Journey into Terroir* (Trubek, 2008), she pushes that the meaning of terroir was created in the early part of the twentieth century by the French who wanted to combine tourism and taste. In this, they created a "language of taste." Similar to Alice Waters of Chez Panisse fame's move of "slow food," locally sourced and sustainable, these epicurious image makers pushed for a sense of locality in all things. Terroir being expressed as a marketing technique goes back to the 1855 Classification. The further wine is traded, the more important this "sense of place" is. It can be said that the globalization of wine lead to terroir becoming an important factor in the description of wine, and from that, was incorporated into the perception and marketing of wine. Trubek calls this "the first attempt by those involved in wine production and sales to promote the

quality of wine by their place of origin.” This movement held true as the growing of wine became popular in the United States, and the formulation of AVA’s occurred.

The French, Americans, and many other countries have put a considerable amount of effort into ensuring that there is an established sense of place in regards to their wines. In France, the Appellation d'origine Contrôlée (AOC) was established under Napoleon’s government as a way to regulate and control the quality of wine in France and on the international market. This list came about shortly after the Classification of 1855, and encompassed all of French Wines. Originally, it was intended to be based on price, and was considered fluid. However, in 1862 for London’s Great Exhibition, the same list that was created, and featured the original structure. This helped solidify the “great” houses of Bordeaux, pushing their sense of place and terroir in history (Zhao, W. 2008).

In the establishment and formulation of its own system, the United States is a relative newcomer. Thanks in large part to prohibition decimating the American wine industry, the United States lagged behind the rest of the wine growing world by decades. It wasn’t until 1980 that the first AVA, American Viticulture Area, was established, not in Napa or Sonoma, or other locations that are related to wine as we know it, but in Augusta, Missouri. Sometimes, even great marketing doesn’t work when the government is involved. In reality, terroir can be found anywhere. Going back to the Judgement of Paris, without that sense of place attached to the wine, the fundamentals of what is special, prestigious, almost religious about an individual bottle fall behind and the story is lost. “David Harvey reminds us that capitalistic economies generate spaces suited to the accumulation of capital (2006). In thinking about terroir we must think about the kinds of

economic imperatives that govern the way land is rebuilt for agricultural production. Producing unique wines is not just a matter of letting the land speak, but also producing in yields and cost performance ratios that allow the winery to subsist economically as well” (Cisterna, 2013). When the magic of terroir is lost, the story disappears. The location, the history, the dynamic symbolic representation of the grape in it’s place no matter has meaning and instead becomes like any other beverage, hence, Agusta receiving the first AVA designation.

It wasn’t until 1966, when a young man named Robert Mondavi established the first new winery in Napa Valley since prohibition. In realizing the great potential of this fertile valley floor, Mondavi, the son of an iron worker turned grape grower, put California and the Napa region back on the world stage for great wine.

Mondavi and To Kalon

Prior to the turn of the 20th Century, there was a winery in Napa Valley which used the name ‘Tokalon’... That winery was sold off in parcels during the first fifteen to twenty years of the 20th Century and use of the name was discontinued. Accordingly, although the name has some historical significance, it has no current meaning or significance in the wine industry.

-Robert Mondavi Winery, responding to the US Patent and Trademark Office in 1987, in the matter of the TO KALON trademark application.

Robert Mondavi has capitalized on the notion of terroir. Mondavi took the French model of great wine growing, with special attention to terroir and winemaking techniques and turned it into something unique to Napa. Creating bigger, bolder, wines that are famous for their ripeness (Siler, J. 2007), Mondavi helped draw others to Napa and the

surrounding region. In 1966, Mondavi established the first new winery in Napa Valley since prohibition. In realizing the great potential of this fertile valley floor, Mondavi, the son of an iron worker turned grape grower, put California and the Napa region back on the world stage for great wine.

To Kalon, Robert Mondavi's most famous vineyard, with wines from it ranging from \$300 to \$3000 retail, is a story of terroir unto itself. To Kalon means beauty in Greek, and is thought to be the ideal of what Napa terroir should be. The perfect soil, climate, and essence to grow amazing wine. The story of To Kalon is much more complicated than that, however. There are two companies that hold a piece of this land, the first being the Robert Mondavi Company and the second being Beckstoffer Vineyards, a grape grower. Beckstoffer originally offered their grapes to winemakers under the name "Beckstoffer Oakville to Kalon," however, realizing the power of the name To Kalon, they convinced one of their premium wineries to change the name on their bottles to "Beckstoffer Oakville to Kalon" in 2003, proving that there is much to be said in a name. Mondavi, of course, battled against this, which led to a countersuit. In that, Beckstoffer revealed that Mondavi over exaggerated the size of the To Kalon vineyard, and that some of their wines labeled To Kalon were not even from inside the original dimensions of the vineyard. From this, both cases were settled out of court, and Beckstoffer was allowed to use the name To Kalon on their labels, subject to a case count. From 2003 onward, Beckstoffer used the name as a vineyard designate, with a minimum of 95% of the grapes coming from To Kalon fruit in order to have the name on the label (Stamp, M. 2016). For Mondavi, the To Kalon name did not appear on a bottle

until 2011, and it's used as a trademark, rather than a designation. This means that Mondavi is not subject to the Alcohol and Tobacco Trade Bureau regulation (and there is no say of what percentage of the grapes come from this vineyard as such) while the Beckstoffer does. Looking at this, is the terroir in the name or is the terroir in the land? Which would you, as a consumer, rather purchase, if you knew the difference? Mondavi's bottle has the story of the name behind it, while Beckstoffer has the land behind it.

Champagne

In defense of terroir, one can look no further than the regions of Champagne, France. While Burgundy is more synonymous with terroir in a microcosmic level, I would argue that for the everyday wine drinker, it is easier to associate sparkling wine with Champagne than it is Pinot Noir with Burgundy. This region is more ubiquitous and synonymous with terroir and yet, in defending their branding, they in turn, create a classist dictation of aesthetic judgement of taste, in which social structure may be, in fact, more important than taste.

“Come quickly for I am drinking the stars!” These are the words attributed to the famous Monk Dom Perignon in 1693, who was said to discover the double fermentation process which lead to the carbonation found in sparkling wine. What we know as *méthode champenoise*, or the champagne method, was seen as a fault during Dom Perignon's time, and not a remarkably nice thing to see in your wine at all. The problem was the bottles kept exploding once the wine started undergoing this process. It wasn't

until a bit later, when a method for more consistent bottle making was developed that this sparkling wine really took off.

However, like Kleenex and Xerox, everything from cheap sparkling wine from California to Cremant from the Loire Valley was being called, simply, Champagne.

The idea of terroir moves consumers beyond simple issues of wine quality by providing them with symbolic connection to a specific piece of land and even to the people who live there when they consume the wine. This is a powerful idea for wine producers and consumers, and it lies at the heart of booming wine tourism (Swinburne, R. 2013).

Champagne, as a region needed to defend its brand, has grasped this concept to the fullest. The brand lends to the story of the wine, and in turn, becomes the wine itself. “Social practices are embedded in this relation in the form of techniques, gestures, ways of doing and thinking that are specific to a given place and thought to impact on the wine produced. Thus reproduction is impossible. The second idea contradicts the first, by arguing that terroir does not matter at all: with sufficient science and technique, the “kind of wine produced somewhere can be reproduced elsewhere, bypassing both the physical and socio-cultural specificities of place” (Daynes, 2013). It was with this and similar thoughts that the region struck back, to speak, and in 1985 successfully protected their name in both Europe and the The United States (Stephenson, T. 2005). Nowadays, a consumer will only legally find the words “California Champagne” on one bottle--that from the Korbel winery, which lobbied to have its name grandfathered in. The lengths that a region or winery will go to in order to protect their concept of terroir are oftentimes extreme, but to a point. “For terroir to be a useful category of analysis, it must incorporate how environments are turned into spaces of capitalistic production, be it

material production as in the growing of vines, or symbolic production” (Cisterna, 2013). If the terroir is not protected, what is, in fact, a wine? Even the terms “*méthode champenoise*, or the champagne method” are now trademarked strictly for the Champagne region in the European Union. “When the vigneronns of the region of Champagne wanted to reclaim the name--at one time widely used elsewhere for sparkling wine--they turned to the grapes and the soil and, by valorizing them, successfully laid claim to the name and legitimizing the idea that Champagne as a region was fundamental to the identity of champagne as a beverage” (Trubek, 2008). This determination to claim their rightful name through the terroir has lead the world to recognize Champagne as the definition of a region and a wine, the two being inseparable.

“The production of locality is a reminder that even the most apparently mechanical forms of social order that seem to function without design, contingency, or intentionally but simply by the force of routine--what we used to call habit- involve large amounts of deliberate attention, effort and labor. Part of that attention, effort, and labor is involved in *collective ideas of what is possible*. Therefore, for the local to have some spatialized embodiment takes an effort which transcends that very spatiality. So the idea is not to, as it were, de-spatialize the local, or evacuate the spatial from the local, but to add something to it. That is to say, for mere spatiality to take its form, there has to be an effort, a “production of locality,” which is much more complex. Once that effort to produce the local is fully observed, we will also, among other things, get a deeper sense of what it means to produce, inhabit, and sustain spatial relations. We won’t have substituted something else for the spatial part of the local but will have enriched the logic of the spatial in the local” (Appadurai, 2003)

There needs to be a story, a sense of place, for development. If that is appropriated, or delineated, the importance of the sense of place is nulled, and it simply becomes a commodity. There is prestige that is granted in authenticity, and when you

have a glass of wine in your hand that you can say has a story behind it, it means much more. These production of localities, however, come at a price. The region of Champagne produces over (approximately) three hundred million bottles of wine a year. Following is a list of the bottle production (Woodard, R. 2014) from some of the larger houses. Note that these houses have wines that often sell in the range of over fifty to three hundred dollars.

- Bollinger 2.5 million
- Dom Perignon 5 million bottles produced in each vintage year
- Krug 500,000 bottles
- Lanson 1.3 million
- Laurent Perrier 7 million
- Louis Roederer 3.2 million
- Moet & Chandon 26 million
- Mumm 5 million
- Nicolas Feuillatte 10 million
- Perrier Jouet 3 million
- Piper Heidsieck 5 million
- Pol Roger 1.5 million
- Pommery 5 million
- Ruinart 2.5 million
- Taittinger 5 million
- Tarlant 100,000 bottles

- Veuve Clicquot 10 million

(retrieved from: glassofbubbles.com, 2017)

The marketing of champagne, as a region, has been the marketing of the classist system. As far as we can trace the production of champagne, we can see the promise of the sophistication, gaiety, and extravagance. Champagne is a luxury unlike any other. During the Restoration court in England, it was lauded, followed quickly by the courts of France--Louis XV famously had a bottle of it just prior to his execution. Napoleon himself was great friends of M. Moet (of Moet and Chandon fame) and during the wars, entrepreneurs followed the troops to sell them this sparkling delight, to help them forget their troubles, at least for a bit. It was because of this that the rest of Europe was able to experience the delight of champagne in a fuller form, and as it became more available, it was marketed as an extravagance. In the first act of celebrity endorsement for champagne, in 1866, Moet commissioned George Leybourne, a famous entertainer of his time, to drink only champagne in public, and to extol the virtues of the bubbly drink. This in turn established champagne as a status symbol (Guy, K. 1999), and the cult of the celebrity attached to the glass of sparkling effervescent symbol of status continues to this day.

