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# Tasting life and energy with the body: the biodynamic resonance of wine

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## Abstract

Based on two long term research with natural and biodynamic winegrowers in France, this text returns to the principles of biodynamic agriculture in its desire to potentiate the living character of the vine and the soil; living supposed to translate into energy or vibrations in the glass. Why is wine attracted to biodynamics? The hypothesis put forward, which would partly explain the apparently happy marriage between wine and biodynamics, is that the latter helps to give more life and energy to wine and that this energy would be perceived through new way of tasting. Our aim here is not so much to study what this extra life or energy might be as a scientific object as these notions are in any case impossible to stabilise from a scientific point of view. The reason for our use of these unstable categories is that they emerge repeatedly on the subject of biodynamic wines from the discourses of winemakers, oenologists, sommeliers and tasters, whether beginners or advanced. These categories of energy or vibrations, still in gestation, refer to forms of wine tasting that go beyond organoleptic criteria alone to extend to the receptivity of the whole body involved in the act of drinking.

Key words: biodynamics, natural wines, vibrations, energy, body, Loire, tasting

*The authors report there are no competing interests to declare.*

Christelle Pineau is a specialist in the anthropology of "natural" wines (PHD). She's now working on extending this reflection to the anthropology of food, and the senses, the ethnobotany and more broadly, the living. She is interested in the different categories of knowledge, and their powers, or how sensory relationships to the world reshape it. The very concrete question of the ways of how to cultivate and taste the earth is part of the cosmopolitical vision of the world.

Jean Foyer is a socio-anthropologist at the Centre de Recherche et de Documentation sur les Amériques. After a PhD on the controversies surrounding biotechnologies in Mexico, he coordinated various projects on global environmental governance and continued his research in Latin America, particularly in Mexico and Panama. Since 2015, he has been conducting research in France on the development of biodynamic viticulture and the relationships with the living and the environment that it reveals.

## Introduction

The text we offer here is centered on biodynamics, an agricultural technique born 100 years ago from lectures given by the thinker Rudolf Steiner. In addition to rejecting the use of synthetic chemical inputs, which is common to organic farming, biodynamics advocates the use of alchemical principles, combining animal, vegetable and mineral compounds. It also envisages the farm – or the estate – as a whole agricultural organism, or ‘social organism’ within different human and non-human entities, contributing to the balance of each part [Rigolot and Quantin, 2022]. The choice of focusing on biodynamics here was prompted by a recurring question raised by colleagues: why is biodynamics developing so much in wine? This apparently simple question is all the more relevant as the marriage was far from obvious. Because of the predominance of monoculture in wine production and reservations about alcohol consumption beyond biodynamic farmers<sup>1</sup> biodynamics has long been reluctant to reach into the world of vines and wines. Similarly, the wine sector, which has largely embraced the principles of agricultural modernisation, has for a long time remained impervious to biodynamics, still controversial today because of its esoteric principles. However, the use of biodynamics in viticulture seems to have developed exponentially over the last two decades<sup>2</sup>, especially in France. Although the basic principles are not well known, it has nevertheless gained a form of recognition among consumers and "influencers" (specialist magazines, wine merchants, wine bars, etc.) Why has biodynamics attached itself so well to wine in recent years? Why is wine attracted to biodynamics? In short, what does biodynamics do to wine? The hypothesis put forward, which would partly explain the apparently happy marriage between wine and biodynamics, is that the latter helps to give more life and energy to wine and that this energy would be perceived through new way of tasting, involving the whole body. Our article is conceived as an original and quite experimental contribution to the anthropology of taste and smell, in an equally original context, that of biodynamic production, far from industrial production methods [Lahne and Spackman, 2018].<sup>3</sup>

Our aim here is not so much to study what this extra life or energy might be as a scientific object and using rigorous metrics, as these notions are in any case impossible to stabilise from a scientific point of view. We also differ here from classic approaches in terms of the sociology of taste, which emphasize the social determinisms and strategies of distinction [Bourdieu, 1979] woven from the expression of a taste. In this vein, the wine object proves particularly relevant for analyzing the making of class boundaries and differences in terms of social, economic and cultural capital [Hartman, 2000; Howland 2013, de Benedittis, 2019]. As anthropologists, we feel closer to pragmatic approaches inspired by the sociology of science [Hennion, 2007; Shapin, 2011] and which, in the case of wine [Sternsdorff Cisterna, 2014; Hennion and Teil, 2016; Teil, 2021], emphasize the tasting experience itself, the affects and perceptions involved, and the ontologies of the various objects. In keeping with the very principles of biodynamics, which invite a phenomenological approach in which the observed and the observers are intertwined, we propose to take this approach a step further by assuming and even asserting the fact of mixing our own subjectivities and sensitivities with those of the actors and objects, in this case the wine, of course. Then, the reason for our use of these unstable categories of energy

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<sup>1</sup> Steiner himself says nothing specific about the question of wine.

