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Market Work and the Formation of the Omnivorous Consumer Subject

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ABSTRACT

Omnivorousness is the tendency of culturally and economically privileged individuals to consume both highbrow and lowbrow products. Prior research explores omnivorousness as a manifestation of status distinction in which consumers deploy the aesthetic disposition—a generic and transposable ability to appreciate cultural products through a formal gaze—to lowbrow options. Existing work emphasizes the acquisition of the aesthetic disposition, but it does not explain how consumers transpose their generic disposition to specific cultural contexts and develop omnivorous tastes. Therefore, we study the formation of omnivorous consumer subjects and highlight its enabling conditions. Building on a seven-year ethnography of coffee consumption in France, we find that omnivorous subjects develop a dual and flexible cultural competence. First, they acquire a common appreciation of coffee during their primary socialization and enjoy the energizing and socializing functions of lowbrow coffee. Then, they develop a formal appreciation of coffee later in life as a result of market work conducted by market professionals. Specifically, market professionals do three types of market work: qualification, captation, and activation. Consumers respond to market work by transposing their aesthetic disposition to highbrow coffee and therefore enjoy its formal characteristics. We extend prior research on taste, omnivorousness, and consumer subject formation.

Keywords: Omnivorousness, taste, consumer subject, market work, coffee

Some people simultaneously enjoy classical music and gangsta rap, watch art-house movies and romantic comedies, and eat haute cuisine and fast-food burgers (Belezza and Berger 2020). These are cultural omnivores, defined by Peterson (1992) as people who consume a wide range of cultural products, from highbrow to lowbrow. While most omnivorous consumers come from culturally and economically privileged social classes (Bryson 1996, 1997; Peterson and Simkus 1992), some people from these social backgrounds remain univorous and consume only a small range of cultural products (Peterson and Kern 1996). To make sense of this phenomenon, we investigate how and why certain high-status consumers develop omnivorous tastes.

Prior work has studied cultural omnivorousness as a manifestation of the aesthetic disposition (Lizardo and Skiles 2012), which is a distanced, formal gaze used to appreciate not only legitimate artworks but also ordinary cultural products (Holt 1998). Scholars characterize the aesthetic disposition as generic and transposable, which means that it can be applied across cultural domains (Bourdieu, Darbel, and Schnapper 1969; Lizardo and Skiles 2012). Although existing work offers important empirical insights on the acquisition of the generic aesthetic disposition (Lahire 2008; Lizardo and Skiles 2012; Peterson 2005; Van Eijck 1999), the question of how this disposition is transposed to a specific cultural domain, once embodied by consumers, has not been fully explored. According to Daenekindt (2017) and Lahire (2003, 2008), scholars assume such transposition is automatic. Yet if we assume that the aesthetic disposition is transposed automatically, all middle and upper-class consumers should be readily omnivorous in any cultural domain. This assumption does not explain why some consumers remain univorous.

To explain the conditions and mechanism of omnivorousness, we argue that market professionals play a key role in enabling consumers' successful transposition of the aesthetic disposition to consumption domains. The goal of this manuscript is to specifically examine this role. We pose the following question: how do market professionals contribute to the emergence

of the omnivorous consumer subject? With this question, we investigate the formation of the omnivorous consumer subject and understand its enabling conditions. Our inquiry is important for three reasons. First, our study makes sense of heterogeneous taste practices among consumers that belong to the same social class (Lahire 2003, 2008). Second, it addresses calls for further research into the interplay between consumer subjects and their social, economic, and cultural contexts (Bajde and Rojas-Gaviria 2021; Coskuner-Balli 2020; Karababa and Ger 2011; Veresiu and Giesler 2018). Finally, by examining how market professionals contribute to the shaping of consumers' taste practices, we contribute to a longstanding objective of consumer researchers: to understand the social patterning of consumption (Dion and Borraz 2017; Holt 1998).

To understand how market professionals enable the formation of the omnivorous consumer subject, we conducted a seven-year ethnography of coffee in France. We found that omnivorous subjects consume coffee in two commercial settings: *cafés*, which have been existed since the seventeenth century, and specialty coffee shops, which emerged in the twenty-first century. In *cafés*, omnivorous subjects enjoy the energizing and socializing functions of coffee. They develop this common appreciation of coffee during their primary socialization. In coffee shops, omnivorous subjects enjoy the formal aspects of coffee. This formal appreciation is developed later in life in response to the market work conducted by market professionals (baristas and coffee shop owners). Market professionals do three types of market work, meaning deliberate efforts to construct and organize market contexts that facilitate transactions (Cochoy and Dubuisson-Quellier 2013). The first type of market work is qualification. Qualification means establishing the features of a product (Callon, Méadel, and Rabearisoa 2002). Market professionals qualify specialty coffee by discursively defining their product as highbrow and inscribing highbrow features into their product. The second type of market work is captation. Captation means attracting and retaining consumers (Cochoy 2016). Market professionals attract

consumers to specialty coffee shops and incite them to return by stimulating their curiosity. The third type of market work is the activation of the aesthetic disposition. Any disposition is latent and needs to be activated to generate a consumption practice (Lahire 2008). Once consumers are inside coffee shops, market professionals introduce them to the highbrow features of specialty coffee to activate their aesthetic disposition. Consumers respond to market work by transposing their generic aesthetic disposition to coffee and developing a field-specific cultural competence. Overall, omnivorous consumers embody multiple dispositions, develop a dual and flexible cultural competence, and consume both highbrow and lowbrow coffee. They enjoy the formal characteristics of the former *and* the functions of the latter. Yet, the formation of the omnivorous subject is not a smooth process. Turning points in consumers' socialization and failures of market work can hinder the process, which explains why some high-status consumers remain univorous.

We contribute to the literature on taste by theorizing a mechanism that explains how people develop omnivorous tastes and why people who belong to the same social class may have different taste practices. We also contribute to the literature on omnivorousness. We theorize the critical role market professionals play in the emergence of omnivorous consumption behavior. We argue that market work enables consumers equipped with the aesthetic disposition to transpose this disposition to a specific cultural context. Market work, we argue, is necessary for transforming a generic disposition acquired during socialization into concrete schemes of appreciation of particular cultural objects. Finally, we extend the literature on consumer subject formation by exploring the emergence of an aesthetic subject, thereby complementing existing work primarily interested in moral and ideological consumer subjects.

THEORY

Taste

In *Distinction*, Bourdieu lays the foundation for a sociology of taste based on three tenets. First, the social world is hierarchized (Bourdieu 1984). Social actors belong to social classes based on the volume and the structure of the economic, cultural, and social capital they hold. These resources are inherited from their family and accumulated over the course of their lives. Each social class is characterized by a habitus, a system of mental and bodily dispositions that people internalize during their childhood through a socialization process. In line with their habitus, people from elite classes acquire an aesthetic disposition, meaning a generic and transposable ability to consider cultural objects not for their function but for their formal aspect (Bourdieu 1984:3). The aesthetic disposition is “a distanced, formal gaze” (Holt 1998:8) that makes consumers consider institutionally established formal criteria when appreciating a cultural object. In contrast, individuals from lower classes develop a common appreciation of cultural objects that prioritizes functional use and personal preferences (Bourdieu 1984).

The second tenet in Bourdieu’s sociology of taste is that just like social actors, cultural products and activities are hierarchized. Bourdieu (1984) distinguishes between legitimate, highbrow cultural options and illegitimate, lowbrow cultural options. Legitimate genres include rare and demanding cultural expressions whose artistic quality is consecrated by institutions with symbolic authority (e.g., museums or prestigious publishing houses) and that are appreciated as aesthetic forms. In contrast, illegitimate genres include entertaining and accessible cultural expressions that offer a direct and immediate satisfaction based on their function.

Third, a structural homology exists between the social hierarchy and the hierarchy of cultural products (Bourdieu 1984). Put simply, the elites consume only the most legitimate and exclusive cultural forms while rejecting the tastes of other social classes. People from lower

classes, on the other hand, consume less legitimate cultural forms. Inter-class variations in cultural consumption can be understood in the light of the social and symbolic functions of taste. Aesthetic preferences and practices regarding music, the visual arts, books, clothing, food, and movies are used to signal one's position in society and to perform class-based distinctions.