It is with this popularity, much reminiscent of the De Beers diamond campaign, that we can see the world of Champagne in its startling formation. Take for instance, Dom Perignon. Ranging in price at \$190-360, you would think it unique, special, to be opened only upon opulence. As the saying in the wine world goes, however, “it’s the most expensive wine you can find in a strip club” (Murray, A. 2005). With an estimated

production of over five million bottles a year, Dom Perignon is anything but elite.

Perception, in this case, is the key to success. Let people believe that this wine is unobtainable, and they will want it, they will desire it, they will crave it.

“The struggles to win everything which, in the social world, is of the order of belief, credit and discredit, perception and appreciation, knowledge and recognition---name, renown, prestige, honour, glory, authority, ways concern the ‘distinguished’ possessors and the ‘pretentious’ challengers. Pretension, the recognition of distinction that is affirmed in the effort to possess it, albeit in the illusory form of bluff or imitation, inspires the acquisition, in itself vulgarizing, of the previous most distinctive properties, it thus helps to maintain constant tension in the symbolic goods market, forcing the possessors of distinctive properties threatened with popularization to engage in an endless pursuit of new properties through which to assert their rarity. The demand which is generated by this dialectic is by definition inexhaustible since the dominated needs which constitute it must endlessly redefine themselves in terms of a distinction which always defines itself negatively in relation to them” (Bourdieu, 1984).

The marketing that the Dom Perignon house has done to project itself as an object of opulence and yet still maintain a market share of sustainable quantity at exceptional cost is extraordinarily impressive. It is hard to see another consumable commodity where such distinction or lack thereof is made is taken in excess. Perception is key, marketing, branding, and most importantly, protection of the terroir, sense of place and the land. Without the concept of Champagne being such that it is, there would be no Dom Perignon as a brand. Without that history, it would be the same as a Cremant from Burgundy, or a sparkling wine from California. However, through protection of its brand, it’s sense of place and taste, the terroir, it is elevated above all other production locations for sparkling wines.

Within these two examples, that of Mondavi and Champagne, the story of terroir

can be shown in different ways. For many, the ability to have a piece of something greater than just a glass of wine is extremely enticing. To be able to say “when I proposed, and we opened the bottle of 2006 Dom Perignon,” to sit back and remember the vineyard you visited, to be able to tell your friends of the time you tasted the best that Napa Valley has to offer. When one is selling a high-end wine, one is selling a memory, a moment, something beyond the glass. That memory is tied to the terroir as much as it is tied to the marketing department. This symbolic connection is, in part, what drives the wine industry, and as we allow it to entice our senses as a piece of art, it is an art that has been perfected over countless years of honing.

Commodification of Wine

Wine is a commodity. There is no contesting this. The culture of wine is intrinsic to the commodity culture. The play is between the grape grower to the winemaker and the consumer, and while there is a constant story being told, there is still the transaction taking place.

“Within the capitalist system all methods for raising the social productiveness of labor are brought about at the cost of the individual laborer; all means for the development of production transform themselves into means of domination over, and exploitation of, to the producers; they mutilate the labourer into a fragment of a man, degrade him to the level of an appendage of a machine, destroy every remnant of charm in his work and turn it into a hated toil; they estrange from him the intellectual potentialities of the labor process in the same proportion as science is incorporated in it as an independent power; they distort the conditions under which he works, subject him during the labour process to a despotism the more hateful for its meanness; they transform his life-time into work-time, and drag his wife and child beneath the wheels of the

Juggernaut of capital. But all methods for the production of surplus-value are at the same time methods of accumulation; and every extension of accumulation becomes again a means for the development of those methods. It follows therefore that in proportion as capital accumulates, the lot of the labourer, be his payment high or low, must grow worse. The law, finally, that always equilibrates the relative surplus population, or industrial reserve army, to the extent and energy of accumulation, this law rivets the labourer to capital more firmly than the wedges of Vulcan did Prometheus to the rock. It establishes an accumulation of misery, corresponding with accumulation of capital. Accumulation of wealth at one pole is, therefore, at the same time accumulation of misery, agony of toil slavery, ignorance, brutality, mental degradation, at the opposite pole, i.e., on the side of the class that produces its own product in the form of capital” (Marx, K. 1906).

These are words that one does not often think of when pondering a glass of wine. Sitting down with a glass, a bottle, thoughts usually turn to the winemaker, the grapes, the terroir, but rarely the workers who go into making the wine. The farmhands who travel from winery to winery during harvest, picking grapes, and using their labor to ensure that the lovely Cabernet Sauvignon in your glass is as delightful as you would hope. “Marx argued that commodities have a dual nature in that they have both use value and exchange value. Although admittedly utilitarian, for Marx, use value is not simply a given or natural in that he regards needs as socially produced” (Ulin, R. 2013). Perhaps more simply summed up for a wine bottle, “Value...does not stalk about with a label describing what it is. It is value, rather, that converts every product into a social hieroglyphic” (Marx, K. 1906). Modern day wine culture is inarguably a commodity venture of the highest order. Starting with the exchange of money for labour of the migrant worker, to the exchange of the grapes from the grape grower to the winemaker, and so on to where you, as the consumer, purchase the bottle from your local shop. The migrant worker will not have the same taste in wine as you, nor will the grape grower,

and possibly even the wine maker. What is shared is the commodification of the wine as itself. This medium of value and exchange is a cross-connect between the consumption of the wine itself and the value that the consumer puts into wine as a commodity. We use price as a relative index to enhance this fermented grape juice's material value above its structure. It is with this that the relative value which is perceived by the consumer enhances wine above the commodity as it is.

The power of a wine label and its price can affect how we perceive how a wine will taste. Imagine two glasses of wine before you. On one side, you have a beautiful bottle, with an elegant chateau, and the rolling hills of the French countryside. On the other, there is a label with a comical looking goat jumping over a fence. You know that both these bottles come from the same region in France. You know they even have similar ratings. However, your perception of the wine will be completely different, because you saw the labels. You will see the second bottle as cheaper, fruitier, less complex. Without knowing the price, you will assume the first to be more elegant, of higher value, and of better quality. "A number of studies have identified that the information on the label directly influences people's perception of the quality and attributes of the wine. One of the most famous studies was undertaken by Frederic Brocet (2001), who identified that when people are incorrectly told that the wine is expensive they virtually always report it as tasting better than the very same wine when they are told it is inexpensive: (Morgan, 2015). Similarly, in 2008, a team composed of economists and neuroscientists came up with a neuromarketing experiment. Subjects with a knowledge of red wine tasted different wines while their brain activity levels were

scanned. Wine was “pumped” into the individuals mouths, and during so, the subjects were told the cost of the wine. While five wines were said to be used, at different price points, only three were in truth. The conclusion from this study showed that people, even when tasting the same wine, will perceive greater pleasure from it if it comes at a higher price (Plassmann, et. al 2008). In 2013, a study was performed “in which the same wine was presented to a panel of regular wine drinkers who were either told that the wine had been given a positive rating (and expert score of 92 out of 100 points) or a negative rating (i.e. they were told that it had scored a 72 out of 100). This information was provided prior to each tasting. The consequence was that the negative rating resulted in negative perceptions of the wine by the drinkers, while the wine that was positively rated resulted in positive assessment of the wine” (Sester, 2013). From this, the assumption is made that when you pay more for something, it makes you feel good, gives you pleasure, and causes a positive neural response. However, the price (or ratings) of these wines in each experiment did not measure the value of the wine, but only the perceived intrinsic value. Is price truly an indicator of value then, or can we all pop off down to our local shop, buy the three dollar bottle for dinner, and tell your guests you paid three hundred? Does higher price equate to higher quality? So much of the story affects our perception that it is virtually impossible to be unbiased by it if it is presented with anything other than a blank canvas, as with The Judgement of Paris, and other blind tastings.

However, that is not how wine is sold, marketed, or commodified.

Notwithstanding, to reiterate the previous point of the cheap wine might be the best wine, one more study to note. In 2008, a mass blind tasting of 560 wines by 507 wine

consumers was done. The results were published in the book *The Wine Trials* (Goldstein & Herschkowitsch, 2008), and in such, they discovered something that did not meet with enthusiastic response by the public. They had wines of varying prices, but gave no information about the wines. On the whole, consumers who did not know the price of the bottle tended to enjoy the lower priced wines more than the expensive ones. This makes the argument for buying the inexpensive wine all the more relevant for the average consumer. In this, Goldstein asks “Is the wine drinker’s judgement of the experience that’s altered by knowledge that a wine is expensive? Or is it the experience itself?” The author goes on to answer his own question, “I believe it to be the latter: it’s the experience itself that changes when you know the wine is expensive. I do not believe that most wine drinkers simply pretend to like wine better because it is expensive, and I do not believe they are lying to others, or even themselves, when they report getting more pleasure from premium-priced wines” (Goldstein & Herschkowitsch, 2008). He concludes what people are really tasting is “the taste of money” when they have a pleasurable experience from a glass of expensive wine. Eric Asimov, the famous *New York Times* wine writer scoffed at these findings, staying that it is not useful for anyone who is above a casual wine drinker, comparing fine wine to fine art. “Think of visiting a museum of modern art. Those who don’t study art, and rarely think about it, will have a much different reaction to, say, a Jackson Pollock, than somebody who’s greatly interested in modern art and knows a bit about Pollock and his contemporaries. Many people might have to do some reading and research on their own, or even take an art history course, to begin to understand what critics and art historians saw in Pollock. Some

might conclude it's all hogwash, but others might gain a deep and rewarding appreciation" (Asimov, 2008). He also points out the inherent flaw in this study, that the grand level of blind tasting, can, in fact, destroy the palate for a moment so only the fruitiest and most forward ("cheaper") wines shine through. So are there elitist snobs, who only value price above tastes, or do they have a more "educated" and "refined" sense of what to look for in a wine?

This should not be perceived as a battle between the classes, but rather one where consumption differs by class. "The very wealthy have the means to purchase, and thus sustain, wines at the very top end of the market that, by their exclusiveness and apparent quality, define the essence of what wine should be. These very expensive wines set the tone for the rest of the industry as the ideals they embody seep down and are filtered through the middle and lower market segments. The middle classes are critical for they often engage enthusiastically in the way wine consumption is linked to indications of status, here seeking to emulate the consumption patterns of the wealthy by consuming wines that retain some important markers of prestige. At the bottom end of the scale, the poor, particularly the rural poor, may well be moving away from wine consumption, at least in many old wine-producing regions, in terms of seeing it as a very cheap home-produced or locally produced everyday item of consumption" (Overton, J. 2013).

Looking upon this theme, we see that wine, once considered an easily accessible, is now being removed from the realm of those who once saw it as an everyday drink. Bourdieu magnifies this by speaking of the "economy of cultural goods." In this, society attempts to create the environment in which the "consumers of cultural goods, and their taste for

them, are produced, and at the same time to describe the different ways of appropriating such of these objects as are regarded at a particular moment as works of art, and the social conditions of the constitution of the mode of appropriation that is considered legitimate” (Bourdieu, 1984). So like the artwork of which Benjamin speaks, so is wine in the sense of its legitimizing societal conditioning.