<sup>2</sup> Demeter, the main biodynamic certification organisation, had certified 468 winegrowers in France by 2021, and had certified more than 1000 vineyards worldwide. To these figures, we should add the 150 or so members of the Biodyvin Union. While a few estates are certified by Demeter and are also Biodyvin members, many winegrowers practice biodynamics more or less without seeking to advertise the fact. A total of 600 winegrowers practising biodynamics in France today seems to be a conservative but realistic estimate.

<sup>3</sup> Even if biodynamics can be developed on large scale

and vibrations is that they emerge repeatedly on the subject of biodynamic wines from the discourses of winemakers, oenologists, sommeliers and tasters, whether beginners or advanced. From an "emic" rather than an "etic" perspective (i.e., one that favors internalist and indigenous points of view) [Olivier de Sardan, 1998], what interests us here is starting from what these actors tell us about their practice, and taking it seriously in an attempt to account for their rationality as finely as possible. Our focus on actors' discourse is partly explained by the fact that the expressions of the sensitivities we're talking about come either through personal experience or through their verbalization, but can hardly be directly observed or measured. By giving credence to these actors' discourses, we believe that what we lose in terms of "critical distance", we gain in terms of a fine-tuned understanding of their singular experiences. In a certain way, we try to respond to the provocative proposition of Gravina who said : « I think that the so-called maturity of wine criticism today should be put to the test by more radical questions that would allow for the possibility of going back to a critical reexamination of the taste of wine. » [Gravina, 2012 : 150].

Our investigation, which is multi-sited and rooted in the various vineyards of France, is all the more interesting in that it targets a powerful cultural and heritage stronghold. Demossier points the burden of identity of wine drinking in France, and evokes “the construction of the myth of French wine as an element of national heritage and patrimony » [Demossier, 2010 : 13]. This French « wine drinking culture » was historically influenced by the Appellations d'origine contrôlée (AOC) system created in the 1930s, the aim of which was to guarantee quality standards, and this influence really took off in the period known as the ‘Trente Glorieuses’ in France, before spreading internationally [Jacquet, 2023]. This system of evaluation, which is still in force, is based on tastings carried out by winegrowers, mainly using organoleptic criteria. It should be pointed out that modern tasting standards are based almost exclusively on those organoleptic criteria which, in most cases, can be objectively assessed. Parmi les critères les plus communs, on trouve les différentes acidités, la limpidité, les expressions aromatiques etc. Wine tasting and evaluation sheets are based on international standards (i.e. the world's best sommelier), drawn up by the International Union of Oenologists, and therefore not typically French. It is widely recognized in professional circles as well as among wine lovers.<sup>4</sup>

Then, the aim of this study is to make visible and comprehensible new ways of tasting wine, based on less commonly expressed and accepted forms of perception, which contrast sharply with the more classic and standardized forms of wine tasting. It also continues our previous analyses on wine concerning the involvement of the body and the sensitivities at work in the vineyard [Foyer, 2018; Pineau, 2019]. In the first section, we will see how, beyond the techniques specific to biodynamics, they echo a concern to enliven soils, vines and, with them, wine. Then we will see how the work undertaken with living organisms seems to resonate in a pattern of wine-tasting that engages the whole body and calls on the mobile categories of energy or vibration. This way of understanding wine beyond olfactory and gustatory criteria alone opens up new ways of appreciating and drinking wine.