Omnivorousness

Distinction has inspired an extensive legacy of work exploring cultural consumption in relation to social class (Maciel and Wallendorf 2017; Weinberger, Zavisca, and Silva 2017). Yet, Bourdieu's theory on taste has been criticized for being bound in space and time and for failing to account for cultural consumption in contemporary society (Lamont 1992). For example, Peterson and Kern (1996) show that since the 1980s, high-status consumers may not be exclusive snobs. Rather, they are likely to be cultural omnivores engaging in a broad range of cultural activities belonging to both highbrow and lowbrow genres (Peterson 1992, 2005; Peterson and Simkus 1992). Omnivorousness is particularly salient among young, educated, high-status consumers (e.g., Van Eijck 2000; Warde, Martens, and Olsen 1999). Although omnivorous consumers have broadened their cultural repertoires, they do not consume all options within a cultural field. In music, they dislike some lowbrow genres such as heavy metal (Bryson 1996). Therefore, omnivorousness perpetuates the symbolic and social function of taste through distinction. Omnivorousness enables culturally and economically privileged consumers to signal status (Belleza and Berger 2020), to express qualities that are highly valued in today's society (Van Eijck 2000), and to ease intra-class communication (Erickson 1996; Warde et al. 1999).

Omnivorousness is a contemporary manifestation of the aesthetic disposition (Lizardo and Skiles 2012). Instead of using the aesthetic disposition to appreciate only consecrated cultural

products, omnivorous consumers transpose this disposition toward ordinary products, which enables them to appreciate such products as pure forms (Holt 1998; Van Poecke 2018).

Omnivorous consumers acquire the aesthetic disposition through early socialization in artistic fields (Lizardo and Skiles 2012) or through social mobility that gives them experiences of a heterogeneous socializing environment (Lahire 2008; Peterson 2005; Van Eijck 1999).

Significant changes in contemporary societies explain why the acquisition of the aesthetic disposition leads to omnivorousness instead of snobbery. First, a broader range of taste practices provides personal reassurance by reducing complexity and anxiety in a culture of abundance (e.g., Smith Maguire 2018; Warde et al. 1999). Second, the world wars have led to an evolution of values promoting tolerance and questioning the superiority of fine arts (Peterson 1992, 2005).

Although existing work on omnivorousness has brought important insights, evidence for the acquisition of the aesthetic disposition does not explain why some high-status consumers invest in omnivorous practices while others remain univorous. A key to this mystery can be found in the assumption surrounding the transferability of the aesthetic disposition. As Lahire observes (2003, 2008), existing work assumes that the aesthetic disposition is automatically transposed from the cultural domains in which it was acquired to other cultural domains. Yet researchers have questioned this assumption (Daenekindt 2017) and prompted calls for more empirical investigation (Lahire 2003, 2008). We need to better understand how and why consumers transpose their aesthetic disposition to a specific cultural domain as opposed to remaining univorous. We argue that market professionals play a key role in the transposition of consumers' aesthetic disposition. We seek to determine how exactly market professionals enable this transposition and contribute to the formation of omnivorous consumers. To advance our inquiry, we turn to the literature on the formation of the consumer subject.

Consumer Subject Formation

Challenging a tradition of work that explores agentic consumption in relation to individuals' identity projects, scholars have investigated how economic, political, and religious actors contribute to the formation and shaping of consumer subjects (e.g., Bajde and Rojas-Gaviria 2021; Coskuner-Balli 2020; Dion and Borraz 2017; Karababa and Ger 2011). They often theorize the formation of consumer subjects as a governmentality process through which ideological and moral discourses about consumers come to be internalized by consumers themselves. For example, Giesler and Veresiu (2014) study the process of responsabilization and highlight the rhetorical and material strategies used by political and economic elites to constitute consumers as moral, autonomous, and rational subjects. In the context of micro-lending, Bajde and Rojas-Gaviria (2021) observe that an affective and moral consumer subject is constructed through market-mediated affective encounters that cultivate a sense of social responsibility and affinity with the less privileged. In their work on the institutional shaping of the ethnic consumer through market-mediated multiculturalism, Veresiu and Giesler (2018) show that institutional actors fetishize immigrants and produce ethnic market offerings, transforming ethnicity-related questions into depoliticized consumption issues. Coskuner-Balli (2020) also theorizes the formation of the citizen-consumer subject as a governmentality process. By analyzing presidential speeches, she demonstrates that American presidents systematically link the myth of the American dream to neoliberal ideology, and in so doing, depict people as active and moral subjects whose values align with the goals of the State. Dion and Borraz (2017) reveal the ways in which luxury retail encounters enable consumers to enact their status and privilege, thereby reinforcing these brands as status markers. More generally, prior work aims to investigate the

interplay between consumer subjects and their environments to better understand how and under what conditions consumer subjects are formed.

The work we cite above pays particular attention to the ideological, emotional, classed, and moral dimensions of the consumer subject. However, little is said about the consumer subject's aesthetic dimension, despite a call from Venkatesh and Meamber (2006) for further research on the formation of the aesthetic subject. One insightful exception is Karababa and Ger's (2011) study of the formation of an active consumer subject of leisure and pleasure in early modern Ottoman society. The authors describe the parallel emergence of coffeehouse culture and coffeehouse consumers, who simultaneously abided by and defied the discourses of marketers, state, and religious authorities. While Karababa and Ger's (2011) work addresses an emergent market, when it comes to our case, traditional *cafés* were already well-established before the emergence of specialty coffee shops in France. In other words, our work is about the transformation of a market context and the reshaping of aesthetic consumers who have already developed affinities and dispositions. We, therefore, extend Karababa and Ger (2011) by exploring what type of consumer subject is formed when a market context is not created from scratch, but rather, is diversified. We thus answer calls to better understand the articulations between consumer subjects and their contexts (e.g., Coskuner-Balli 2020; Veresiu and Giesler 2018). To further develop our framework, we use market work as a conceptual tool.

Market Work

Market work is defined by Cochoy and Dubuisson-Quellier (2013) as the ongoing efforts deployed by market professionals such as designers, packagers, merchandisers, salespersons, advertisers, web managers, activists, and R&D professionals to construct and organize markets.

Market professionals do “constant, gentle, patient and very fragile work aimed at approaching and shaping economic exchanges” (Cochoy and Dubuisson-Quellier 2013:4). Concretely, they create and use devices such as purchase settings, merchandising tools, or quality standards that facilitate market transactions and shape consumer subjects. The role of market professionals in the functioning of markets is so crucial that Cochoy and Dubuisson-Quellier (2013) call for accounts of concrete activities performed by market professionals and their impact on consumers. Prior research sheds light on three types of market work: qualification, captation, and activation.

Qualification. Qualification means defining a product or a service by establishing and stabilizing its salient features (Callon et al. 2002; Çalışkan and Callon 2009; Dubuisson-Quellier 2010). Put differently, qualification is a “criterialization activity” that aims at “defining dimensions of product quality, selecting which aspects deserve to be rated” (Cochoy and Dubuisson-Quellier 2013:5). Qualification relies on qualification devices, meaning material and discursive tools listing the features of a product or service that make options commensurable and easy to compare (Cochoy and Dubuisson-Quellier 2013). For example, car magazines define cars by establishing quantifiable features (e.g., price and speed) and qualitative criteria (e.g., comfort and road holding), which not only delimit the product but that also help consumers make comparisons between different models (Cochoy 2002). Consumer watchdog organizations translate higher order values to measurable and testable qualities that rate and rank products (Nøjgaard 2022). Wine promoters also use qualification to define wine as premium (Smith Maguire 2013). Nevertheless, the outcome of qualification is not definitive. The features characterizing a product can be challenged and modified through requalification interventions (Callon, Millo, and Muniesa 2007). Market professionals can redefine a stabilized product by adding, suppressing, and modifying its features (Goulet and Vinck 2012; Mallard 2012).