How a winery chooses to represent itself, through marketing, its label, its terroir, its story, is a reflection as to its social exchange in the cultural phenomenon of commodification. Consumption can be said to be driven in many ways, by cost, by location, by label, by review, by class. The choices that consumers make as members of the culture industry, either as elite aficionados who only collect from their favorite Tuscan villages, or the college senior buying the box of wine for their weekend party, are reflected as a socioeconomic division, and yet still, in the purchase of wine as their primary commodity, they both reflect a normative viewpoint of intellectual classism. As Marx relates to us the social relations of productions, so I point us to the terroir as the signifier in the story of wine. So much can be replicated in a tank, but without a sense of place, wine becomes like any other beverage to be held at hand. The terroir gives us the story, and it is this story that enables it to become more than other commodities. When we think of a wine from Bordeaux, from Napa, from Australia, we tie it to a sense of place, to it’s story. We perceive more attached to the wines. Similarly, when told a story of a wine, whether it be from a critic, a marketing firm, a celebrity, or an advertisement, we relate to the wine with all our senses, and the wine does not judge class, but rather class judges wine. We fetishize it from all levels and aspects, but as an overriding culture,

continue to engage with it, remodel it, innovate with it, and most importantly, consume it, thus reinforcing its position and status.

When thinking about wine, it is often related to many things: power, privilege, social class. What it is less often related to is the simple marketing of it as a consumable product. When we have the perception of class related to the perception of price, these are the semiotic symbols which present themselves to us and help us make our decisions in choosing the “proper” wine. The aesthetic value of the wine is directly related to our perception of it. “Some informants consider wine to have elements of a work of art. However, more widely noted was the fact that wine, like artworks, can invoke a sense of pleasure--focusing on an awareness of the beauty of the product. This includes both a “hedonistic experience” --the general awareness of pleasure--and a deeper, more profound aesthetic experience” (Charters and Pettigrew, 2005). Through this, should we look at wine like an art form, to be enjoyed more by those who study it? Or is it all in the marketing and price? Take for instance, the case of boxed wine. Wine from a box is often associated with college parties, jungle juice, lower class and the lower income. It is for those who can not afford better. This perception may be changing with the availability of higher quality wines becoming available in box form, however, it is a very slow process. “There is so much culture invested in the ritual of wine consumption that wine in a box affronts the senses of the wine aficionado, much as did jug wine in the past or drinking wine from plastic or paper cups in the present” (Ulin, 2013). As much as we, as a culture, fetishize wine, we still choose to disassociate ourselves from it in non-normative cultural forms. “Wine should come in a bottle” is the predominant thought, because that is its

historical context. “The absolute artwork converges with the absolute commodity” (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1972). This is not to say that box wine sales are not booming, it is currently one of the largest growing segments of the wine industry, marking 18% of the American market, a growth of almost 19% year over year (Patterson, 2010). In some cultures, such as Australia, it is a normative. Boxed wine, in its essence, is simply not classy on one end, and not ageable, on the other. In short, its there for the party, and not the one with the fine linen. Similar thoughts can be brought to the subject of screw caps. We, as consumers, tend to see screwcap wines in the same light as boxed. It should be for cheap wine, for picnics, daytime drinking, and definitely not for red wines that have a higher social context. However, this perception has been created largely in part by the cork industry, who have had airtight contracts on the wine industry since the 1740’s (Clarke, 2015). With Portugal and Spain having the largest cork industries in the world, there is a limited amount of cork produced (keeping the market high), new world wine regions such as Australia have had to innovate in order to maintain any form of quality control. With high prices on solid cork, or the alternative, pressed cork that leads to a high amount of wine failure (over oxidation, bad wine, etc.), these new regions have little alternative. “In accord with its model, the fetish character of the commodity, the new becomes a fetish, this is to be criticized in the work itself, not externally simply because it became a fetish; usually the problem is a discrepancy between new means and old means. If innovation is mechanically pursued in a direction that has already been tried, the direction of innovation must be changed and sought in another dimension. The abstractly new can stagnate and fall back into the ever same. Fetishization expresses the paradox of

all art that is no longer self evident to itself: the paradox that something made exists for its own sake; precisely this paradox is the vital nerve of new art” (Adorno, 1996). The cork industry has tried to stifle this innovation through negative marketing (Siegel, 2010), striking back at the innovators who have pressed into their territory, before the screwcap can become part of the fetishized wine market.

Fetishization of Wine

“Commodities produced under conditions of alienation appear to take on a life of their own, that is, they easily lend themselves to fetishization, a point that its analog in Adam Smith’s “Invisible Hand of the Market,” where market forces operate independently from human agency and social relations...I maintain that wine along with other notable food commodities such as chocolate and coffee are object of fetish in our society in that we associate such food commodities with distinction, aesthetic value, and even the art of living that leaves the condition of their production and the critical analysis of their consumption in the historical and social margins” (Ulin, 2013).

Wine is one of the most symbolically and culturally charged commodities. When people consider wine, they think of the good life, bourgeois moments, prestigious occasions on which to celebrate. The Marxist tradition, according to which commodities were often regarded as coming from social labor, ignore their cultural articulations and by that their social meanings. Thinking profoundly about how culture shapes the goods we produce, represent and consume. For Marx, commodity fetishism involved replacing the relations between people with relations between objects in a way that disregarded the social aspects and more importantly the labor of producing the commodity.

“As against this, the commodity-form and the value-relation of the products of labour within which it appears, have absolutely no connection with the physical nature of the commodity and the material relations

arising out of this. It is nothing but the definite social relation between men themselves which assumes here, for them, the fantastic form of a relation between things. In order, therefore, to find an analogy we must take flight into the misty realm of religion. There the products of the human brain appear as autonomous figures endowed with a life of their own, which enter into relations both with each other and with the human race. So it is in the world of commodities with the products of men's hands. I call this the fetishism which attaches itself to the products of labour as soon as they are produced as commodities, and is therefore inseparable from the production of commodities" (Marx, 1906).

This mystical value that we attribute to wine is not because of the labor that goes into its creation, but because of its commodification, its mystique, the story it has to tell in its history and terroir. One has to look no further than the high-end value collectors of wine or the niche collectors, always seeking that one extra bottle to complete their collection. Wine collecting is a perfect example of the height of fetishism, unlike consumers and collectors of other goods, such as chocolate, coffee and even cars. Many times, collectors never open special bottles, preferring to have them as a signature piece in their collection, to brag about, or to show, but never to consume, these bottles being far too valuable in existence. Once that bottle is consumed, it is lost to the world in everything but a memory.

"It was Antonio Gramsci who said somewhere that the worker tends to bring his executant dispositions with him to every area of life. As much as by the absence of luxury goods, whisky or paintings, champagne or concerts, cruises or art exhibitions, caviar or antiques, the working class lifestyle is characterized by the presence of numerous cheap substitutes for these rare goods, 'sparkling white wine' for champagne, imitation leather for real leather, reproductions for paintings, indices of a dispossession at the second power, which accepts the definition of goods worthy of being possessed" (Bourdieu, 1984).

Marx speaks of fetishism in order to explain the lure of the commodity. "A commodity appears at first sight an extremely obvious, trivial thing. But its analysis

brings out that it is a very strange thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties” (Marx, K 1906). Fetishism can refer to the lure of the gods, where an idol can have powers of persuasion, but Marx reinterprets this to the draw that commodities have for people. As people treat commodities for a greater purpose than their use-value, and remove the products from the labor that was used to create it, fetishism is created. “The mysterious character of the commodity-form consists therefore simply in the fact that the commodity reflects the social characteristics of men’s own labor as objective characteristics of the products of labour themselves, as the socio-natural properties of these things” (Marx, K. 1906). This helps define the sociality between people and labor becomes instead the social relationship between a person and an object. In a capitalistic society, the producers, the laborers, become hidden. No longer do most people see the day labourer who picks the grapes, the winemaker who works to balance the wine, those who work on the bottling line, or even the tasting room attendant who sold them the wine. What they see is the product itself, and what that product symbolizes to them, status, class, and a bourgeois sense of tastes. When we only see the product through exchanges of money, we only see the profit from the labor, not the laborer them self. “It is...precisely this finished form of the world of commodities--the money form--which conceals the social character of private labour and the social relations between the individual workers, by making those relations appear as relations between material objects, instead of revealing them plainly” (Marx, K. 1906). When have you ever heard a discussion about the migrant worker who went into harvesting the grapes while sipping a glass of Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir? It is a very simple answer, you

do not. In this, the consumer is separated from the producer through elevation. While there is often talk, in more wine-oriented circles of the winemaker, or owner, those who do the work are forgotten. “Whatever we may think...of the different roles in which men confront each other in such a society, the social relations between individuals in the performance of their labour appear at all events as their own personal relations, and are not disguised as social relations between things, between the products of labour” (Marx, K. 1906). In this, the real producers of the wine are hidden, behind the layers of enchantment, as we see the finished product and only peel away the layers to ascertain those in which we are comfortable with and can relate to, to the winemaker and his immediate staff. In this, we glamorize the production of the wine itself, removing the actual cost, that of the workers of the harvest.

One can find wine anywhere, in grocery stores, restaurants, gas stations, and specialty shops dedicated to wine. The internet abounds with stores selling wines specifically tailored to your tastes, to encourage the feeling of the bond with the wine itself. There are wines that can only be afforded by the rich, and those that are targeted to those less fortunate. New to wine? Only like sweet wines? Want something a bit silly as a gift? Looking for a special bottle just for Halloween? The ways in which wine can be targeted separate it from many other commodities. It is a mass produced product that screams with the concept of individuality. With this, it symbolizes status and lifestyle, all hidden away within that “boutique” bottle from that little winery that only you know about. You can purchase wine for weddings, for wedding anniversaries, for bachelorette parties, and for divorces. Wine is intended to evoke emotion, primarily for the positive.

Connoisseurs of wine appreciate much more than the label and the intoxicating effects. The contents of the bottle are as of much import as the label. The location of the winery, the soil in which the grapes were grown, the climate, all these lead to the sight, smell and taste of the wine which connoisseurs enjoy so much. To those that fetishize wine, the contents of the glass are to be analyzed, and no two bottles are alike. In this, for these people, wine is an obsession, one to be savored, examined, and detailed into the smallest realm of perception. What was the weather like that harvest? How does it compare to the previous year's vintage? Is there a change in the blend of wine? How about how long it was aged in barrel? Was it new oak or old? American, French or Hungary? How about the toast on the oak? Last vintage it was a medium, but I would say this is a medium plus. So many possibilities that lead to the perfection which is that single glass of wine. Some people collect baseball cards, others collect bottles, and still others collect the memories of the dates those bottles were opened, and the stories that go with them. Weddings, celebrations, special moments with a loved one. These are the things that engage the senses and create the stories behind the wine which drive people to learn more about them, to need to know the details, to compare and contrast the different styles. These are the things that create the fetish of wine.

No two bottles of wine are the same. The harvest date, climate, vinification process, and aging all lead to differences that a fetishist craves. There are forums and websites that allow everyone from the layman to the serious engager to share their own personal information and enjoyment with others. As such, they are able to gain knowledge from others, explore vintages that they may have never tasted, and share in

the moments which create their wine world.