## **Materials and Methods**

Our discussion is based on ethnographic surveys and interviews carried out in the Anjou, a region where the development of biodynamic viticulture is particularly 'dynamic', and during multi-site fieldwork in French vineyards where 'natural' and/or biodynamic winegrowers are strongly represented (Ardèche, Beaujolais, Jura, Loire, South-West...). It seemed obvious to the authors that this article should be written as a duo. The subject, biodynamic wine, is common

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<sup>4</sup> See the International Organisation of Vine and Wine website: <https://www.oiv.int/public/medias/7943/oiv-patronage-concours-norme-ed-2021.pdf>

to both. Our recent studies intersect and echo each other, even though our paths towards it have different starting points. Christelle Pineau came into contact with biodynamic wine through 'natural' wine, which has been the focus of her research [Pineau, 2019] for more than twelve years, following on from the thinking and the links she has maintained with wine and wine-tasting in contact with professionals. Jean Foyer came to wine through biodynamics. He led long-time research about biodynamics in Anjou based on 94 qualitative interviews between 2014 and 2020, mostly with winemakers, biodynamic trainers and students in biodynamic training. He also led participatory observation during organic wine salons and biodynamic training. Although a complete beginner in oenological terms at the start of his fieldwork, he began to appreciate the wines of the vintners he interviewed, especially after being struck by the sense of discovering not only the wine in the bottles, but also the people. This near-symmetry between our pathways has multiplied the possible approaches to the complex and "borderline" object of biodynamics associated with wine. The overlaps or divergences that result from our observations in the field both nourish and enrich our analyses. To support our argument and give credibility to the discursive motives of those involved in the wine industry, we have drawn on the opinion of a recognised expert in the field of wine tasting. Pascaline Lepeltier represented France at the Best World Sommelier's Competition in 2023. She knows all the different styles of tasting, from the most standard to the most alternative.

## Results:

### 1. Life in motion: the principles of biodynamics

Biodynamics is anchored in the work done in the vineyard, in the care given to the land and, more precisely, to the balance of the vineyard as a whole. While the same applies to all wine-making methods, with biodynamics, the choice of doing without synthetic chemicals<sup>5</sup> and the extra attention [Foyer, Hermesse and Hecquet, 2020] given to the dynamics of the living world refines our understanding of the interactions between plants, animals and humans. According to Aurélie Choné "To be a farmer for Rudolf Steiner is both to be active in nature and to seek more consciousness in the work undertaken, in other words in the social organism." [Choné, 2017]. The contributions of different composts and preparations<sup>6</sup> mixing animal envelopes and plant containers and stemming from analogical thinking [Breda, 2016; Pineau, 2020] are supposed to contribute to the revitalisation of each particular environment. We should note here that two of the central features of analogism as defined by Philippe Descola are the use of different techniques for establishing correspondences (for example, between microcosm and macrocosm) and the circulation of vital energy [Descola, 2005], features that are widely present in our fieldwork observations. These fundamental techniques are combined with observations of the position of the moon and the planets (interpreted in a biodynamic calendar). Contemporary biodynamic practice can cover different levels of understanding and appropriation by winemakers, from the highly pragmatic to the highly esoteric energy [Grandjean, 2021]. Some observe it rather 'distantly', others embrace it in a 'discreet and personal' manner, or approach it

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<sup>5</sup> Doing without chemical inputs increases risks compared to the conventional method, which can (partly) guarantee the harvest, or correct it using synthetic products, including pesticides.

<sup>6</sup> Of which the 500 and 501 preparations are the most emblematic and widely used. The 500 is a preparation made from cow dung inserted into cow horns that have been left to overwinter, dug up and then dynamised and sprayed in infinitesimal quantities on the vines. This is supposed to nourish and restore the vigour of the soil. The 501 preparation contains quartz silica and is based on the same process, except that it is put out to dry. This is designed to address the foliage of the vine.

in a 'secular and republican' way.<sup>7</sup> Adapting the biodynamic method in the field according to the technical and mental ergonomics of each farmer (or winegrower) is a key point in Steiner's thinking. Another idea, just as central, is based on dynamising, or setting the living in motion, as expressed by the term of biodynamics itself. The question that concerns us here is whether the work thus undertaken with the living can be translated into a chain of traceability from the vine to the glass. In other words, can we find in a glass of wine the "extra vitality" that applying biodynamics in the vineyard is claimed to confer on it, and if so, how can we identify it? This formulation of the living appeared with the rise of the "natural" and biodynamic movements. More often than not, the discourse on wine focuses on the restitution of the *terroir* in a glass. A lively *terroir* is supposed to be reflected by a wine which is livelier (which can also be understood as more stimulating), or simply more alive. This discourse contrasting the dead soils on which conventional wines are grown with the living soils of biodynamic wines was developed in particular by the '*Renaissance des Appellations*' group in France from 2001, formed around Nicolas Joly and Mark Angeli, winemakers who put forward a radical critique of appellations and a call for their redesign. These appellations, which are supposed to reflect and guarantee the quality of the *terroir*, become problematic and highly questionable when the land is exposed to the intensive chemical treatments used in conventional viticulture and no longer benefits from the living substratum that gives it its particularity: "The respectability of a brilliant creation is destroyed, or almost, within a few decades. Wine, which has become a fruit of technology rather than a fruit of nature, only has to please the palate of neophytes and the consumer majority". Nicolas Joly continues his argument with the need to reconsider the *terroir*: "A *terroir* does not only consist, as is said today, of the geological originality of its soil, but also, and just as importantly, of the living world that accompanies it: in other words, of all these microbes and bacteria that are each adapted to a particular type of soil and climate. By their presence they give the roots 'access' to these original features". Joly, 2007: 29]. Biodynamics, by virtue of its aim of revitalising the agricultural organism, notably through the use of preparations, seems to be particularly suited to the logic of the *terroir* that is so central to wine production. The "*Renaissance des Appellations*" winegrowers are therefore not at all opposed to the principle of appellations; rather, they dispute the technicist and technocratic logic at work in the current appellation system, particularly within the local institutions of the INAO (*Institut National de l'Origine et de la Qualité*), which, they believe, can only lead to the standardisation of wines.