Captation. Once a product or service is qualified, it must enter the consumers' world. This is achieved by captation, a type of market work that attracts consumers to the product and maintains this attraction over time (Cochoy 2004). To do so, market professionals develop captation techniques, including captation devices such as shop windows, packaging, ads, labels, and loyalty cards (Cochoy 2004). Captation techniques generate actions on the part of consumers, such as developing interest in a product, purchasing it, or repeating a purchase (Cochoy 2004, 2016). When consumers are retained in a market and develop stable perceptions about available options and routinized behaviors, they are completely attached (Callon et al. 2002). Attachment is the process through which all manner of ties—including behavioral, affective, intellectual, and physiological ties— between a consumer and a product or service are created and maintained (Gomart and Hennion 1999). Although consumers are active in the formation of their own attachments (Pomiès and Hennion 2021), ties can weaken and even break over time (Le Velly and Goulet 2015). Detachment happens when existing ties that bind consumers to a product or a service are severed (Brembeck, Cochoy, and Hawkins 2021).

Activation. Consumers acquire dispositions, meaning tendencies to behave in a specific way in a specific situation (Bourdieu 1984). They internalize dispositions during their primary socialization, from birth to the end of adolescence, and through secondary socialization, over the course of their adult life. All dispositions are latent (Bourdieu 1984) and must be activated by a market context to generate consumption practices (Cochoy 2016; Lahire 2008). Lahire (2008, 186) thus recommends that we investigate the “subtle mechanisms of putting on standby/putting into action or of inhibition/activation of dispositions.” Furthering Lahire, we argue that, without exploring these mechanisms in regard to the aesthetic disposition, we fail to understand why

middle-class consumers at times include lowbrow objects in their cultural consumption and at times do not. To address this, we consider the activation of disposition to be underspecified market work and investigate the efforts made by market professionals to activate consumers' latent aesthetic disposition.

Using the notions introduced above, we ask: how do market professionals contribute to the formation of the omnivorous consumer subject? Our goal is to understand how their market work enables the transposition of consumers' aesthetic disposition and thereby cultivates omnivorous practices. To explore this question, we study coffee consumption in France.

EMPIRICAL CONTEXT

France has a long-standing culture of coffee consumption (Morris 2013). The first *café* opened in Paris in 1675 and became an important gathering space for intellectuals and artists (Letailleur 2011). *Cafés* proliferated throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and became places to play chess, pass the time, and quarrel about politics (Letailleur 2011; Manzo 2010). As such, *cafés* offered sociopleasure, psychopleasure, and ideopleasure (Karababa and Ger 2011). Today, most French *cafés* host consumers from different social backgrounds, including people from lower classes and those experiencing unemployment and homelessness (Boisard 2016). When consumers order a coffee, they receive a bitter espresso made by a waitperson using a blend of beans supplied by industrial roasters (Allen 2001; Morris 2013). In *cafés*, coffee is a cheap commodity that customers drink for functional reasons, such as getting an energy boost or spending time with family, friends, and colleagues (Boisard 2016).

Our secondary data show that the coffee culture started diversifying in 2005, with the opening of the very first specialty coffee shop in Paris. Five other specialty coffee shops opened

between 2009 and 2010, marking the beginning of the specialty coffee era in France. Our data show that the first specialty coffee shop owners and baristas were mainly French people who had discovered specialty coffee abroad while traveling and who wanted to provide French consumers with a different, highbrow coffee experience to what was available at the time in France. When consumers go to a specialty coffee shop and order coffee, they are asked if they want an espresso, a cappuccino, a macchiato, a V60, an Aeropress, or a Chemex. Whatever their choice, they receive a balanced beverage made with custom roast Arabica beans. Skilled baristas prepare beverages with coffee beans supplied by French and international craft roasters working in small batches (Racineux and Tran 2016). In specialty coffee shops, a coffee is about three times more expensive than in *cafés*. They therefore attract primarily middle and higher-class consumers (Manzo 2010; Quintão, Brito, and Belk 2017; Shaker and Rath 2019).

The emergence of specialty coffee is not specific to France. Specialty coffee shops exist in many countries, including Australia, Brazil, Canada, Japan, the U.K., the U. S., and the Scandinavian countries (Racineux and Tran 2016). Coffee aficionados label this global trend the *third wave* (McCamley and Morland 2021). Specialty coffee professionals promote farming techniques that respect the *terroir*, customize roasting profiles suited to specific coffee beans, use coffee preparation methods appropriate for each bean's flavor profile, and encourage coffee connoisseurship (Racineux and Tran 2016). The third wave is labeled in contrast to the *second wave* represented by branded coffee chains like Starbucks and their standardized third-place experiences (Bookman 2014; Manzo 2010). In the U.S., specialty coffee shops emerged as a reaction to Starbucks while still being shaped by the hegemonic brand (Thompson and Arsel 2004). However, in regions with a long-standing coffee culture like Scandinavia, the impact of Starbucks on the local coffee market was "less obvious yet more complex" (Kjeldgaard and Östberg 2007, 185). In France, branded coffee chains arrived after the market of historic *cafés*

was already established, and their growth remained limited (Morris 2013). As shown in the findings section, the third wave in France emerged against the French coffee culture represented by the established market of *cafés*, not as a reaction to the second wave of branded coffee chains.

A key actor promoting specialty coffee is the Specialty Coffee Association (SCA), a transnational association created in London in 1998. SCA gathers coffee professionals working at every level of the coffee chain who are devoted to pursuing high-quality coffee from bean to cup. The association comprises an international core and national sections in over a thousand countries. Created in 2005, SCA France brings together equipment manufacturers, coffee bean importers, roasters, and baristas. The association has set up many activities, including training programs, certification courses, guild camps, and publications. Its main activities, however, are yearly coffee contests. Organized for the first time in 2007, the French Barista Championships involve preparing and serving specific coffee beverages to certified judges within a limited time frame. Exchanges between contestants and judges at the championships mimic transactions between baristas and customers in coffee shops.

Coffee consumption in France is an ideal context in which to investigate the formation of the omnivorous subject. First, coffee is an ordinary cultural product, making it “an ideal candidate” to be considered through a formal gaze by consumers who have integrated the aesthetic disposition (Holt 1998; Lizardo and Skiles 2012: 275). Second, the emergence of specialty coffee is relatively new, making it possible for us to trace the entirety of the market work done by professionals and to foreground shifts in consumers’ tastes. On this note, the first author started to work on this project when the first specialty coffee shops were opening in France. This allowed her to trace the phenomenon as it happened instead of collecting data retrospectively (Lee, Struben, and Bingham 2018). The relative newness of specialty coffee also makes it a suitable context for generating insightful comparisons (Arnould, Price, and Moiso

2006) with other cultural contexts organized around more established taste hierarchies, such as music and food, which have already received scholarly attention in regard to omnivorousness. Third, coffee consumption is an interesting context *per se*, as it is culturally significant and powerfully resonant (ibid) for French people. Since their inception in the seventeenth century, *cafés* have served as gathering places for people coming from the lowest to the highest classes and have played a major role in consumers' social life.

ETHNOGRAPHIC METHODS

From 2013 to 2019, the first author conducted a multi-method, multi-sited ethnographic study in dozens of coffee shops and traditional *cafés*. During her immersion, she met people who consumed coffee in both traditional *cafés* and coffee shops, people who consumed coffee only in traditional *cafés*, and people who consumed coffee only in coffee shops. She also attended SCA meetings, participated in barista championships, became involved in training workshops, watched videos, and read a wide range of coffee-related publications, including books, magazines, newspaper articles, professional websites, and consumers' blogs. She established trusting relationships with people and learned their jargon, creating conditions to understand them and their world (e.g., Whyte 1993), thus progressively becoming an insider (Schouten et McAlexander 1995). The second author, who has extended familiarity with the specialty coffee market, joined the first author to discuss the empirical material from an analytical distance to avoid the danger of overabsorption in the empirical context (Arnould et al. 2006). Complementarity between authors and their ongoing communication was essential to advancing the study through successful collaboration (Lincoln and Guba 1985).

Data Collection Procedures

The first author conducted 39 interviews with consumers and coffee professionals. 29 of these were in-depth, semi-structured interviews lasting 120 minutes on average. All were audio-recorded and transcribed—except one, for technical reasons. The remaining 10 interviews were ethnographic interviews conducted during the first author’s observations in *cafés*, coffee shops, championships, and workshops. Ethnographic interviews were shorter and more spontaneous than formal interviews (Arsel 2017). However, they were particularly insightful for probing into small occurrences in the fieldwork setting without disrupting the natural course of events.