There are those that argue that the story of the wine will preempt it from being allowed as a fetish, because isn't it so much more than a commodity? When there is the story, the love of the grape, winemaker and terroir, how can there be a commodity? Wine is argued to be a process, but not a product. It is a double standard to consider it both at the same time. Cook and Crang (1996) expound upon this point in saying "that on one hand limits consumers knowledge about spatiality distanced systems of provision through which food commodities come to us; but on the other, and at the same time, also puts increasing emphasis on geographical knowledges about those widely sourced food commodities." While they could be very likely talking about chocolate or coffee, the two other widely-acknowledged fetishized food commodities, their take applies directly to wine. In the book *Food and Culture Studies (2004)*, Bob Ashley argues that food-fetishism is more complicated than other commodities, as it is "bound up in a double commodity fetishism." "The provision of increased culinary diversity, in other words, allows consumers to advertise their cultural capital by demonstrating their knowledge about the origins of particular foodstuffs. This possibility is seen most clearly in relation to wine, where the ability to 'locate' the grape and the region from which a wine is produced enables someone to display their credentials as a wine expert" (Ashley, 2004). It is with this that I argue that with the story, wine is the perfect example of commodity fetishism. The labourer is left out of the argument, and only those with a plutocratic sense appreciate and fetishize this particular commodity. Why else would anyone ever pay up to hundreds of thousands of dollars for fermented grape juice? "The

value of culture, the supreme fetish, is generated in the initial investment implied by the mere fact of entering the game, joining in the collective belief in the value of the game which makes the game and endlessly remakes the competition for the stakes. The opposition between the “authentic” and the “imitation,” “true” culture and “popularization,” which maintains the game by maintaining belief in the absolute value of the sake, conceals a collusion that is no less indispensable to the production and reproduction of the illusion, the fundamental recognition of the cultural game and its stakes” (Bourdieu, 1984). What we are being told is that what is real matters far less than the perception that is brought forth through marketing, through the stories that are told, through the lineage of the winemaker, and the reviewer whose opinion matters more than ours. These stories built around the commodity function a wall of cultural fiction which we accept as a normative function, and in turn, allow to make our decisions for us.

Fetishization of the Celebrity

Yao Ming, the retired Houston Rocket’s center, sells his Family Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon for anywhere from three to seven hundred dollars. (Hellman, P. 2016). What does a Chinese basketball star know about wine? Extraordinary little. However, he knows the market that fetishizes him as a celebrity. In China, “wine knowledge and culture is seen as conferring a high-status identity, and at a time of major societal transformations that access and acquisitions of wine knowledge and culture is a way of signifying and consolidating your social standing and prestige” (Demossier, M. 2013). Furthermore, “Wine experts have reported several stories about the new social

class of (Chinese) parvenus who could afford such wines but ‘do not have the culture’” (Demossier, M. 2013). On Yao Ming’s winery website, he has Chinese New Year Gift Sets consisting of two bottles of wine and a rooster wine pourer, as well as a basketball hall of fame commemorative Napa crest bottle, among other, more standard offerings (yaofamilywines.com, 2016). These wines are not targeted at snobbish Burgundy drinkers, but rather the cult of his followers in both China and the basketball world. To these people, it is the brand that matters, the celebrity, and the aura of having a “piece” of Yao Ming and what he represents. In this sense, it is not the terroir that holds sway, but rather the celebrity. Does Yao Ming make the wine himself? No, not at all, he has signed his name to be attached and funded the process. He openly admits that he did not start drinking wine until he started playing basketball with the Rockets (Bonne, J. 2011) and knows little about it. Will this matter to those buying the wine? Again, not at all, because the wine is not really what they are purchasing. Even more exceptionally is that fact that Yao Ming crowd-funded the three million dollars he needed for the tasting rooms in Napa and Beijing. Fans of the basketball star did this not knowing anything about the wine (none had been made at the time) and based solely off his reputation as a basketball player, and the fetishization of both the wine and the star.

As of today, there are over eighty celebrities who have their hand in the wine business, either through full ownership of wineries or through branding contracts. Few of them are the exceptions to the rule, and delve into the full business of making the wine, from harvest to bottling, while most merely pose for photos with bottles that have their name attached somehow. “The endorsement by a celebrity really gives consumers the

feeling that they can partake in the kind of lifestyle they assume these celebrities are living," said Michael Stone, CEO of licensing agency Beanstalk" (Kell, J. 2015). This feeling of attachment, predilection of the story of the celebrity through the wine. The consumer sees it as a classist lifestyle marker, while most celebrities see it as an easy way to make some money, or improve their image. "Celebrities are increasingly lending their names to wine and spirits, for a variety of reasons," said Richard Hurst, s.v.p./beverage alcohol for Nielsen. "While some celebrities have had a long-standing personal affinity for these product categories, others view these products as extensions of their established 'lifestyle brands' and have connected with willing supplier partners to procure and market them" (Progressive Grocer, 2008).

As Bourdieu points to the reproduction of the illusion, and the cultural game, none is more such than the cult of the celebrity. It is here that the common man can fetishize a world in which it is impossible for them to live, but through commodification, they can attempt to get a taste of what it would be. Many celebrities are "cashing in" on this, and moving into the wine industry on their own. Sports figures, actors, musicians, all represent a diverse group of high profile individuals delving into the world of wine. Opening boutique, niche wineries, these investors (who can hardly be called the winemakers themselves, as they rarely have anything to do with the actual process of making the wine), use wine in a twofold way. The first, as a sort of "gentleman's pursuit," where they rarely get their hands dirty doing the work, but they can say that they have an intellectual investment in a high brow product. The second, they share this image of themselves with those that fetishize them, that is, those who follow their celebrity. In this

case, it is not the terroir which is of utmost importance, but rather the image of the celebrity which pushes forward the wine. As such small production wineries rarely lead to large scale economic return, a classist view is perhaps the only lens in which this can be viewed. The story of the wine becomes the story of the celebrity, and the sense of place is replaced by the image of their favorite sports figure, singer, actor, director or even author.

The transfer of wealth into status, and into leisure activities is a common theme among those who can afford it, and what could be perceived as more leisurely as an activity as lending your name to winemaking? “Wine offers a chance to balance and enhance...reputations. Wine, after all, is a product desired by the wealthy and middle classes, and is often seen as a symbol of sophistication and worldliness. To tap into the conspicuous consumption argument, a bottle of wine, especially if it carries the name of the winery's owner, attaches a person or a family to a product that has status” (Overton, Banks, 2015). Veblen coins this type of activity as conspicuous consumption. People (as is mentioned, the celebrity in this case) spend money on objects (in this case, wineries) of mass consumption in order to show others indications of their wealth and social class. Veblen sees this as an activity that is intrinsic to all social classes, not just the very rich, though, perhaps, slightly more obvious the further one goes up the economic scale. “The result is that the members of each stratum accept as their ideal of decency the scheme of life in vogue in the next higher stratum, and bend their energies to live up to that ideal” (Veblen, 1899). In *The Theory of The Leisure Class*, Veblen (1899) speaks as to how consumption shapes class and status. It is with this that the bourgeoisie are validated by

their display of status and class. "It becomes indispensable to accumulate, to acquire property, in order to retain one's good name" (Veblen 1899). As this was true in 1899, so it is true today, amongst the new elite, and those who seek to be more like them. As the "trickle down" of society goes from the rich to the middle class to the poor, each grasping for something elusive that they do not have but rather wish they could have a taste of, (symbolically and literally, in this case), we see what Veblen calls conspicuous consumption takes place. The celebrity rarely has much to do with the actual process of making the wine, with the extremely rare exception. Rather, they are the front, the true gentleman farmer, never getting their hands dirty, but gaining the positive reputation and acclaim from not only their followers, but also for those who care to put in monetary wherewithal, the industry itself, when they hire winemakers who can garner scores and awards to add to their personal reputations. "They know to team up with pro winemakers to get the job done right, leaving them with little to do other than pull up to the winery door in time to check out the final blend prior to bottling" (Hellman, P. 2016). As Gatsby in *The Great Gatsby* sought to obtain higher social cultural formation by buying his way into it, so too can the celebrity of today. In short, one will always want what one cannot have, in a false consciousness sort of way, and will strive to achieve it, or in this case, at least a taste of it, both for the consumer and the producer, in the form of conspicuous production. Conspicuous production "shows a historical interest in economic activities for reasons that may not be solely about the creation of productive value and profit maximization...Highly visible, it primarily seeks to confer status or utility value on the individual, corporation, or the state carrying out the activity" (Overton, Banks, 2015).

Symbolic Capital

Wine gives these celebrities a chance to enhance their status. In return, their followers are offered the opportunity to glimpse into their lifestyle. Though the celebrity is famous for reasons unrelated to the wine itself, those who fetishize the celebrity will in turn fetishize the wine which is produced by the celebrity due to the influence that the celebrity has garnered on them. However, many of these “branded” wines last as long as the celebrities themselves. From The Real Housewives wine to Martha Stewart and her endeavor with Ernest and Julio Gallo, and even Nicki Minaj putting out a moscato that comes in a six pack, branding and target marketing doesn’t always quite work out the way the celebrities envision. It takes a special type of consumer to wonder what a bottle of Marilyn Monroe Pinot Noir would taste like, which is to say, the wine of the celebrity is, for the most part, a niche market.

Kyle MacLachlan, of *Twin Peaks* fame (along with an extensive IMDB database) sells his wine in conjunction with Dunham Vineyards in Walla Walla, Washington. Pursued by Bear wine features only two bottles, the highlight being a 2012 cabernet with the following descriptors. *“A dense and luscious nose filled with ripe cherry pie and cinnamon spice leads into a rich palate of cola, raspberry and cassis. A velvety entry rapidly evolves into a silky texture finishing with elegance.”* (Dunham Cellars, 2017) This bottle of 2012 Cabernet sells for \$65 a bottle. Compare this to Dunham’s highest end Cabernet, their Dunham Cellars Cabernet Sauvignon XVIII 2012, which sells for \$43. *“Resembling a top-flight Bordeaux, the 2012 Cabernet Sauvignon XVIII gives up tons of tobacco leaf, lead pencil shavings, damp underbrush and cassis-like fruit in a*

fresh, yet concentrated, elegant, nicely structured package.” (wine.com, 2017). Both these wines received the same rating from Wine Spectator. MacLachlan also makes a Syrah through Dunham, which again, has the same ratings from Wine Spectator and sells for again, more than twenty dollars more. Comparatively, looking at these two wines, they sound extremely similar, and yet you are paying considerably more for the Kyle MacLachlan wine. Why is this? “Publicity for the wines and wineries owned by conspicuous producers helps fuel the process of status reconstruction. Many such wine producers are not shy about publicizing their involvement in the wine industry, and their ownership of vineyards and wineries. These forms of publicity allow them to control the way they are portrayed: associated closely with the wine product, and with quality, craft, and nature” (Overton, Banks, 2015). In short, attach a famous person’s name to your winery and quite simply, you can charge more money for the wine. This is backed by an overall average. Two separate sources state that consumers pay approximately 30% more for a wine that has a celebrity attachment, and that sales of celebrity-labelled wines are on the increase. (Progressive Grocer, 2008) (Parker, S. 2013).