While this argument of revitalising wines by revitalising their *terroirs* and soils has attracted many winegrowers, opinions among biodynamic winegrowers on the promotion of *terroirs* (and the AOCs attached to them) are variable. Not all biodynamic winegrowers have the same attachment to *terroirs* and AOCs and some go so far as to break with the system, which they consider is incapable of reflecting and enhancing the living - and therefore potentially unstable - character of the wine they produce. Because of these differences of opinion on the question of the *terroir*, we prefer to focus on the notion of the living, which is common to all. The *terroir*, subject as it is to criticism, denial, variability and doubts from both scientific and non-specialist quarters and the object of insoluble laboratory studies and interminable discussions in bars and cafés, is considered to mask the question of the life that resides in wine. From an analytical point of view, we have therefore opted to shift the focus from the *terroir* to the living, but without abolishing the consubstantial links between the two<sup>8</sup>. Bearing in mind the possibilities

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<sup>7</sup> Quoted from interviews conducted between 2012 and 2017 with winemakers in the Anjou and Minervois regions.

<sup>8</sup> Among the studies describing the pitfalls of attempting to reify the notion of the *terroir* [Van Leuwen and Seguin, 2006], we note those of M.-F. Garcia-Parpet for the way they highlight the changes in the socially established hierarchies between *terroirs* and appellations [Garcia-Parpet, 2001, 2014], and Geneviève Teil's proposal for a specific ontology of the *terroir*. Teil analyses the *terroir* as an object-product 'in the process of being made', not

of the *terroir* in the tension between the objective and the subjective, we will focus our interest on the characteristics and effects generated by biodynamic wines to track down the supposed framework of the living which is inherent in the practice, over and above the pedological, climatic and geographical data of the place in question.

Before going any further, it should be noted that many of the winegrowers we met practise "natural" vitiviniculture, i.e. without synthetic chemical inputs in either vineyard or cellar, applying a non-interventionist approach in the sense that human action is considered as "indirect" and "negative" with regard to the plant and the animal, to use A.-G. Haudricourt's terminology [1962]. "Natural" and biodynamic practices do not systematically overlap, but neither can they be separated, such is the reciprocal porosity that becomes apparent in the field. While not all 'natural' winegrowers are interested in biodynamics, a kind of benevolence towards it can be observed in the vast majority of cases. Conversely, not all biodynamists make 'natural' wines, but many of them tend towards the same ideal of minimal intervention in the wine cellar. "Natural" and biodynamic methods do not have the same origins, but they link up and intertwine in the flow of daily life and encounters, as evidenced by the many wine salons advertised as "natural" or biodynamic, mingling hybrid and evolving profiles, each choosing to define themselves as one or the other according to backgrounds and convictions.