The sampling criteria for consumer interviewees were that they all go to coffee shops regularly—once a month on average. We recruited participants via several techniques: requests sent through social media, personal networks, introductions by baristas, and snowball sampling. All participants are middle-class and educated, which sets the necessary socializing condition for acquiring the aesthetic disposition (Lizardo and Skiles 2012). Most participants are young, which is in line with the profile of coffee shop consumers (Manzo 2010; Bookman 2013). All of our participants have been consuming coffee in *cafés* since their youth.

Initially, interviews aimed to understand what made coffee consumers enter a coffee shop for the first time and return afterward; we assumed that consumers would switch exclusively to coffee shops instead of continuing to frequent *cafés*. However, during data collection, we discovered that all coffee shop consumers continued to visit *cafés*, an emergent finding that directed us to omnivorousness. To find a boundary case, we recruited a participant who was omnivorous for a period but who then stopped consuming coffee in *cafés*. We will explain the implications of this case to our theory at the end of our findings. The interviews started with a broad question: “How did you start drinking coffee?” Then, we asked questions about our

participants’ consumption experiences in *cafés* over the course of their lives, their first time visiting a specialty coffee shop, their current coffee consumption practices and preferences, and their views on coffee. Interviews ended with questions about consumption practices in other fields like wine, music, and cinema to better understand participants’ class profiles and tastes.

The first author also interviewed coffee professionals: waiters, baristas, coffee shop owners, trainers, equipment manufacturers, roasters, and coffee bean importers. Participants were recruited during observation sessions at coffee shops and events. The interviews started with a broad question: “How did you start drinking coffee?” Then, she asked questions about coffee preparation, participants’ professional trajectories, their daily activities as coffee professionals, their views on coffee, and their experiences with customers. Table 1 and table 2 introduce consumers and coffee professionals with whom semi-structured interviews were conducted.

TABLE 1. KEY PARTICIPANTS – CONSUMERS

Name	Gender	Age	Occupation	Consumption profile
Adele	Female	20-29	Student	Omnivorous
Emma	Female	20-29	Sales manager	Omnivorous
Eve	Female	20-29	Academic	Omnivorous
Hugo	Male	30-39	Marketing manager	Omnivorous
Jade	Female	20-29	Student	Omnivorous
Liam	Male	30-39	Portfolio manager	Omnivorous
Lili	Female	30-39	HR business partner	Omnivorous
Louis	Male	20-29	Student	Omnivorous
Nora	Female	50-59	Housewife	Omnivorous
Rose	Female	30-39	Marketing manager	Omnivorous
Sylvain	Male	60-69	School principal	Omnivorous
Tom	Male	20-29	Student	Univorous
Zoe	Female	30-39	Graphic designer	Omnivorous

TABLE 2. KEY PARTICIPANTS – MARKET PROFESSIONALS

Name	Gender	Age	Occupation	Other roles
Adam	Male	40-49	Roaster	SCA leader and judge
Alexandre	Male	20-29	Coffee shop owner and barista	Contestant

Arthur	Male	20-29	Barista	Contestant
Baptiste	Male	30-39	Barista	Contestant and judge
Catherine	Female	50-59	Roaster	SCA leader and judge
Cedric	Male	20-29	Barista	Contestant and coffee class trainer
Charles	Male	50-59	Coffee bean importer	SCA leader
Chloe	Female	30-39	Coffee consultant	Judge and coffee class trainer
Christelle	Female	40-49	Barista	Judge and coffee class trainer
Daniel	Male	30-39	Barista	Contestant
David	Male	30-39	Coffee shop owner	Contestant and coffee class trainer
Gabriel	Male	20-29	Coffee shop owner and barista	-
Jerome	Male	20-29	Roaster and barista	Contestant and coffee class trainer
Nadia	Female	40-49	Equipment manufacturer	Judge
Olivier	Male	30-39	Coffee shop owner and barista	Coffee class trainer
Xavier	Male	20-29	Barista	Contestant, judge, and coffee class trainer

The first author conducted observations in three coffee shops and two traditional *cafés* located in two large cities. Two of these coffee shops—Vol 714 and Objectif Lune—are renowned trailblazers within the French barista community and opened in 2010 and 2013, respectively. The third coffee shop, Ottokar, was established in 2018 by a barista who was trained by the pioneers of specialty coffee in France. The two *cafés*—La Locomotive and Patachon—are places where the first author regularly went to drink coffee with friends or read, even before the introduction of coffee shops. In all these places, she conducted participant observations as a customer involved in market exchanges and non-participant observations as another consumer watching market exchanges involving other customers. She paid particular attention to the moment of ordering, coffee preparation and service, and service interactions. Moreover, she conducted observations in seven Barista Championships. She conducted non-participant observations as an audience member and participant observations as a certified judge. Finally, she conducted observations in three workshops. Two were training workshops for judges, and the third was an introduction to espresso preparation for beginners that helped refine her observation

skills. Overall, she produced 856 photos and 2 hours 30 minutes and 53 seconds of video. She also recorded 178 pages of fieldnotes to complement, contextualize, and triangulate data.

Finally, we complemented this corpus with secondary data. The first author collected official documents used in barista championships. Rules and scoresheets describe the organization of contests, define categories of beverages, and present formal evaluation criteria. She also collected 22 secondary interviews of 14 coffee shop owners and baristas published in a specialized magazine and a specialized website between 2013 and 2019. Questions tackled the interviewees' biographies, current activities and future projects, and views on coffee. In addition, she tracked media coverage of coffee renewal in France. She collected all articles on *cafés* and specialty coffee shops published in five leading national daily newspapers and five leading weekly national magazine outlets between 2013 and 2019. Finally, we added eight books to the data set to better understand the historical, economic, and practical dimensions of coffee production and consumption in France and in the world. Table 3 summarizes our data sources.

TABLE 3. SUMMARY OF DATA SOURCES

Method	Sources	Data Set	Goal
<i>Interviews</i>	Consumers	13 semi-structured 5 ethnographic	Understanding taste practices
	Professionals	16 semi-structured 5 ethnographic	Understanding their vision of coffee, their job, and their efforts to attract consumers
<i>In situ observations</i>	3 specialty coffee shops 2 <i>cafés</i> 7 championships 3 workshops	856 photos 2h30min videos 178 pages of fieldnotes	Analyzing transactions in <i>cafés</i> Analyzing transactions in coffee shops Analyzing transactions in championships Spotting commonalities and differences across sites
<i>Secondary data</i>	Rules and scoresheets of barista championships	25 pages	Analyzing the qualification process
	Interviews with coffee professionals in professional outlets	22 secondary interviews with 14 coffee shop owners and baristas	Analyzing what coffee professionals emphasize when talking to peers

	Press coverage of the emergence of specialty coffee shops in France	17 articles in 5 newspapers (<i>Le Monde, Le Parisien, Les Echos, Le Figaro, La Croix</i>), 22 articles in 5 magazines (<i>L'Express, Le Figaro Magazine, L'Obs, Le Point, Le Parisien Magazine</i>)	Contextualizing the renewal of coffee in France and the evolution of the market context
	Books on coffee	8 books (<i>La Vie de bistrot, Histoire insolite des cafés parisiens, Le café c'est pas sorcier, Le Breuvage du diable, L'imaginaire du café, La qualité du café, L'économie du café, Le café du Dr Le Plé</i>)	Understanding the historical, sociological, economical, and practical dimension of coffee production and consumption

Analytical Procedures

Data analysis was iterative with data collection. We started with an idiographic analysis of each interview transcription, by coding and re-coding the interviews. This first phase helped us develop a deep understanding of each participant and to form a holistic view of our corpus of interviews (Fournier 1998). We then made continual comparisons across participants (Fournier 1998), seeking commonalities and differences and identifying patterns. In parallel, we analyzed observation data. Photos were coded to create an inventory of objects involved in bilateral exchanges (Dion 2007). After transcription, we analyzed the videos to create an inventory of actions involved in bilateral exchanges (Dion 2007). Fieldnotes were analyzed with the goal of listing objects, actions, and interactions involved in bilateral exchanges. We analyzed observation data following a three-stage process: we started with an analysis of transactions in each coffee

shop and *café*, then we compared transactions in coffee shops with transactions in *cafés*, and finally, we compared transactions in coffee shops with exchanges between contestants and judges in barista championships.