Coppola

Of course, not all celebrities get into wine for the branding or lifestyle. Some have the passion and dedication to make remarkable wine and an impact on the industry itself. These individuals are few and far between, and while the story of wine is still centered on them in a sense, they try to bring it back to the land itself. Francis Ford Coppola is one such story. With his dual branding of his wine labels, that of “Inglenook” and “Coppola,”

he manages to separate the celebrity from the terroir, appeasing both those who fetishize the celebrity and those who fetishize the terroir. Coppola has been a Napa Valley staple for over 40 years now, having used money he made from movies such as *The Godfather* and *Apocalypse Now* to purchase Inglenook, one of Napa Valley's oldest wineries. Founded in 1871 by George Niebaum, the winery grew in fame and scope over the years, even being served to Grover Cleveland in the white house in 1891. Sadly, due to prohibition and lack of leadership, the winery fell into disrespect and disrepair over the years, becoming a high volume wine producer that you could find on the bottom shelf of any grocery store. Once famous for quality, it was now known for quantity. In 1975, the Coppolas moved to Napa Valley, purchasing Inglenook winery.

"I was amazed that a big company like Seagrams, or the established winemakers like [Robert] Mondavi, didn't buy that property," Coppola recalls. "That they let a filmmaker come in and take a jewel of Napa Valley was a miracle" (Parker, S. 2013). It was from here that he took it from the broken down house that it was and turned it back into the jewel of the valley. Investing heavily from his own pocketbook to renovate and restore Inglenook, Coppola took pride in the flagship wine that he was able to produce. Since the beginning, Coppola has reached out to two sets of people: those who fetishize the land and those who fetishize the celebrity. With his attention to detail and love of wine with his Inglenook and Rubicon brands, Coppola says his goal in the wine business is "to perfect the Rubicon." He adds: "We know we have the earth and the fruit to make the ultimate wine of its kind" (Parker, S. 2013).

In doing so, he puts the Rutherford area of the Napa Valley on the map as it's own

distinct terroir, giving it a name “Rutherford dust” that marks it as distinctive, and with its own story, separate from the terroir of the greater region. Coppola helps push for Rutherford to become its own AVA, enhancing this feeling of specialness in terroir, and in 1991, succeeds. By expanding the land, rebuilding the chateau, and hiring famous winemakers, Coppola enhances the image of Inglenook, and for all intents and purposes, it is a labor of love. In part to fund this, Coppola draws directly upon his celebrity in his under thirty dollar brand, Director’s Cut. With a label that draws directly to the movie business, he plays to the celebrity, drawing on his appeal as the Director of *The Godfather*, *Apocalypse Now*, *Tucker*, and other classics. “The turning point for Rubicon, Coppola says, was the success of *Bram Stoker’s Dracula*, the 1992 movie that ended his years of box-office drought. “All I know,” Coppola says, “is that one year we did \$9 million. Four years later, \$60 million. I was making much more money in the wine business than I ever made in films” (Heimoff, S. 2006). Using celebrity to make both good wine and good money seems to be the ideal, in this case.

“As for the fetishism of the consumer, I mean to indicate here that the consumer has been transformed through commodity flows (and the mediascapes, especially of advertising, that accompany them) into a sign, both in Baudrillard’s sense of a simulacrum that only asymptotically approaches the form of a real social agent, and in the sense of a mask for the real set of agency, which is not the consumer but the producer and the many forces that constitute production” (Appadurai, 1990). As both the consumer fetishizes, so is he fetishized by the advertising companies, corporations, and economies of state which want, in the end, his dollar. The fetishism is cyclical in this

sense, with those who go to any lengths to capitalize upon this drive for “more.”

Counterfeit Feelings

Walter Benjamin’s essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” (Benjamin, 1936), expands on the cross connect between wine and the symbolic ideal. First, we, as consumers, see wine, and especially fine wine, as an art. Benjamin’s essay is about the ability to reproduce artwork, a la (though very much previous to) a Warholian experience, where a reproduction of a great piece can be found on anyone’s wall, thereby diluting its effect. What is authentic then?

Looking at a bottle of wine, we can see so much that has and can be counterfeited, and has been since the beginning of wine production. Pliny the Elder, in ancient Rome, complained of the counterfeit of wine being so abundant that not even true wine could be found in the houses of the aristocracy (Robinson, J, 2006). In the middle ages, there were laws prohibiting tavern owners from cellaring wines from different countries together, to prevent a sneaky purveyor from passing a wine from a less prestigious location off as another, more expensive one. If a wine was found as being fraudulent, part of the payment would be for the perpetrator to drink the said foul wine themselves. During the phylloxera epidemic in France, counterfeit wine was so commonplace that winemakers would take non-wine grapes and make wine, or even non-grape fruit, such as apples to make “Champagne.”

Wineries attempt to keep their stories to themselves, by marking the corks with their estate origins on the simpler side, to the more modern technology of DNA matching

on fine wine. The assurance that the wine in your bottle is the same wine attached to the story of the terroir that you envision when you close your eyes and smell the juice, that is what the consumer is looking for, and expects. Unscrupulous merchants and wine collectors go out of their way to play upon the consumers trust of the story. When you replicate art, when you take it's story, you remove it's authenticity. The same happens when you duplicate wine. How could you feel if the glass you were drinking was not the 1982 Chateau Margaux, but rather a thirty dollar counterfeit? If you were told the first, and were drinking it with pleasure, assured that it was the "real thing" would you feel cheated, or would you enjoy the wine regardless of its "story"?

Hardy Rodenstock --Jefferson Bottles

Hardy Rodenstock, collector of fine wines and rare vintages, would often hold tastings for his friends. His most famous tasting included 175 bottles of Chateau d'Yquem, the tastings of which were held over a week in Munich Germany. While it hasn't been proven that Rodenstock was a knowing accomplice, he is the center of one of the most famous wine fraud cases in the world, that of the Jefferson bottles. Said to be found in the walls of an old French house in Paris, the bottles were inscribed with "Th. J." These bottles, from some of the top wine houses of France, and were confirmed by Michael Broadbent, the head auctioneer at Christie's, as being authentic to the time. Broadbent also sampled one of the bottles, and proclaimed the 1784 vintage to be "perfect in every sense: color, bouquet, taste" (Keffe, 2007). It is extremely rare for vintages from even the early 1900's to be said to be perfection, let alone a 1784. The first

bottle went for one hundred and five thousand pounds (about one hundred and twenty eight thousand dollars in today's terms), and subsequent bottles sold at equally outstanding prices. This bottle, sold in 1985, was the single most expensive bottle of wine ever sold. One collector, Bill Koch, the "other brother" of the Koch brothers fame, and a businessman in his own right, Koch bought four bottles. Over the course of 15 years, he would bring them out to show to friends at special occasions, but other than that, they stayed safe in his cellar. This fraud was uncovered when the Boston Museum of Fine Arts was putting together a Jefferson exhibit, and requested Koch's bottles for display. For authentication, Koch's staff searched for details, other than Broadbent's word, that the bottles belonged to Jefferson, and were unable to find any. Further research, in hand with the Thomas Jefferson Foundation, provided no evidence that the bottles had ever belonged to Thomas Jefferson. Another collector, Hans-Peter Fredericks, had purchased a bottle pre-auction for ten thousand pounds. After seeing the prices that the Jefferson bottles were going for, Fredericks wanted to sell his, but was stopped by Rodenstock (Wallace, B. 2004). After an effort to go through Christie's auction house and being denied, Fredericks sent his bottles to be examined in a laboratory with carbon dating. The results confirmed the worst, that the bottles contained a mix of wine that was dated from the 1960's or later, and Rodenstock was sued.

Rudy Kurniawan

Case in point the fraud that rocked the wine world, that of Rudy Kurniawan. The subject of the 2016 documentary *Sour Grapes*, Rudy seemed to be the darling of the wine

world. A savant who often shared his large collection of burgundy wines, Rudy Kurniawan seemed to have it all, and was passionate about his wine and collecting it. He was noted in 2006 as having one of the best cellars on earth, and his nickname was Dr. Conti (after Romani-Conti the famous region in Burgundy for Premier Cru wines). He had the palate, he had the money, and he had the wine collection to make himself indispensable to the wine world. Rudy once joked that if he knew the wine that he had drunk the week before would go for so much at auction, he would have refilled the bottle and put the cork back in. Little did the wine world know at the time, but that is what he was doing, on a massive scale. “Rudy would be buying off old vintages from France, blending them with Californian wines, to try and match the specific taste he was making” (Rothwell, R. 2016). Arrested and convicted in 2012, the wine that Rudy blended is still being found. Bill Koch, having been burned once before with the Jefferson bottles, uncovered the fraud, after being sold several million dollars worth of wine which, in fact, included wine which did not exist, bottles which were never produced from the wineries they stated they did, and others whose caps were put on with Elmer’s Glue. “On an 1858 bottle, we found Elmer’s Glue...and Elmer’s Glue didn’t come until some time in the 70’s. (Koch, B, 2016).

“The triumph of advertising in the culture industry is that consumers feel compelled to buy and use its products even though they see through them” (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1944). In both of the examples and cases above, the consumer had evidence that there was the substantial chance that the bottles were counterfeit. Evidence was there from the beginning, but as a choice, these things were overlooked in favor of the story of

the wine itself. Wouldn't it be nice to own a bottle that Thomas Jefferson once laid his hands upon, the stories that you could tell around it? The ownership of that story was in most cases, enough for the consumer to overlook the potential downfalls. "The culture industry perpetually cheats its consumers of what it perpetually promises. The promissory note which, with its plots and staging, it draws on pleasure is endlessly prolonged; the promise, which is actually all the special consists of, is illusory: all it actually confirms is that the real point will never be reached, that the diner must be satisfied with the menu" (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1972). In the consumption, purchase of these wines, are the consumers getting the use value for their exchange? Until the story is unmasked, the answer would be yes. If a person cannot tell the difference between the story of the wine and the wine itself, such as a piece of art, is there a difference? If you do not know that the Picasso you are looking at is, in fact, a fake, does that make you wonder any less? If the Monet that takes up a wall in the museum was done by anyone else, would it be less magnificent? Does it lose its story, when you can not tell the difference between the original and the second? Is it not as good? Both are objects that pleasure is found from, and equal pleasure when one does not know the difference. The social relation of the experience is worth the price, is it not? With a single bottle of wine, status and class can be established, and in the world of high end wine, so much is related to the story of the bottle, fraudulent or not.

As Benjamin sees works of art as having an "aura," he also sees the value of art decline due to reproduction. Authenticity cannot be reproduced, once this happens, the first piece is devalued, and is removed altogether from the same realm of art once it is

reproduced. As modern technology allows us to gather, send, receive and multiply works of art, we become distracted from original intent and meaning. How can someone appreciate something commonplace? “Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be” (Benjamin, 1935). Benjamin talks of the loss of traditions, in the world of wine, when it is replicated, the terroir, tradition, and story is also lost. It’s aura of authenticity, so to speak. “During long periods of history, the mode of human sense perception changes with humanity’s entire mode of existence. The manner in which human sense perception is organized, the medium in which it is accomplished, is determined not only by nature but by historical circumstances as well” (Benjamin, 1935). Even the greatest “noses” of our time have been fooled by false wine. Robert Parker once gave a 100 point rating to a magnum of 1921 Petrus. Sadly, the Petrus winery never made any Petrus magnums in 1921. When asked about this mystery bottle, Parker stated “If that was a fake... It was wonderful” (Keffe, P. 2007). Other notables include the bottle of 1947 LaFleur, one of the most sought after magnums in existence, as only five have been produced. Since 1998, nineteen bottles of this amazing wine have sold at auction. If the math befuddles you, it should. Auction houses are not held accountable for the wines they sell, past an initial inspection. Many collectors pay in cash in order to avoid taxes, and don’t want to admit to the possibility that their bottle could possibly ever be the bottle that is counterfeit. It must, of course, be all those others.