## 2. Tasting with one's body: energy and vibrations

Just as the idea of the *terroir* has remained controversial and difficult to grasp in its entirety, postulating the existence of a common thread in biodynamic wines is proving to be equally fraught. The burden of proof in an "objective" scientific framework remains the major obstacle. In an attempt to understand the mechanisms governing the expression and definition of taste, researchers in neurophysiology and sensory analysis try to eliminate bias - external or internal influences of a socio-cultural and psychological nature. As Pr Jacques Le Magnen reminds us, some stimuli can be described in more or less the same way by a large number of individuals, as is for sugar, but also "the smell of a pure substance is described in approximately the same way by everyone." But he goes on to say that the same cannot be said of the likes and dislikes, preferences and aversions that subjects, and therefore consumers, express with regard to the foods that produce the sensations." [Le Magnen, 1990, 2009: X preface first edition]. Moreover, Jules Chauvet, a wine merchant and winemaker from the Beaujolais region who was also a researcher in microbiology and chemistry<sup>9</sup> and has become an emblematic figure in the "natural" wines network, pointed out that the act of tasting brings into play a whole system that is difficult to define, being at once clear and opaque: "While our apparatus is ultra-sensitive (it can detect certain odours from infinitesimal quantities of matter-substance, of the order of a millionth of a milligram), our analytical faculties have remained very rudimentary. Nature seems to have deployed every obstacle to put us off the scent: in olfaction, there are no elementary units as there are in vision, for example, where colours can be expressed in wavelengths. There are no elementary odours: all odours and scents are complex and it is not possible to measure their intensities in practice."<sup>10</sup> Being aware of these difficulties - which we fully acknowledge - that arise either from idiosyncrasy or from the inability to analyse and then to state the complexity [Teil, 2019], we could simply state that our attempt to identify a common thread in biodynamic wines is futile. Nevertheless, on the basis of fieldwork, repeated

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as a finished and defined object-thing. However, she specifies: "The impossibility of predetermining a *terroir* does not make it a pure invention, but a relatively unpredictable production of which the winegrower is not the only master". [Teil, 2011 : 18].

<sup>9</sup> This was to better understand fermentation, but also to break away from synthetic chemistry, which he did from 1951

<sup>10</sup> Jacques Néauport, *Jules Chauvet ou le talent du vin*, published by Jean-Paul Rocher, Paris, 1997, p.57.



interviews, informal observations, personal experience and critical tastings over the long term, it seemed to us that the hypothesis could not be dismissed so easily. A dominant feature emerged in the data collected, contrasting with the usual expressions used for smells and tastes: the bodily involvement associated with tasting biodynamic wines. This involvement of the body is directly associated with energies and vibrations, the whole body being seemingly more affected by the circulation of the wine. Clearly, any type of tasting involves the body, but what we are trying to capture here is the involvement of the body as a whole, as an organ of perception in the manner of an antenna. A fragmented tasting experience could be contrasted with a synaesthetic tasting experience, in which the body is no longer fragmented into different organs of perception and senses. Pascaline Lepeltier, who was elected best sommelier of France 2018 and best worker of France in 2018 in the sommelier category, knows all the registers of wines, from the most conventional taught during her training and encountered during official competitions to the most "alternative", such as "natural" and biodynamic wines. Today, thanks to her wide-ranging expertise, she is able to give more precise descriptions of these "differences" and to discuss them, even though the divide between conventional and biodynamic methods occurred at the beginning of her career:

"There were expressions, tasting sensations, mouth-feelings and lingering finishes that were appealing even for a novice like me at the time. And especially, this was at a time when, even during the competition, we were blind-tasting a Sauvignon blanc, a Sancerre probably and an Anjou, a village Brissac, I still remember thinking that these were very hard angular wines, and saying to myself that I preferred the wines I had tasted the day before at the Renaissance des Appellations fair<sup>11</sup>. That weekend was quite an experience for me, and after that it continued, of course."<sup>12</sup>

After explaining that she was introducing contrasts between organic wines ("to me, organic can only be a palliative"), biodynamic wines with too much sulphur ("very safe in terms of winemaking, from 30 mg/l<sup>13</sup> onwards they get a bit hard"), and biodynamic wines which she prefers (except for "very large companies, and mainstream biodynamics"), she expands on her description of tasting sensations:

"There is an undeniable salinity on the palate and harmonies between the different elements, with the alcohol responding to the acids, to the sugars, to the bitterness, to the phenols, coherently and without asperity. You'll get wines with crazy acidity but you won't feel the acidity, it won't dominate, it won't be aggressive, or you'll get wines with a lot of alcohol, but you won't get the alcoholic sensation, the alcohol burn, because it's all coherent."