Documents outlining championship rules, secondary interviews published in specialized media, and press articles were analyzed using the same technique we used for interviews. Other secondary data sources were carefully reviewed to enhance our understanding of the context. Data collected through interviews, observations, and secondary sources were triangulated (Lincoln and Guba 1985) to align insights between data sources. When ideas of omnivorousness and market work emerged, we read the literature to strengthen our data analysis. We went back and forth between the data and the literature to frame our findings and highlight blind spots within the literature. The names of interviewees and places are all pseudonyms.

THE FORMATION OF THE OMNIVOROUS COFFEE CONSUMER SUBJECT

The omnivorous coffee consumers we interviewed revealed a similar trajectory in developing their dual and flexible appreciation for coffee. First, they acquire a common appreciation of coffee during their primary socialization. All the omnivorous consumers we interviewed regularly went to *cafés* when they were young. Some participants discovered coffee with their parents, as going to *cafés* was a family ritual. Others discovered coffee with their peers and went to *cafés* to maintain the energy they needed to study, or to spend time with friends. Whatever the case, coffee brought them physiopleasure and sociopleasure (Karababa and Ger 2011). Second, omnivorous consumers learned to appreciate the formal features of coffee later in life as a result of market professionals' efforts. In this section, we highlight the three types of market work carried out by market professionals that enabled the transposition of consumers'

generic aesthetic disposition to coffee. We also explain how consumers respond to market work by using their aesthetic disposition to consume highbrow coffee as a pure form, while continuing to consume and enjoy lowbrow coffee for its socializing and energizing functions.

Qualification: Creating a Taste Hierarchy

The presence of both highbrow and lowbrow options in the marketplace is a precondition for consumers to have omnivorous taste practices in a cultural domain. However, unlike older cultural domains in which a taste hierarchy has existed for centuries (e.g., music and food), we found that market professionals had to create such a hierarchy for coffee in France, because it was historically a basic commodity (Boisard 2016). To do so, market professionals qualified specialty coffee as a highbrow product. In this subsection, we present the ways in which market professionals have defined the formal characteristics of specialty coffee and inscribed them into the product they serve to customers.

Defining Highbrow Coffee. Our data show that specialty coffee market professionals develop quality standards, meaning a qualification device that defines the features of specialty coffee and that emphasizes which aspects need to be evaluated (Cochoy and Dubuisson-Quellier 2013). Quality standards are formalized in the rules of the barista championships, in score sheets used by judges during the championships, in discourse produced by champions, and in educational materials used in coffee classes. We found that features converge across these documents. Charles (SCA leader) explains: “*Everything looks the same. We all know our job, so we produce documents that are relatively similar to each other.*” Our analysis of quality standards shows that coffee is defined as a formal entity composed of sensory features. Sensory

features relate to the organoleptic dimension of coffee, its visual aspect, and its texture (e.g., taste balance, flavors, and body). For example, the barista championship rules emphasize the importance of taste balance, defined as a “*harmonious balance of sweet/acidic/bitter,*” and state that “*crema must be present when espresso is served. The crema should be dense and smooth*” (rules of WBC 2013). By defining different sensory features, quality standards emphasize the intersensorial dimension of highbrow coffee (Maciel and Wallendorf 2017).

Interestingly, we found that quality standards are not restricted to sensory standards. Rather, they convey a broader definition of coffee that also includes technical, social, and political features. Technical features relate to a preparation protocol which includes recommended equipment (e.g., tamper, trays, and refractometer) and expected technical actions (e.g., flushing the group head, tamping horizontally, and cleaning the espresso machine every day). Highbrow coffee, therefore, is a technical entity, including all the devices and actions used for its preparation and service. Social features relate to the form and content of how baristas interact with consumers (e.g., being professional, attentive, and caring). Quality standards thus define highbrow coffee as a social entity embodying the service provider’s performance (Arnould and Price 1993). Political features relate to macro-level concerns about coffee production. Such features define highbrow coffee as a product in which labor conditions and colonialism intersect. For example, Arthur (barista champion) emphasized the working conditions of the farmers producing his coffee beans at the barista championship: “*I was strongly emphasizing the Mexican farm that produced my coffee. It provides farmers with a shuttle from their homes to the farm. It provides a doctor and free healthcare for all the farmers. They have free daycare for children. These are very important things.*” By including political features, quality standards shed light on preexisting yet invisible actors (Goulet and Vinck 2012), such as farmers and roasters.

To summarize, specialty coffee market professionals develop quality standards defining highbrow coffee as a multidimensional entity (Pomiès and Tissier-Desbordes 2016). They build on these quality standards to assess the coffee produced. They argue that personal tastes must be anesthetized when assessing the quality of a coffee. In other words, coffee is not considered good because you, personally, enjoy it, but because it fits the formally established criteria of highbrow coffee. For example, Adam (roaster and judge) says: *“One should not say ‘I don’t like it’ because that’s not the point. The point is: ‘Is it a good coffee?’ This is the only question we need to ask ourselves, not ‘do I like it or not?’”* Nadia (equipment manufacturer and judge) shares this willingness to distance herself from her personal preferences when evaluating a coffee: *“Since we all have different tastes and we react to taste in different ways, it is important to remember, ‘Be careful, what are we looking for?’”* Specialty coffee market professionals build on quality standards to promote a pure appreciation of coffee based on its formal features.

Producing Highbrow Coffee. Market professionals build on quality standards to prepare highbrow coffee for their customers. They inscribe the features of highbrow coffee in the products they serve in coffee shops. Quality standards shape the everyday coffee preparation practices of market professionals and serve as a taste regime orchestrating the practice of coffee making (Arsel and Bean 2013). Market professionals engage with quality standards every time they go to a qualification center. Qualification centers, such as championships, certification workshops, and coffee classes, are events bounded in space and time that are organized around quality standards. In each qualification center, the actions of specialty coffee market professionals are shaped by their careful reading of the quality standards. For example, Cedric (barista) explains how he trained for the championships:

Cedric: You can download the scoresheets on the website. So you download the scoresheets. [...]. Roughly speaking, you start with a given score, and if you don't clean your machine, you lose points. If you don't clean this, you lose points. If you miss that, you lose points [...] Well, the idea is to look at this part carefully, saying yourself: "I shouldn't lose points about what? What are the things that may make me lose points? What are the most important things?"

Author: Did it help with your preparation?

Cedric: Hell, yeah! For the organization, to know when I must show my portafilter, know how to purge, know where and how I will arrange my jugs, and if I have something to hide my jugs. Those things matter as much as the rules.

Author: Talking about the rules, did you read them?

Cedric: Sure, I read them and learned by heart.

Qualification centers are situations saturated with quality standards, imposing strict guidance on market professionals. They are also obligatory points of passage (Callon 1984). Different individual reasons compel market professionals to go to qualification centers. Some aim for professionalization. Interviewees see qualification centers as opportunities to learn more about coffee and to improve one's skills. These events "*contribute largely to knowledge diffusion*" (Charles, SCA leader) and make coffee professionals "*progress to the next level*" (Catherine, judge), which in turn helps them get a job or excel in their current job. Other market professionals are attracted to qualification centers for socialization purposes. They enjoy meeting with their peers in a fun and friendly atmosphere. These events enable our participants to break from daily routines and to have a good time with peers while also learning their craft. Finally, market professionals go to qualification centers for business networking purposes. Interviewees unanimously valorize these events for their ability to gather a wide range of stakeholders (e.g., equipment manufacturers, roasters, coffee importers) who represent potential business partners and who bring their products to sample. For example, Christelle (barista) and Baptiste (barista) find coffee equipment purchases costly and risky. They use qualification centers as opportunities

to meet coffee professionals and to buy the machines that suit their needs. Therefore, qualification centers are “a rendezvous of multiple agents” (Peñaloza 2000:89).

Because market professionals go to qualification centers on a regular basis, they come to internalize quality standards. The orchestration of market professionals’ practices in accordance with these standards continues once they leave qualification centers and return to their coffee shops. Our data show that quality standards continue shaping baristas’ everyday practices even long after competitions, certifications workshops, and coffee classes. Consequently, in their everyday coffee shop setting, contestants prepare and serve beverages that embody the features of highbrow coffee with a high degree of fidelity. For example, in the case of contestants, being marked down on a criterion during a championship makes baristas very careful about respecting this criterion when preparing coffee for customers. Xavier (barista) explains:

I struggle every day at The Karaboudjan to keep work surfaces clean. Mine is spick and span. There may be a rush, 12 million beverages; it will always be spotless because I was made aware during championships because they slammed me about cleanliness. So there, yeah, I have learned a lot indeed, and I do my best to apply that in everyday life.