“The culture industry not so much adapts to the reactions of its customers as it counterfeits them” (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1972). The ability for these counterfeits to

become part of the landscape of the upper echelons of the wine world in unto itself both shocking and yet, not.

“The struggles to win everything which, in the social world, is of the order of belief, credit and discredit, perception and appreciation, knowledge and recognition---name, renown, prestige, honour, glory, authority, everything which constitutes symbolic power as a recognized power -- always concern the ‘distinguished’ possessors and the ‘pretentious’ challengers. Pretension, the recognition of distinction that is affirmed in the effort to possess it, albeit in the illusory form of bluff or imitation, inspires the acquisition, in itself vulgarizing, of the previously most distinctive properties; it thus helps to maintain constant tension in the symbolic goods market, forcing the possessors of distinctive properties threatened with popularization to engage in an endless pursuit of new properties through which to assert their rarity” (Bourdieu, 1984).

In short, many collectors, even knowing that their wine is false, will overlook this fact, pass it for real, because of not only the social stigma that comes with that claim that they were hoodwinked in the first place, but also the loss of prestige when that one special bottle that is the center of their cellar, their story, so to speak, turns out to be nothing but a lot of hot air.

The Culture Industry and the Power of the Wine Critic

“Around spring each year, scores of wine writers descend on Bordeaux for the en primeurs tastings, and every spring, many end up asking themselves the same rueful question: Do I really need to be here? It is a question born of a hard truth: When it comes to rendering a verdict on each new Bordeaux vintage, the only opinion that truly matters in the eyes of producers, merchants, retailers, and consumers is Robert Parker’s. His barrel scores hugely influence the opening prices and are treated as the vinous equivalent of papal bulls by wine lovers around the world. When it comes to Bordeaux, Parker doesn’t just move the market; he makes the market.” (Steinberger, M, 2008)

“In principle everyone, however powerful, is an object” (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1972). However, when that object has the ability to change the rhetoric of the wine world, people pay attention. One such individual is Robert Parker. Parker has changed the way people perceive wine. Through his creation of the 100 point system, he allowed the layman, the individual, the non-elitist to see past the rhetoric into a semiotic description of wine and understand it. Through this, his popularity, and that of his magazine grew, to where he could influence a wineries bottom line by an average increase of 16%-18% with a single review (Hoverack, O. 2009). Prior to becoming a wine critic, Parker was not from the wine industry itself, but rather was brought into it through his passion. He simply loved wine, and this gave him great ethos, which drew people to him as a critic. Parker is quoted as stating “What I’ve brought in is a democratic view. I don’t give a shit that your family goes back to pre-Revolution and you’ve got more wealth than I could imagine. If this wine’s no good, I’m gonna say so” (Langewiesche, 2000). Through verbal sparring such as this, Parker integrated himself with those who previously perceived wine as being out of their realm of comprehension. Not only reviewing fine wine (though he has a personal preference for expensive Bordeaux blends, Cabernets from Napa and Rhone varietals), but also that of much lower prices, under twenty dollars, and easy to fit into the wallets of the masses. This changed perceptions of wine, and took away the mystery for so many people outside of the cultural elite. “On the other hand, Parker’s rhetorical achievement can be understood to have entailed new power structures, and perhaps ultimately a threat to the culture of mystique and inherited traditions which originally justified its existence” (C. Hommerberg, 2011). Why do we trust a man who started off

as a corporate lawyer more than we trust ourselves when it comes to wine preferences? What makes his rhetoric (and those of future wine critics) so powerful that their influence for even table wine is “accompanied by an average increase of 16%-18%” (Horverak, Ø. (2009). The answer is simple, really. Through his rhetoric, his passion, and his love, he has created ethos for himself. He has created his own expertise. In the article *Rhetoric and This Crazy Little “Thing” Called Love* (2013) Eric Jenkins and Josue Cisneros explore the relationship between rhetoric and love. In respect to this, it can be acknowledged that once one is in love, one is biased and that bias shows. Robert Parker is in love with wine, and most specifically, big, bold, tannic wines, and it shows and is reflected in his rhetoric, and this has influenced the American palate significantly. He has simply changed the style of wine we drink, and thereby, changed the story of the wine we drink.

Before 1975, wine reviewers were often strongly influenced by one thing: the wines they themselves were trying to sell. This led to some strong biases in their discourse, as one could well imagine. Have extra Tuscan red to sell? The public gets to hear some amazing reviews on Barolos. Whether the wine was good or not was debatable, as that was not the point of the story. The wine was only as good as it needed to be sold, and its reputation that predated it. There were generalized concepts of “good” and “bad” wine, American wine being in the latter category.

The late 1970’s marked a strong change in the wine world. There was The Judgement of Paris in 1976, and a young student from the Baltimore area went to the Alsace region of France to visit his then girlfriend, and future wife, while she was doing a

study abroad program. It was here that this student would discover the world of wine. After returning to the United States and after completing his law degree, this passionate entrepreneur (and future lawyer) started writing his own wine guidebook, his story of wine. Simple, at first, it eventually overwhelmed and became a lifelong passion that changed the face of the wine world. What was the name of that wine guidebook? Who was that student who had the fortune to visit France and explore so much of its extensive wine cultural history? None other than Robert Parker, and the guidebook he created went on to become the *Wine Advocate*, the single most influential wine journal in the world. He did this, because of that trip, where he discovered a love for wine. In his words,

“A wine goes in my mouth, and I just see it. I see it in three dimensions. The textures. The flavors. The smells. They just jump out at me. I can taste with a hundred screaming kids in a room. When I put my nose in a glass, it’s like tunnel vision. I move into another world where everything around me is just gone, and every bit of mental energy is focused on that wine” (Langewiesche 2000).

Robert Parker did something no one had done before. He made wine understandable. He took it out of the hands of the salesman and put it into the hands of the consumer, and opened doors to wine, and the story of wine. No longer was wine a product intended to be consumed only by the elite that understood its subtleties, here was someone who came to the middle class customer to explain it. Frustrated with the wine salesman knows all approach, Parker made it more relatable. Parker saw himself as the “Ralph Nader” of the wine world (WineAdvocate.com, 2016). Wanting to expose poor wines that were being sold at premium prices, and at the same time, find great values, Parker stated that his goal was to “democratize” wine. Most importantly, he was outside the wine trade, and as such, was in the unique position of not being influenced by it. Of

course, success did not happen overnight. It took Parker a full ten full years before he could quit his day job and dedicate his time to *The Wine Advocate*.

What he did was create a world where the wine salesman no longer dominated how we purchase our wine. Prior to Robert Parker, Bordeaux wines in particular relied on their reputations, their house's names, to sell their product. He changed this game, in a way that was refreshing to many. Parker rebelled against the social norms of the time because he changed the perception of what is a good wine. The world of wine can be extremely confusing, especially with so many experts crying out that their knowledge is the best, their palate is superior. It can be misdirecting, and two wine reviewers can contradict each other, and often do. Robert Parker, when he called the 1982 Bordeaux vintage "superb," fully disagreeing with the rest of the wine world, who found the vintage to be thin, and not age worthy (Asimov, 2012). This is the call that put Robert Parker on the world wine map, and garnered the attention of many when it turned out he was correct. Through this, he helped create his ethos and credibility. It wasn't tradition that made the wine good, it was the wine that made the wine good, as simple as that, and no one could tell him differently. When other critics give wines good ratings because of the houses they belong to, Parker famously has challenged that. Another example, on the other side, is a review of a Chateau Canon, a bottle that commonly goes for around a hundred to a hundred and fifty dollars.

"Once again, this renowned estate appears to have badly missed the mark. Undoubtedly, part of the difficulty in 1999 was the fact that the vineyard was hit by the hail storm that punished a small zone of vineyards on September 5th. This medium dark ruby-colored effort reveals soft, berry flavors with steely/mineral-like notes in the background. Some of the vineyard's pedigree comes through, but this uninspiring, medium-bodied

wine possesses little depth or length. Anticipated maturity: now-2008.”
(WineAdvocate.com, 2016)

Obviously, a review like that can hurt a winery, and they do. A good review can increase a wineries bottom line, as well as a bad review can hinder it. When Parker refused to sample the 2002 Bordeaux wines in barrel, the wineries were forced to drop their prices. “Taking the Saint-Émilion *grands crus*, for instance, Parker ratings alone account for 33 per cent of the variance in release price and a staggering 50 per cent of the variance in increase in release price between 2004 and 2005. Very similar effects are seen for the Médoc classed growths, with Parker score alone accounting, again, for just over a third of the total variance in release price and 38 per cent of the variance in increase in release price between these consecutive vintages. Moreover, even if we control for position in the official classification, with which Parker ratings are strongly correlated, they account for an additional 8 per cent of the variance in release price and an additional 9 per cent of the variance in increase in release price” (Hay, C. 2007).

It can be stated that Parker has created his own style of wine, that with his reputation for loving big, bold, juicy Bordeaux, Napa Cabernets, and Rhone varietals the wineries gravitated towards making the wine in this manner (Langewiesche, 2000), and this “Parkerization” of wine is a given truth. His popularity comes from his ability to speak plainly, and put things in terms that are accessible, easy to understand, and grab onto. An example of this is his 100 point rating system. He invented this rating system that has redefined the wine world. It has been adapted, and is used in grocery, and beverage stores, by other wine reviewers who have come after him. A person can walk into a store now with confidence and state they want a 90+ point rated wine for under

twenty dollars, and know the quality of wine they are going to receive, because of this 100 point ratings system.

Here are the definitions of the numerical ratings, as posted by WineAdvocate.com:

“96-100: An extraordinary wine of profound and complex character displaying all the attributes expected of a classic wine of its variety. Wines of this caliber are worth a special effort to find, purchase, and consume.

90-95: An outstanding wine of exceptional complexity and character. In short, these are terrific wines.

80-89: A barely above average to very good wine displaying various degrees of finesse and flavor as well as character with no noticeable flaws.

70-79: An average wine with little distinction except that it is soundly made. In essence, a straightforward, innocuous wine.

60-69: A below average wine containing noticeable deficiencies, such as excessive acidity and/or tannin, an absence of flavor, or possibly dirty aromas or flavors.

50-59: A wine deemed to be unacceptable.”

(WineAdvocate.com, 2016)

No advertisements are allowed in *The Wine Advocate*. No bribes, no influence, nothing on the outside to influence the wine itself. Those who read it are the influential sort, and his reviews end up on the grocery store shelves, simply because his prose is so understandable and unique in it's reading. However, even that prose is subject to the story

of terroir, as well as that of other wine writers. In his article “On Wine Bullshit: Some New Software?” Economist Richard Quandt explores the world surrounding the world of the wine reviewer.

“Two things have to be true before ratings can become useful for the average wine drinker. Since there are many wine writers, and there is a substantial overlap in the wines they write about (particularly Bordeaux wines), it is important that there be substantial agreement among them. And secondly, what they write must actually convey information; that is to say, it must be free of bullshit. Regrettably, wine evaluations fail on both counts” (Quandt, 2007).