The question of mineral characteristics in the description of wines was only introduced some 20 years ago and there are still problems with multiple meanings [Deneulin, et al. 2014; Deneulin and Bavaud, 2015]. Some associate it directly with the *terroir*, others with the presence of chemical additives in the cellar (such as PVPP<sup>14</sup>, used in conventional methods to "glue" and filter the wines or many other additives). But it would seem that the mineral characteristics called for in biodynamic winegrowing do not only correspond to descriptions of rocks such as the classic "gunflint, pebble, flint or limestone". They appear to open up a new field of perception that combines with the register of energy and vibration:

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<sup>11</sup> The Renaissance des Appellations is a biodynamic wines fair held in Angers" => Renaissance des Appellations is a "group" as it calls itself and organises a well-known wines fair in Angers every year. <https://renaissance-des-appellations.com/fr/>

<sup>12</sup> Interview, 7 April 2020. Pascaline Lepeltier has been working as a sommelière in New York for over ten years. She represented France at the World's Best Sommelier competition in 2023.

<sup>13</sup> Added SO<sub>2</sub> in the wine. The Demeter biodynamic label allows added sulphur up to 90mg/l depending on the colour of the wine. Up to 150 mg/l can be added to organic wines, and 200mg/l to conventional wines. The recent charter published by the *nature'L* or "*vin méthode nature*" winemakers' union, the S.A.I.N.S. wine association (no inputs or sulphite) and the older AVN (*association des vins naturels*) do not allow any added sulphur. There is a tolerance of up to 30mg/l of total sulphur (generated by the wine and added) within the union, provided this is mentioned on a specific logo.

<sup>14</sup> Polyvinylpyrrolidone is a synthetic glue.

"I'm very sensitive to the energies, the vibrations in the wines, the fullness in the mouth, the length. I can feel the energy of a wine when I taste it. [...] I see energy as a vibration. [...] And this vibration of a finished product is capable of being in harmony with a living body like mine. Afterwards, this vibration can linger more or less strongly. [...] It's as if my body recognises the living nature of the wine. [...] Once you start tasting these wines, your body will remember them, there's a reptilian memory."

The mention of energies and vibrations is one of those most frequently made by tasters and winemakers, both advanced and neophyte. But what kind of energy is it? Here again, we are faced with a "versatile" object, as Sébastien Carcelle describes it in his study on energy in rural homeopathy in Brazil [Carcelle, 2022], a category that can take on dimensions that are at once physical (thermal or electro-magnetic energy), metaphysical (energy as a vital flow) or moral (good or bad energy) [Bordes, 2018]. Jo Landron, a winegrower from the Nantes region, refers more to vibrations:

"Biodynamics is a way of accompanying the vine, in particular to modify the vibratory level of the wine. The vibratory dimension was the trigger that made me switch to biodynamics. When the wine speaks to us on another level, we don't really know why. That intense happiness that gives you a thrill. Trying to feel within yourself what makes you feel good. I wonder if in ancient times, wine might also have been like that: there were people with powers who I'm sure could make wines that were divine, with that kind of awareness." (Jo Landron, 27/07/18)

Others attempt to measure this energetic-vibratory quality with a pendulum, or try to detect the tuning of their vats with a tuning fork. Others again have music playing in their cellars. Experiments on the borderline between science and art are conducted to record the musical scores of fermentation and to understand the living dimension of the microbiota in the musts [Blanc et al., 2021]. The words living/energy/vibration that alternate throughout the discourse seem to evoke a single category that encompasses even the registers of health and well-being. Some winemakers are looking for the "drinkability" or "digestibility" of the wine, categories that are still vague, but which refer to the "health-giving" character or beneficial effects of their products for the body. Some even go so far as to evoke the ideal of wines that heal, not so much by the chemical compounds they contain as by their capacity to transmit their vital and energetic dimension. Pierre Overnoy, a Jura winegrower and pioneer of "natural" wines (Jules Chauvet school), opened out to biodynamics through his "spiritual son" and partner, Emmanuel Houillon. He frequently receives Japanese tasters who express the benefits of this type of wine for the body, its "nourishing" quality. Listening to these words, what emerges from all the variations is above all the circular dimension, from vine to wine and from wine to taster, which is inherent to the holistic vision of biodynamics. What is said is that the information and the intention of early care (given to the vineyard) must be transmissible.