Similarly, for Christelle (barista), going to certification workshops and participating in championships shaped the way she makes coffee. She says: “*We want customers to get the best. We cannot participate in judge training and let it go. And in the end, I think we integrate this rigor. In a sense, it comes automatically; we integrate it in our movements.*” With the internalization of quality standards, market professionals incorporate the definition of highbrow coffee and bring it back to their workplace. In so doing, they inscribe the features of highbrow coffee into the beverages they serve to customers. In a similar manner to what occurs in other fields such as literature (Anand and Jones 2008) and fashion (Blanchet 2017), qualification centers shape the product and configure the market context in which consumers are embedded.

Market professionals create highbrow coffee through qualification, but this is not enough to make people consume it. They complement their efforts with another type of market work: captation.

Captation: Attracting Consumers to Highbrow Coffee

For omnivorous taste practices to take root, consumers need to have access to both lowbrow and highbrow options. Yet, since the taste hierarchy is new in the French coffee market, market professionals need to introduce highbrow coffee to consumers. This is achieved through captation. Captation refers to work carried out to attract and maintain consumers in a market space (Cochoy 2016). Specialty coffee market professionals awaken consumers' curiosity to entice them into coffee shops. Then, they maintain consumers' curiosity to incite them to return.

Raising Curiosity. Curiosity is the tendency to break from one's habits and let go (Cochoy 2004, 2016). For high and middle-class consumers, curiosity is expressed in a habitus disposed for exploratory and sensory-based practices (Maciel and Wallendorf 2017; Weinberger et al. 2017). Market professionals raise consumers' curiosity through service touchpoints. First, they work on the storefront. Most of the consumers we interviewed entered a coffee shop for the first time because an element of the storefront grasped their attention, such as the English word "coffee shop" written on the shop window and the attractive decor visible through the glass. For example, when he was asked what made him enter a coffee shop for the first time, Louis explained: "*I think it is the natural aspect of the materials and decoration. It was made of wood. There were also some bulbs that were dangling.*" Adele had a similar experience and entered a coffee shop for the first time because, "*it looked really beautiful from outside.*" Tom entered a coffee shop without even knowing it was a place dedicated to coffee: "*I was drawn by the*

aesthetic of the place. I am sensitive to interior decoration, so I am attracted to aesthetically pleasant places. Once inside, I realized it was a place dedicated to coffee, so I decided to stay.”

Interestingly, consumers feel like they found a coffee shop by accident. Participants describe a class-shaped aesthetic affinity towards the atmosphere of specialty coffee shops that is visible through the storefront, creating a “fits-like-a-glove” effect (Allen 2002). What seems like a serendipitous encounter results from market professionals’ efforts to attract consumers.

Besides the storefront, market professionals configure the interior space in a way that contrasts with *cafés* and that consequently breaks consumers’ habits. First, the espresso machine is central, highly visible, and located on the counter. As a result, baristas can stay physically close to customers, maintain eye contact, and talk to them while preparing their beverages. When Olivier (coffee shop owner) designed his coffee shop and arranged the interior space, he wanted to make coffee preparation visible: *“I wanted to enable my customers to see what’s happening backstage.”* This aspect of space configuration contrasts with *cafés*, where the espresso machine is on a table behind the counter. Consequently, waiters turn their back on customers when preparing coffee, which prevents customers from giving full attention to coffee preparation.

Second, in specialty coffee shops, coffee bags are highlighted. Inside Vol714 and Ottokar, coffee bags are showcased on a shelf at eye level. Inside Objectif Lune, coffee bags are showcased on a table near the entrance. In the three coffee shops, consumers who wanted to know more about coffee could easily approach and read the information on coffee bags. This effort to highlight coffee beans contrasts with *cafés* where there are no coffee bags in plain sight. The only place a customer can see coffee beans is inside the grinder, next to the espresso machine, at a distance behind the counter. Consequently, consumers are neither accustomed to being given information about the coffee beans used in their beverage, nor to looking for it.

Third, coffee shops have a menu that lists an abundance of coffee-based beverages, including espresso, cappuccino, macchiato, flat white, Chemex, V60, and Aeropress. This menu contrasts with *café* menus, which include several categories of beverages such as soft drinks, alcohols, and hot drinks, the latter including limited coffee-based options: *café* (espresso) and *noisette* (espresso with a hint of milk). Consequently, the menu of a coffee shop breaks consumers' habits and displays many unexpected possibilities. Eve (consumer) explains:

It was super puzzling because I received a lot of information. It's like going to a comic bookstore when you know absolutely nothing about comics. You don't even know where to look. You feel like the range of possibilities is unlimited. You face so many coffee options! It's really cool, but at the same time, you know nothing about it.

Our participants experienced a mix of curiosity, wonder and disorientation due to the lack of reference points. For Jade (consumer), the first consumption experience in a coffee shop “*ha[d] nothing to do*” with what she was used to in a *café*. Rose (consumer) uses a religious vocabulary to compare her experience with “*a revelation*” that remains “*etched in [her] mind.*” Facing the discovery of the coffee shop, consumers feel excited and puzzled. They are amazed to discover that a domain of reality they thought they were familiar with is much larger than they previously believed. Hugo (consumer) uses a spatial metaphor to describe such epiphany: “*I realized that I was playing on a small territory while the territory is actually almost unlimited.*” Consumers perceive highbrow coffee as “a world to explore” (Teil 2021:137).

Maintaining Curiosity. Specialty coffee market professionals make efforts to maintain consumers' curiosity. They try to prevent the fossilization of habits and to recreate the feeling of amazement that consumers experienced during their first consumption experience. First, they make customers leave their comfort zones. When they welcome newcomers, baristas ask and answer questions to create a window to explore consumers' taste (Ocejo 2014) and to identify

their personal preferences. Participants describe the attention and help they received from baristas when they first started discovering highbrow coffee. Zoe (consumer) remembers: “*She noticed that I was looking at the menu. I was taking a long time to make a decision. She asked me if she could help.*” Once baristas understand consumers’ preferences, they make suggestions to create a perfect beverage match. Tom’s (consumer) first experience in a coffee shop shows how baristas’ guidance helped him find his own way in the coffee world:

I decided to be honest by telling him I know nothing about coffee and asking the barista for advice, who took time to explain the vocabulary. In the end, I simply asked simple things, what the difference between the beans was. He took time to explain subtle differences in terms of taste and to ask me what I like. From there, he formulated a recommendation like a sommelier.

Market professionals guide newcomers and help them find their way in the world of specialty coffee. Our data show that loyal customers tend to order the same beverage, a behavior that baristas gently, yet directly, challenge. They suggest that loyal customers, whose preferences they remember after many visits, try something different. For example, Lili (consumer) is a latte lover who tried an espresso after the barista in her favorite coffee shop encouraged her to do so. This novel consumption experience fed her curiosity and desire to return. Attempts to challenge consumers’ habits can also be tacit. Gabriel (coffee shop owner) explains:

Some people come here because they know they’re entering a specialty coffee shop. They are not the people who enter and say, “can I get a coffee?” Those ones, I try to guide them so that they have the best experience possible, so that they are not too shocked. [...] I ask them a basic question: “Would you like a coffee with a light or a pronounced acidity?” Some of them tell me, “I don’t like acidic coffee,” so I serve them the less acidic coffee I have. [...] I don’t ask this question to people who often come here. There are people who regularly come here. They trust me, so for them I prepare the coffee I like [the acidic one].

Without explicitly telling them what he is doing, Gabriel crafts a sensory journey through which customers progressively come to understand the importance of acidity and to appreciate it. By offering two types of beans—a balanced option to raise the curiosity of newcomers and a more acidic option to challenge the loyal customers—he shapes the tastes of his customers.