Even wine reviewers are influenced by the perception of terroir, the story behind the label, and the rhetoric of the glass. This affects the consumer by altering their perception of the wine before they even have a glass. The Wine Advocate is so influential that stores with overflow of bad product, would, at one point prior to the internet, attempt fraud to get rid of product that would not sell. “You can also, if you have a stock of bad wine, take out your scissors, find a relevant issue of *The Wine Advocate*, and, with a bit of tape and a copy machine, improve the score. Rovani mentioned a New York store that had recently done just that, sending out altered scores and tasting notes with its promotional literature. The work was so shoddy in this case that the doctored print lay crooked on the page.

According to Martin Klimmek, in his article “On the Information Content of Wine Notes: Some New Algorithms” (2013), wine reviews automatically default to using certain words when describing inexpensive wine versus more expensive wine. Words such as “pizza, bbq, fruity and light” are used with inexpensive wines, while “opulent, lush, ageable, seafood” are words associated with wines that have a higher price tag. If prior to even seeing a wine, a consumer were to be presented with the simple words of a

review, given no price, they would be able to determine which one was apparently the more expensive, and therefore the more coveted of the two. This has nothing to do with the actual taste of the wine, nor the quality, but rather just the price. The culture industry plays a cruel joke on society in this case, as perceived value may have nothing to do with actual reality of the power trade between the rural worker and the economic elite. Take for instance, the following: two wine reviews, the information retrieved from Wine.com, March 6th, 2016. They are both for 91 point rated wines. I have chosen both to be Bordeaux blends from the left bank, and Robert Parker, of course, as the reviewer.

“This wine, which is a blend of the three basic varieties planted in Bordeaux – Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Cabernet Franc – is a major sleeper of the vintage and far exceeded my expectations, and that, of course, is all good news. Lots of red and black currant fruit, licorice, spice and soft tannins have resulted in a silky, opulently styled wine that far exceeds its humble origins and appellation. Drink it over the its first decade of life, although the position of Prince Robert is to release this wine only when it is showing some maturity, as their target market is largely consumers desiring immediate gratification and restaurants seeking similar qualities.”

“The iconic 2012 Pape Clement is a candidate for near-perfection as well as one of the wines of the vintage. From proprietor Bernard Magrez, this is a blend of 51% Cabernet Sauvignon, 46% Merlot, 2% Petit Verdot and 1% Cabernet Franc. This extraordinary vineyard (a few miles to the west of Haut Brion and La Mission Haut Brion) has hit all the highlights of this vintage. Interestingly, the quality of the Pomerols and Graves wines in 2012 is closer to what one would consider a great vintage than the general image of 2012. This is truly great wine and not far off their magnificent 2005 and 2010. Full-bodied, with rich cassis, subtle burning embers and spice followed by velvety, well-integrated tannins, the wine is lush, expansive, savory and profound. This is a remarkable wine that could be drunk at a reasonably young age, but should cellar brilliantly for a quarter-century” (Wine.com, 2016).

In short, if you want to impress your friends but don't want to spend a lot of money, find one of Parker's "value" wines with a high rating, and only tell your friends

that the wine received a high rating. They don't have to know that you only spent twenty dollars on that 93 point wine, they only have to know that Robert Parker considers it "an outstanding wine of exceptional complexity and character." It is for this very reason that many professional wine tastings are performed blind, with no label, no semiotics, nothing on the bottle rhetoric to distract the reviewer. If there was a previous bias given to the wine, then the Judgement of Paris mentioned at the beginning of this piece could have never happened with the results that took place. Burgundy and Bordeaux would have won, simply because of preconceived bias against Napa Valley. The importance of a wine label, of its ratings, of its review is all a distraction from the one thing that actually matters, which is the juice inside the bottle, or better yet, inside your glass.

If in this, we take Charles Sanders Peirce's Theory of Signs and apply it directly to the wine, we can see icons, indexes and symbols (Peirce, C.S. 1991). Applying icons to the wine label in order first, from grapes to chateaus on the labels, these affect how we, as consumers, value the price of the wine. It can also, in turn, affect how a wine reviewer may view the wine as well. Wine labels are in effect, the branding that is allowed by liquor laws to wineries. There is much on it from alcohol percentage to "sulfites added" that is dictated by law. However, imagine a Bordeaux blend with a finelooking Chateau on it. Compare that to a similar looking bottle with a cartoonish goat on it, prancing around the French countryside. The two bottles may be priced similarly, but you may value one more. This has to do with the iconic images that the wineries have chosen to brand their wine with. It is questionable to believe that wine reviewers are unbiased by the same perceptions that the rest of us consumers are when presented by a wine with a

more interesting label. On the indexical side for wine, you can see wines such as Dom Perignon, used for celebration rather than for everyday drinking. You as a consumer may open a bottle of 1982 La Tour for an important birthday, or to celebrate a wedding. Wine means something, something more than just alcohol. It takes on additional meaning that we give it as a symbol in our lives. This tends to be a universal, that even those who do not consume wine still realize it's importance in societal dictates. Lastly on this, wine as a symbol. It can affect emotions, much more so than as an alcoholic beverage, but also as a gatherer. People tend to drink wine as a social mechanism, with food (this separates it from many other alcoholic beverages, it is part of the dinner, rather than previous or after it, thereby making it part of the experience). A person will come home from a long day at work and have a glass of wine, or sit with their friend and have a glass of wine in the sun. It is an almost universal conversational piece, which moves it past other beverages. Are all wines the same then? Are you slowly being lead down the path to paying more for a wine than you should because of the classist, elitist wine critic, who prefers the more expensive wine to the cheaper, based on an image in their head alone? Are we biased by our own opinions as to what a good wine should be, listening only to the semiotics of the wine review number but not the actual review itself? Not all wine is created alike, and not all wine consumers are the same. By this, the fact that wine reviewers like Robert Parker, who enjoy big, bold, tannic red wines, control and dominate the wine world, hold back so many new people from enjoying wine. They pick up the well rated bottle, thinking that they must enjoy it, because of Parker's ethos, and it's a mess in their mouth, because they didn't take the time to understand the 'why' of the wine, rather than the image of the

wine.

However, nowadays there is a new voice coming up: that against the big, bold, juicy wines that Parker has made so famous. One such person is Alice Feiring, author of the book *The Battle for Wine and Love or How I saved the World from Parkerization*, (2008) is an excellent example of the kickback against Robert Parker and his brand. In it, she calls Parker wines “fat, flat, chewy, chunky, oaky and stupid,” among other things. “I want my wines to tell a good story. I want them natural and most of all, like my dear friends, I want them to speak the truth even if we argue,” states Feiring, calling for “natural” wine, removed from the scientists and chemists who create wine for a mass-market palate. She calls this wine soulless, and calls back to the artisans who let the wine, with natural yeasts, speak for itself. These wines are more delicate, and tell a story. With this, they have the true sense of place, that Parker wines, through their mass commodification, do not. Feiring looks for a more delicate balance in her wines, and many in the wine world are listening. While in the 80’s and 90’s many wineries pushed themselves for fruitier and juicier wines, there is now a new balance being pushed forward, that of “natural.” It is hard to turn around in Sonoma nowadays without seeing signs for “organic” and “biodynamic.” For Feiring, Parker wines are wines that have no taste, but rather have the flavors of an industry that is trying to sell a product to as many people as possible. This push against Parker goes even further with Feiring. “I am short. He is tall. I am urban; he is rural, I am left leaning; he swerves to the right. We are looking at the world of wine from two different points of view” (Feiring, 2008). There is a distinct aesthetic difference between the two wine reviewers, separating them more so

than “natural” wine and created wine. Do wines lose their story when they revolve around one wine critic? The terroir is the same, the winemakers rarely change, and is bowing to consumer demands such a terrible thing? In Feiring’s opinion, it is. The historical aspects of the wine remain the same, while the taste changes. In such, where is the story when there is only commodification? The consequences of this is a loss of subjectivity and a standardization of wine, where one style becomes the norm, based on the power of a single critic.

In addition, there is the populist backlash against Parkerization and that of the celebrity critic. “While the field of wine criticism has always had relatively low barriers to entry, the Web has stripped away even these minor roadblocks. Now, every wine amateur with a computer and modem can share his or her self declared expertise with the world” (Steinberger, M. 2008). Websites, such as Cellartracker.com, where anyone who has an interest can rate their favorite wines, see others’ reviews, and engage in a community of like-minded oenophiles. Perhaps one of the more interesting features is that Cellartracker.com has a function where you can see the people with the most reviews and tasting notes, in addition to seeing the list of popular wines, as voted on by the population of the site. This takes the wine out of the hands of the critics and puts it in the hands of the people. With over 6.6 million tasting notes (cellartracker.com, 2017), both professional and amateur, individuals can find the wines and reviews that work for them-- even if the reviews come from your neighbor, as long as their tastes align with yours.

If you think that your neighbor cannot possibly know as much as someone who has spent years studying wine, you will have those who agree with you. Critic Matt

Kramer of *Wine Spectator* states “One hundred people who don't know much about, say, Auxey-Duresses adds up to 100 muddled, baffled and often duplicative conclusions.” (M. Schatzker, et al 2016). While professionals often taste wine blind, amateurs know what they are drinking, have preferences, and far less “wine education” than a critic. Schatzker performed an observational study where data was taken from approximately 10,000 wines reviews, both amateur and professional, and compared the correlation. Three predominant wine critics were selected, *Wine Advocate*, *International Wine Cellar*, and Jancis Robinson. What was found was that “the crowdsourced reviews were more consistent with the expert reviews than the experts were with each other.” While it is true that the scores were similar when the quality was high, the experts tended to disagree more among themselves than the consumer did. This could be useful, if you, as a consumer, were looking for a solid product. Not everyone is out for the hundred or thousand dollar wines that the experts love to taste. Instead, the thirty dollar Pinot Noir is of much more interest to the average person, and thereinlies the draw of consumer sourcing of reviews.

As Benjamin describes storytelling “It sinks the thing into the life of the storyteller, in order to bring it out of him again. Thus traces of the storyteller cling to the story the way the handprint of the potter clings to the clay vessel” (Benjamin, 1992), so could he be describing wine reviewing. For every sip that is mentioned in writing, every review which is listened to, wine that is described rhapsodically, there is the life of the wine in the story and the life of the storyteller in the wine. Robert Parker is the antithesis of this creation, as wine literally has been created around his wants and desires. His love

of deep, dark wines with robust flavors has driven an entire industry. His storytelling has promoted a love of wine in a class that previously had no experience with it.

His handprint gives way to allowing others to have their own true experiences, and discover for themselves what story they would like to tell. “After all, storytelling, in its sensory aspect, is by no means a job for the voice alone. Rather, in genuine storytelling, the hand plays a part which supports what is expressed in a hundred ways with its gestures learnt of work” (Benjamin, 1992). These stories would not be told without the wine itself, without the land, without the audience to listen. As Benjamin is making the comment of the inability of people to reflect upon their experiences, it is the irony that in wine people find the very voice he proclaims they have lost. While Parker may have had the loudest voice, he is by far not the only one. Because of his success, there is an industry of wine critics lending their voice to the field, each ready to tell you how to perceive that glass of wine you are drinking.