### 3. Renegotiating wine-tasting: beyond organoleptics

Validating the transmission of energies, as a combination of spiritual - even esoteric - and pragmatic influences, comes up against the academic scientific framework, but it also comes up against the very foundations of the standard organoleptic tasting exercise. When Pascaline Lepeltier evokes these resonances between bitterness, sweetness and acidity, or when Jacques Néauport (a winemaker of natural wines and friend and pupil of Jules Chauvet) specifies that "a wine that is balanced when analysed will not necessarily produce a harmonious wine in the glass", we realise that analytical grids are not enough to give full expression about a wine. Nathalie Dallemagne, a wine-making and wine-tasting engineer specialising in organic and biodynamic viticulture, goes further:

"There is something intimate about wine. We're working with the completely unknown, because even if oenology understands things and can intervene, we have to admit that most of the time we don't understand. When you really want to accompany a wine, there's just you and your own sensitivity."<sup>15</sup>

Tasting here seems to be renegotiated and presented as an intimate experience. This intimacy of tasting - shared or not - can only be experienced through a framework for interpretation which is open to sensitivity. It is an intimacy that "counteracts the stabilisation of binary categories of inside and outside, of space and time. It disturbs what is binary. It is effectively a democratic experience of sharing what can be sensed, in which we find ourselves on an equal footing because there is no longer any power relationship." Laplantine, 2018: 82]. On this point of the democratic character of these new ways of appreciating wine - we are aware that the efforts made here to account for these new tasting criteria may seem to be the sophisticated or elitist considerations of insiders - it appears that wine tasting in a more sensitive mode has, on the contrary, been able to open up the world of wine to a new and non-specialist audience. Over and above the effect of fashion, which also plays a fundamental role, and the stories being told about biodynamic wines, it may be that it is precisely these bodily resonances that make these wines accessible to a non-specialist audience which reacts intuitively and sensitively to these wines, without worrying about the intimidating codes of organoleptic tasting. Because, looking into the wineglass, all the stories about the vineyard, the winemaker, the wine and the self intertwine, giving the tasting a unique, unrepeatable and virtually incomparable character. The taster's self is embedded in other selves (animals, plants, humans, spiritual entities, things...), in an extended "ecology of selves" [Kohn, 2013] that tells each sequence of a story in which each has deployed "energy" to transmit "information". This is perhaps the direction we need to take to understand the energetic and vibratory supposed powers expressed by winemakers and tasters, in the perception of the "chain of energy" contained in the living, which is neither stabilised or oriented by oenological products and techniques:

"After a while, this living thing also becomes very sensitive to the winemaker's touch. There's such transparency that you can really feel the agony or the delight of the person making the wine. [...] When there's this much depth to the winemaker's work, you sense it all the more in the bottles. [...] You take a sip and it makes you reflect, open up fields of thought that you didn't necessarily have. What I expect from a real bottle of wine is organoleptic, hedonistic, satisfaction, but I also expect intellectual satisfaction in the sense that the wine offers ways of thinking that I didn't have before...like a piece of music." (Pascaline Lepeltier)

At this point, we understand at the very least that expressions around the tasting of biodynamic wines shifts the framework of organoleptic tasting into a different psychological, ontological and artistic terrain<sup>16</sup>. Some professional sommeliers are quite prepared to consider a rethink of tasting codes that would bring in other dimensions, such as energy, aesthetics and poetry... In a way, this would mean moving away from the ethnocentric in the tasting exercise, reconfiguring a model constructed by modern Western oenology. It would mean tasting "in three dimensions" as the Angevin winemaker Didier Chaffardon puts it, giving precedence to the "sculpture and shape of a wine", to understand the "mobility" of a sulphite-free (and biodynamic) wine that "multiplies individual feelings" like Calder's mobiles, writes Alsatian winemaker Jean-Pierre Frick, to analyse the musicality of wines, as proposed by winemaker Gilles Azzoni, a natural winemaker in the Ardèche, who is not a biodynamist but is open to the practice:

"Biodynamic wines are tranquil, more gentle... to me it's almost like listening to chamber music... they interest me, they challenge me, everything is about sensing... there's this idea of seeking a lasting balance, harmony. I don't

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<sup>15</sup> Also expressed by Jules Chauvet (1907-1989), a winegrower who became a chemistry and microbiology researcher in later life. Voir Jules Chauvet, *Le vin en question. Wine in question. Entretien avec Hans Ulrich Kesselring*, Jean-Paul Rocher éditeur, 1998.