Market professionals also change coffee beans on a regular basis to maintain consumers' curiosity. In coffee shops where we conducted *in situ* observations, coffee beans are frequently rotated, encouraging loyal customers to taste beans from different producing regions with specific aromatic profiles. Christelle (barista), who works in a coffee shop that highlights a new coffee every day, explains: “*We have a coffee of the day. We have between 15 and 20 coffees [on the menu], so we change every day.*” Rotating coffee beans entices customers by providing new aesthetic experiences. While high and middle-class consumers are naturally curious about exploratory experiences (Weinberger et al. 2017), market professionals provide them with opportunities to discover new aspects of the realm they have been exploring. Market work to maintain curiosity generates newness, which, in turn, not only sustains consumers' amazement (Cochoy 2016) but also starts their journey to understanding coffee as a complex object.

According to specialty coffee market professionals, such a complex object should be appreciated through a formal gaze. Nevertheless, capturing consumers does not mean they will spontaneously consider coffee to be a highbrow product. Market professionals need to deploy additional efforts to activate consumers' latent aesthetic disposition.

Activation: Encouraging Pure Appreciation

Since consumers are used to consuming coffee as a functional product in *cafés*, they habitually relate to the object using their common disposition (Bourdieu 1984). Even though they are equipped with the aesthetic disposition, this disposition is latent and needs to be activated (Lahire 2008). To catalyze activation, specialty coffee market professionals introduce consumers to the formal characteristics of highbrow coffee and overwrite their common appreciation. In this

section, we explain how market professionals encourage consumers to formally appreciate highbrow coffee after being attracted to coffee shops.

Introducing the Features of Highbrow Coffee. Specialty coffee market professionals introduce the formal features of highbrow coffee to consumers. In so doing, they inculcate and disseminate what quality is and what it means (Ocejo 2014). Specifically, they use three discursive strategies to present specialty coffee while legitimizing it.

First, market professionals emphasize the provenance of highbrow coffee, similar to the way wine promoters highlight a wine's provenance to situate it as a premium product (Smith Maguire 2013). They use provenance as a discursive strategy to introduce and legitimize the sensory features of highbrow coffee. Baristas not only emphasize the sensory complexity of coffee when interacting with consumers, but also associate each unique sensory profile with a *terroir* (Smith Maguire 2018). For example, Christelle (barista) always says "*a few words*" about the coffee she serves, which systematically include the country of origin and sensory descriptors. When serving a coffee from Burundi, she tells consumers that "*It has a nice body. It is a round coffee.*" Like Christelle, Cedric (barista) mentions the origin, flavors and aromas when serving a coffee. In his view, presenting coffee is necessary: "*You cannot serve this coffee if you do not introduce it, if you do not explain it to [customers], if you do not take them by the hand.*" Provenance allows market professionals to link unique sensory features to geographic anchors.

Second, market professionals create personal connections between highbrow coffee and the individuals or families involved along its production chain, doing what Johnston and Baumann (2007) call giving a face to the food. They use this discursive strategy to introduce and legitimize the political features of highbrow coffee by highlighting the talent and work that is put into the product. In so doing, they create a distance from lowbrow coffee that they see as a

product of labor and land exploitation. Baristas often provide the names of the farmers and roasters who produced the coffee beans. According to the market professionals we interviewed, raising consumers' awareness about roasters and farmers is necessary to “[give] respect [to] families who can live thanks to coffee” (Jerome, barista). Chloe (trainer) argues that talking about “the work of producers” has become common, and our observations in coffee shops confirm Chloe’s statement. Market professionals tell consumers that real people are behind their beverage and aim to foster a sense of closeness and connection (Bajde and Rojas-Gaviria 2021) with the producers. The following field notes taken at Objectif Lune reveal how the barista mixes provenance and personal connections when presenting coffee to customers:

Gabriel serves an Aeropress to two customers. The customers seem to be familiar with the coffee shop and to know Gabriel personally. Right after serving them, Gabriel asks:

- Do you know that the coffee you are drinking won the Irish slow brew championship last year?
- Yeah, you already mentioned that the Irish are good at making coffee.
- It is a Kenyan coffee roasted by Castaldi. It was made with the same water.

Third, market professionals blur commercial exchange boundaries (Arnould and Price 1993) to introduce the social features of coffee. They engage in friendly conversations with customers—unusual in service settings in France—to reduce the demarcation between the service provider and the customer. Going beyond what is usually framed as emotional labor in service work that is meant to manage customer feelings and expectations (Hochschild 2012), market professionals build commercial friendships (Price and Arnould 1999) to introduce and legitimize the social features of highbrow coffee. Our data show that market professionals are very friendly with their customers and show genuine interest in how customers experience highbrow coffee. For example, Gabriel’s (coffee shop owner) ultimate goal is to have a joyful, pleasing exchange with each client: “*Here is what I want to sell: a small, pleasant moment because this is the only thing I can do for people.*” By prioritizing friendship, Gabriel takes a stand against

commercialism (Holt 1998) and distances himself from the commercial pole of the cultural field (Bourdieu 1993). Xavier (barista) shares Gabriel's view and argues that baristas need to take care of their customers. Taking care of consumers involves making sure they enjoy their consumption experience, maintaining eye contact, checking if they always have water to drink, and asking if they are doing well—all of which are stated in the qualification standards we introduced earlier.

Fourth, market professionals emphasize the craft of highbrow coffee in contrast to industrial processes (Dolbec, Arsel, Aboelenien forthcoming). They use this discursive strategy to introduce and legitimize the technical features of highbrow coffee. Data show that market professionals present technical objects and actions involved in coffee preparation to customers. Zoe (consumer) recalls: "*It was interesting because she was explaining things at the same time. It was nice to look at her preparing coffee, to see how she was making what she was offering.*" One coffee shop where we conducted *in situ* observations even has a blackboard providing technical details about the extraction time and the quantity of ground coffee used to prepare an espresso. All of the market professionals we interviewed argue that highbrow coffee is a premium entity involving specific skills and material arrangements and that customers need to be educated on these technical features.

Intercepting Consumers' Common Appreciation. Market professionals work to thwart consumers' temptation to enjoy highbrow coffee only for its functions. The first function that specialty coffee market professionals fight against is sociopleasure (Karababa and Ger 2011). To intercept the socializing function of coffee, market professionals organize tables inside in a way that makes it impossible to welcome large groups of consumers. In line with our own observations, Adele (consumer) notices that contrary to traditional *cafés*, coffee shops do not have large terraces that allow groups of consumers to gather. Consistent with existing work on

specialty coffee consumption as a solitary experience (McCamley and Morland 2021), the consumers we interviewed go to coffee shops alone. Once inside, they are isolated in a bubble. Market professionals craft a quiet atmosphere that discourages consumers from speaking loudly with people, playing cards, or spending time with kids. Lili (consumer) experiences this bubble as a pleasant space-time of her own: “*It is my moment. It is like a cocoon where I feel good. It is a great refuge.*” Market professionals provide consumers with the right conditions to focus on coffee instead of being distracted by lively conversations and ambient noise.

Interestingly, market professionals’ efforts to fight against the socializing function of coffee lead to an adverse effect: Instead of taking the quiet bubble as an opportunity to appreciate the formal dimensions of coffee, some consumers use it to work on their laptops. Market professionals, therefore, try to discourage consumers from using coffee (and space) as an excuse to work in the coffee shop. They resist people consuming coffee primarily for its functional benefits of stimulation and access to third places (Oldenburg 1999; Thompson and Arsel 2003). Gabriel (barista) decided to cut the wifi in his coffee shop so that people could not use their laptops, while Alexandre (barista) created a “no laptop” section in his coffee shop. In the coffee shops where we conducted observations, seats were not comfortable, counteracting consumers’ temptation to remain for hours to work. To summarize, market professionals strive to activate consumers’ latent aesthetic disposition and to thwart their functional consumption.

Transposition: Consumers’ Response to Market Work

At this stage, both highbrow and lowbrow options are available to consumers in the market. Consumers have discovered the taste hierarchy and have learned which formal features of coffee to give attention to. All the consumers we interviewed have internalized the generic

aesthetic disposition over the course of their socialization, through repeated experiences with legitimate culture. Describing how they have acquired this aesthetic disposition is beyond the scope of this paper, but it is important to mention that all of these consumers have the generic capacity to formally appreciate cultural products. We find that consumers react to market work by transposing their aesthetic disposition to highbrow coffee and developing a field-specific cultural competence (Maciel and Wallendorf 2017). Interestingly, they do not use their aesthetic disposition when consuming lowbrow coffee. Instead, they continue to appreciate it for its functions. In this subsection, we present these two responses to market work.