From Their Mouths

“Why am I passionate about wine? I think I love the fact that it’s one subject that covers so many. You’ve got languages, you got history, you’ve got geography, you’ve got...it just encompasses so much and it’s been such an interesting part of human history for such a long time that it’s...endlessly fascinating” (Naus, P., personal communication, January 4th, 2017).

There can be no story of terroir, no story of wine, without the people to connect it together. With this, I interviewed several people, both in and out of the wine industry, with various levels of wine knowledge and passion, with the fundamental question: what

does terroir mean to you, what is your story of wine? In this, two industry professionals, winemakers and sommeliers both, along with a high end collector and an average wine drinker were asked a variety of questions to garner a sense of their story of wine.

For some, the story of wine was in the earth itself, while for others, it is in the history. S. Griffis, a winemaker as well as wine consultant, stated “For terroir I think the first thing that always comes to mind is Willamette Valley. I’m a Portland, Oregon native, born and raised there. I think of what the Willamette Valley looks like to me, which is incredibly green, green lush green, grey, overcast skies, a diffused light, and just for me optimal growing conditions for cool climate varieties, but then I also think of how that’s incredibly different to other growing regions that have different conditions: different soil types, different climate, different weather, different amounts of sunlight. I think kind of the classic definition of terroir is all those environmental factors that come together to impact that agricultural product and how that looks and tastes and what the result is in that” (Griffis, S. personal communication, Dec 31, 2016).

D. Johnson, a biotech salesperson who drinks wine on a casual basis, and is not an oenophile by any measure, recounted her grandparents, and their history in Northern California when thinking of her ties to the land through wine. “In terms of history of wine, my family would drink wine with Basque sheep farmers in Northern California. Basque wine is, from what I’m told, not very high quality, necessarily, but something that was enjoyed around campfires and as part of the community. I have some pretty great memories of my grandfather talking about getting drunk with the Basque sheep farmers in the middle of nowhere. On the other side of my family...they have some old vines in

Sonoma. For me, that meant that they felt very connected to their history in Sonoma County and having those old vines in the family meant that they felt very rooted in who they were and their history and their French Background. It seemed to be part of, almost, the mythology of their coming to America and being able to have those vines and have those vines persist to this day seems to be a very emotional story for them. I guess both sides of my story, there's some pretty interesting ideas about wine, and for me as a modern millennial person, I feel that wine is something to be enjoyed, but I maybe don't typically think about that kind of background when I'm just enjoying my wine glass on a Monday night" (Johnson, D. personal communication, January 4, 2017). While these views on wine and terroir are very different, they encompass both the sense of place and the sense of taste. For some people, it is the land itself which gives meaning to the wine, while for others, it is the history and the story of the wine itself which gives it a reason worth drinking.

Continuing on the same theme, when asked about the culture of wine, the answers differed as much as the individuals backgrounds. "A bottle of wine, therefore, is not just an expression of place: it is thought to be the expression of a place in time. Like an object of art, a wine is thought to be unique and impossible to reproduce" (Benjamin 2008, sic). So too is how wine is interpreted, and the culture of the industry of wine. For one, it is the cult of the celebrity, for another, it is the backbreaking work that goes into making the wine. The difference in how the question of "culture" of wine was taken in by the different individuals

First, Naus, P., a winemaker from Niagara Falls, Canada. Previously, Naus

worked in high end restaurants in Canada, after becoming a certified Sommelier at the age of twenty one. Naus directly correlated the culture of the wine to the cult of the celebrity. People constantly going after the next best wine.

“There’s wines that people love and there’s names that are big. It’s interesting. It’s like a weird celebrity culture...there’s fads and there’s popular people and times, and there’s the magazines with the spreads of the cool wines. It all changes and it always evolves and things come and go, and things come into fashion and things leave” (Naus, P. , personal communication, January 4th, 2017).

S. Griffis, on the other hand, correlates the culture of wine with that of the worker, the person who creates the wine itself. “For me the culture is all of the hard work and the sweat that goes into making wine, everything that happens behind the scenes that most people don’t think about or know about and if they do they’re not really aware of how hard it is. It is hard labor to grow grapes and to make wine. A lot goes into it, and so for me, I see wine culture as the hard work that goes into making an amazing product that pays off at the end of the day that you can sit down and enjoy it with your friends and family and it just has a huge impact from 6:00 am in the vineyards to 10:00 pm at night with a partner” (Griffis, S. personal communication, Dec 31, 2016). Two extremes in views of what wine “culture” is, brought around by Johnson’s answer. As the non-wine aficionado of the group, her answer looks to the elite. Not as a cult of a celebrity, but rather as a window that is occasionally opened to her, where she is allowed to enjoy that society which is not her norm. “Wine culture as a term, it has connotations of being elite for sure, or maybe just very finicky or picky. At the same time, I enjoy wine. I enjoy drinking with people who enjoy wine. I enjoy going to different places and trying new wines. I suppose in a way I am part of wine culture, but it also feels very

outside as a working class person that I will never truly be able to engage in this community, but more that I am someone that's on the periphery that occasionally gets to enjoy being inside of it" (Johnson, D. personal communication, January 4, 2017). It is with her statements that we can see the perception of classism that takes hold of the wine industry, and those who participate in it. She would like to be a part of it, she enjoys the consumption, but believes that because of her socio-economic status she is separate. This is at the heart of one of the primary issues of use value vs economic value, that she is assigning greater significance to the culture of the glass than needs be. She buys into the story of the marketing, of the prestige, instead of simply enjoying what she explores.

"The paradise offered by the culture industry is the same old drudgery. Both escape and elopement are pre-designed to lead back to the starting point. Pleasure promotes the resignation which it ought to help to forget" (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1972). How fitting when describing the bottom of a bottle of Bordeaux, or staring at an empty glass of Napa Cabernet. As a collector, Krell tells the story of how he purchased an amazing bottle of wine from a wine merchant in Austin, Texas. It was "the best I've ever had in my life, great, incredible aroma, flavors." The wine was a Burgundy, and he purchased it for around fifty dollars. Eager to get more, he went back to the wine store, and asked to purchase a case. Sadly, he was unable to. "How do I get more of this?" The wine merchant looked unhappy, and says "First--that is the first good bottle of Burgundy I had in my life," then proceeds to tell Krell the story of the wine. Apparently, the vineyard at one time belonged to French nobility, who had recently passed on. The children were not interested in continuing the family business of winemaking, and sold

the winery to a proxy of Domaine de la Romanée-Conti (the most expensive land in Burgundy). Krell stated that wine now sells for over three hundred and fifty dollars a bottle. His sadness at hearing this, was of course, acute, and there was nothing left to do but to open a different bottle, and try again. In this, the wine itself did not change. The land itself did not change, but like so many other wines and vines, the story of the wine changed. With the new ownership came a new “cult” a new “celebrity” status to the wine, and with that, the price change. This brings us back to the primary argument of what is terroir? Is it the grapes, is it the land, is it the story, is it the culture? If it is all of these things and yet none of these, who determines? Like a piece of artwork that can be counterfeited, the design that goes into the creation of a bottle of wine create more questions than answers, for those who seek them out. However, Johnson perhaps states it best, when she talks about her opinion on trying wine. “I try and derive as much pleasure as I can out of trying new things. For me, what’s more important is that I have a good experience, I try new flavors, I live life a little, and I don’t overspend” (Johnson, D. personal communication, January 4, 2017). If more people had this thought process there would be many a Sommelier out of a job.

Conclusion

Wine consumption is an aesthetic experience. It involves sensory, emotional and cognitive responses, like a piece of artwork. This makes it incredibly unique as a consumable product. How often does one enjoy the experience of a glass of wine and mark it as “beautiful,” to be savored, as a piece of artwork, to be evaluated on its own

measure, separate from other consumable commodities? It is this unique experience that allows it to own a story, allows it to become fetishized, and allows it to become more than it is. When one thinks of wine, they think of relationships. They think of the company they keep whilst drinking it, the music that was playing, and the emotional gravitas that envelops them, whether it be delightful or somber.

Returning to the overall research question, here are the reasons why I think the stories we communicate about wine fetishize the commodity, and influence how people see it as a status symbol. Looking to the stories of wine as developed in the literature review, we can see the progression of this phenomenon.

“The appropriation of symbolic objects with a material existence, such as paintings, raises the distinctive force of ownership to the second power and reduces purely symbolic appropriation to the inferior status of a symbolic substitute. To appropriate a work of art is to assert oneself as the exclusive possessor of the object and of the authentic taste for that object, unworthy of possessing it, for lack of the material or symbolic means of doing so, or simply for lack of a desire to possess it strong enough to “sacrifice everything for it” (Bourdieu, P. 1984).

Bourdieu, when taken in context with Benjamin and Fisher, move wine into the world of both the story and the world of the art. Once the wine becomes more than it is symbolically, it is placed higher than other commodities, and is fetishized. The stories grow, and in that Warholian experience that Benjamin extrapolates upon, the consumer latches onto it, for better or worse. While Fisher’s stories are always there in different contexts, the branding of wine helps lead to development of this fetishization. The rhetoric of the glass speaks for itself, and builds its own story to the individual. How we perceive this commodity separately from other goods, as an artwork rather than a dry good separates it, and gives it that symbolic power, whether it be through giving that

power to the celebrity, the terroir, the bottle, or the glass itself.

The proposition of this commodity to be fetishized beyond its basis completely fascinates me. Is it the land which makes it so unique among other commodities? The soil, the limestone, the chalk, the weather, the brix at which the grapes are harvested? Or is it the story that the winemaker tells you? That of the celebrity, whether the celebrity be that of the land, in the sense of Romanée-Conti, Screaming Eagle, or La Tour, or your favorite actor or even that of a basketball player? Even more so, is it the economic push on the label that creates the story? If it is expensive, it creates its own classism, but why this so, in modern times, when so much wine is good? It is my hope that even though this paper may have asked more questions than it answered, it opened the doors to potential thought on class and consumption. The culture industry unto itself invites this dynamic of necessity of asking these questions, due to the uniqueness of wine both as a story, and as a symbol. Wine is aesthetic, and conceptualizes the social of the good life. For that, I raise my glass, in all its commodified form. This thesis has attempted to analyze wine through the unique lens of the culture industry, and see the relationship between wine and the greater humanities. To make wine more than a commodity, it must tell a story. It is up to the consumer to determine how that story is interpreted.

To that end, the point of this paper is to encourage the reader to come to a single point: to realize the importance of personal choice. The most important thing in that glass of wine is not the terroir, it is not the winemaker, it is not if the wine critic has given it 94 points and called it one of the best bottles of the century. It is not the history that makes

up the winery, the definitive moments of the year it was bottled, the weather, the celebrity who endorses it, or the cost. What you should take away, if nothing else, is that wine is a commodity, and as such, it is meant to be enjoyed. It is meant to be explored for what it is. Taste it, try it, decide for yourself without the outside influence. The most important thing about that glass is if you, yourself, as the consumer, like it or not, without outside influence. I highly encourage exploring as many varietals and styles as possible, keeping a notebook, and deciding for yourself what is good and what is not. Having someone else tell you that something is delightful is lovely, however, you are the one consuming it, make it worth it for you. As a communications scholar, your taste is the one that matters the most.

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