<sup>16</sup> Although a study of ten conventional and biodynamic wines did find differences in favour of biodynamic wines from an organoleptic point of view [Reilly, 2004]. Study not published in a peer-reviewed journal. Another study of organic and biodynamic wines found less clear-cut differences across vintages [Carolyn et al. 2009]. Yet another study found that biodynamically produced grapes had higher levels of sugars, phenols and anthocyanins (the latter contributing to aroma, taste and mouthfeel), [Reeve et al. 2005].

mind imbalance, although I will try to restore a balance. It's not a matter of taste, but of sensations when you drink. In biodynamic wines, there's nothing that jars. Non-biodynamic "natural" wines don't always have that gentleness, they vibrate but more like rock and roll, or reggae. Biodynamic "natural" wines aren't rock and roll, they're baroque, or maybe free jazz."<sup>17</sup>

To get an idea of the changes underway in the development of evaluation criteria, it's worth mentioning the recent work carried out with the Haute Ecole de Changins in Switzerland, which specialises in viticulture and oenology. Following discussions between the winegrowers of the Syndicat Suisse des Vins Naturels, created in 2021, most of whom practise biodynamic viticulture, and various partners including Pascale Deneulin, Professor of Sensory Analysis, new criteria have been added to the conventional evaluation. The new tabs invite us to take into account "the individual hedonic appreciation, the overall sensations perceived, the taste aspect of the wine", and "the emotion provided by the wine. This judgement is personal, although regularly shared. It does not represent the quality of a wine, as perfect things are not necessarily harmonious or a source of emotion."<sup>18</sup>

The understanding or perception of what can emanate from a biodynamic wine seems to come from a combination of different tasting models that recognise the importance of organoleptic tasting while linking it with other categories of expression, including synaesthetic tasting<sup>19</sup> and the use of metaphor. These categories, which resonate with the underlying analogical structure of biodynamic wine, seem to be better suited to descriptions of the evanescent and subtle otherness of biodynamic wines, but they are also able to broaden the lexical and perceptual field of tasting so that it is accessible to all, from the highly professional to the complete novice.

## Conclusion

In this article, we have tried to give a relatively integrated interpretation of the different ways in which winegrowers or professional tasters talk about their biodynamic or "natural" wine practices, in an attempt to grasp what the common thread of these wines might be. We have seen that the work done by the winegrower to stimulate life in the vineyard is said to be reflected in wines that give back this "extra life" in the form of energy and vibrations that are more or less consciously perceptible to the winemakers as well as to those who taste and drink their wine. These ways of understanding wine not only from an organoleptic point of view but also from the point of view of energy, broaden out the horizon to encompass new ways of tasting, drinking and appreciating wine, and with them, new forms of sociability around the act of drinking. In these forms of sociability, a kind of distinction exists, no longer based solely on class boundaries, but on different ways of engaging the body in the act of tasting. This distinction is based on another, perhaps more fundamental, distinction between conventional and biodynamic production methods. It is the adherence to the other modes of production and consumption that creates a community of knowledge and experience. Alain Corbin's work has enabled us to understand the break with the sensitive apprehension of the world that took place during the period of modernity [Corbin, 1986], a loss of reference to the senses that led to a loss of meaning by cutting itself off from sensitive and intuitive evaluation to the benefit of hygienism and standardisation, a dynamic that applies perfectly to the industrialisation of the wine industry to the detriment of traditional methods.

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<sup>17</sup> Interview, 28 April 2020.

<sup>18</sup> © Changins - ChG et PaD. See the website : <https://www.vin-nature.ch/copie-de-deutsch>

<sup>19</sup> The ability to bring multiple senses into convergence. See Victor Segalen, *Les Synesthésies et l'école symbolique*, Fata Morgana, 1981. Or, on a more poetic note, Baudelaire's well-known poem *Correspondances*.

Like the objects analysed, this article is experimental in the sense that it gives an account of ongoing experiments captured by a process of semantic trial and error that calls on unstable categories such as energy and vibration. By intertwining our object and our model of interpretation, we highlight the separation of appreciation criteria in the 'modern western' organoleptic model, such as the split between body and mind or subject and environment, which all derive from a naturalist matrix. The warp and weft of biodynamic wines could then be found in a certain ontological model of tasting. This would no longer be just a matter of drinking a glass of wine (which is already highly charged with history and symbolism), but also of taking an extract from the world into oneself, an image of other plant, mineral and animal worlds - in other words, of making room for otherness within one's intimate self, as Joël Candau explains "As the same time as odours, other elements of the world are mobilised, thought about and described" [Candau and Jeanjean, 2006 : 9]<sup>20</sup>

This way of tasting offers a kind of simplicity but there is also a more ambitious dimension, that of amplifying the resonance of the living world and, in taking a sip of wine, promoting its diversity.

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<sup>20</sup> "En même temps que des odeurs, d'autres éléments du monde sont mobilisés, pensés et décrits" (author's traduction)

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