Using the Aesthetic Disposition with Highbrow Coffee. In response to market work, consumers transpose their aesthetic disposition to highbrow coffee and appreciate its formal features. Consumers pay attention to the sensory dimension of the beverage they drink. Like wine consumers (Hennion 2015), they take time to focus on what they are tasting. Louis (consumer) notes: “*I try to enjoy the moment and to be fully aware of what I am consuming.*” Zoe (consumer) shares a similar experience: “*I really taste [coffee] now [...] I do not drink coffee as if it is Coca-Cola anymore.*” Our participants enjoy the taste balance and aromatic complexity of highbrow coffee. For Jade (consumer), coffee served in coffee shops is “*strong, but without being bitter and unpleasant. It is completely different!*” The interviewees notice a slight improvement in their sensory skills and a better ability to perceive differences between origins. Tom (consumer) explains that he “*ha[s] become more sensitive*” and able “*to perceive different flavors.*” Some of our participants even take notes about their consumption experiences. This is the case of Hugo (consumer), who is engaged in light institutional benchmarking (Maciel and Wallendorf 2017). He compares his perceptions with the indications that are given by the barista or written on the coffee bag, and he sometimes writes a few words in his phone about the origin of the beans and

their main flavors. Rose (consumer) also sometimes takes notes, and is even considering creating a notebook dedicated to coffee to “*keep refining [her] palate.*” Consumers’ bodies are slowly shaped by the activity of coffee tasting (Hennion 2015). They acquire cultural competence by learning how to describe their perceptions and sensations (Maciel and Wallendorf 2017). Generating traces of their consumption experiences helps them along this journey.

Consumers’ cultural competence goes beyond their sensory skills, as they begin to pay attention to the other formal features of highbrow coffee. First, they acquire knowledge about the technical characteristics of highbrow coffee. Interview data show that consumers unanimously notice and become interested in coffee making. Louis (consumer) notes: “*I can see what happens behind the counter. I can see quite well what happens behind it. Seeing [baristas] working reassures me of their skills.*” Some consumers even point at technical objects and ask baristas questions about them. Second, consumers notice that they are interacting with welcoming and caring market professionals. Elaborating on her consumption experiences, Adele (consumer) finds the social features of highbrow coffee similar across coffee shops: “*In general, it’s consistent in coffee shops. [The barista] is pleasant, kind, courteous.*” Lili (consumer) shares Adele’s impression and finds baristas to be always “*friendly and kind.*” Consumers integrate these social features into their expectations when they go to a coffee shop. Hugo (consumer) explains: “*I expect a barista who converses with me, who shares with me, who wonders if I have questions. I find that enriching.*” Finally, consumers become sensitive to the political features of highbrow coffee as they gain an understanding of the role of roasters and farmers. For example, Rose (consumer) explains that she always asks questions about the producers when she interacts with baristas. She always wonders where the beans come from, and “*sometimes [she] ask[s] for the roaster name to know the roasting house it comes from.*” Overall, consumers develop a multidimensional cultural competence aligned with the formal features of highbrow coffee.

Although consumers use a formal gaze to appreciate highbrow coffee, they incorporate some features introduced by market professionals into their formal appreciation schemes while excluding others. Despite their acquisition of a certain sensory competence, consumers confess they cannot always identify the flavors of their beverage nor find the right words to describe them. Lili (consumer) explains: “*My palate has refined [...] But I cannot recognize woody flavors, chocolate flavors, or fruity flavors.*” Consumers’ technical competence remains limited, as well. Some of our interviewees such as Hugo bought small equipment (e.g., a hand grinder, a V60, or an Aeropress) to prepare coffee at home. Yet, they acknowledge that the technical skills they have developed through observing baristas’ gestures are not enough to prepare an excellent coffee at home. Consumers also refuse to valorize all the political features of highbrow coffee. Consumers do not care about all of the aspects of the work done by farmers and roasters. A perfect illustration of this behavior is visible in a market exchange observed during a fieldwork session at Objectif Lune. As Gabriel (coffee shop owner) gave detailed information about roasting while serving espressos to a couple of customers, one of them interrupted him with, “*It’s only coffee.*” Consumers are interested in learning more about coffee production but do not find every piece of information relevant. Rose (consumer) explains: “*The barista talked about the origin of coffee beans and how he prepares coffee. It was interesting. But yeah, when he mentioned the altitude of the farm, I think the information was too much, too advanced. It was not particularly interesting.*” Excessive information can even ruin consumers’ experiences. Sylvain (consumer) strongly rejects baristas’ attempts to educate him: “*Coffee was really good, but the guy [the barista] bored me to death!*”

Moreover, consumers can reject the discursive strategies used by market professionals to introduce and legitimize highbrow coffee. This is particularly salient when it comes to the commercial friendship used by baristas to convey the social features of coffee, namely

professionalism, politeness, and attentiveness. Sometimes consumers find friendly baristas insincere or too informal. Market professionals' efforts to legitimize highbrow coffee lead consumers to expect interactions similar to the distant and formal interactions with waiters in highbrow restaurants. Louis (consumer) admits he finds the small talk with baristas "*fake*." Tom (consumer) shares a similar impression and argues that addressing customers with "tu" [an informal way to address a person of certain familiarity] instead of "vous" [a formal way to address someone one does not personally know] is a professional blunder:

I was really shocked when I went to a coffee shop in [large French city] where I was directly addressed with "tu." I do understand the idea of establishing friendly contact with customers and make them feel comfortable. But for me, there is a difference between this and professionalism. They need to maintain a distance. It is possible to be joyful, nice, and to address people as "vous" [...] When people go to a restaurant, they are not addressed with "tu"! In my view it's the same thing. It's a service delivered to clients, and a distance should be respected. It really ruined my experience. I had a similar one in Paris by the way. I don't remember which coffee shop it was in, but the same thing happened.

Tom draws an invisible line between professionalism and friendship. Tom's dissatisfaction with his consumption experience reveals that customers and market professionals may hold and enact noncongruent scripts when interacting. Such a script interference (Price, Arnould and Tierney 1995) reveals that market professionals can fail to adjust consumers' expectations, resulting in partial failure of the market work.

Lili's inability to perfectly describe the flavors of her beverage, Hugo's inability to prepare an excellent coffee by himself, Tom's refusal to engage in a casual service interaction, and Sylvain's boredom with the political features of coffee described by his barista show that consumers resist part of the market work performed by service providers and refuse to transpose their aesthetic disposition into all of the formal aspects of highbrow coffee that are presented to them. While appreciating highbrow coffee as a form, they do not strictly follow the script created

by market professionals (Akrich 1992). Rather, they develop their own script for action and a flexible cultural competence alongside this script.

Applying One's Common Appreciation to Lowbrow Coffee. Once consumers manage to transpose their generic aesthetic disposition to coffee and understand its formal features, they realize that coffee served in *cafés* does not meet the standards established for a highbrow cultural product. Zoe (consumer) explains that the bitterness of coffee in *cafés* “rips [her] face off” now, which sometimes forces her to add sugar to the beverage. Jade (consumer) shares a similar experience and admits, with amusement, how mediocre the coffee is in the Parisian *café* where she has been going since high school: “*In this café, I must say the coffee is not that good (laughs). It is not extraordinary.*” Similarly, consumers observe the absence of technical features in lowbrow coffee. Our interviewees think waiters are not well trained for proper coffee preparation and service. Adele (consumer) argues that “*there is no expertise behind*” the coffee served in *cafés*. Nora (consumer) disapproves that espresso machines are not cleaned every day in *cafés*.

However, with the exception of one person, all the consumers we interviewed continue to drink coffee in *cafés* and enjoy their consumption experience. Zoe (consumer) explains: “[*Before discovering coffee shops*] I was not aware I could choose between a good coffee [in a coffee shop] and a bad coffee in a *café*. Before, I ordered a coffee and suffered. Today, I know that I can choose. And when I order a coffee in a *café*, it's a choice. I know it won't be great. I know it.” This quote shows that consumers consciously navigate the taste hierarchy. Emma (consumer), who consumes both highbrow and lowbrow coffee, uses the metaphor of love to explain her behavior: “*It's like polyamory. I can have two lovers, A and B, and meet A on Monday, B on Tuesday, and A again on Wednesday. Or sometimes I want to see A more often because he brings out some specific energy in me, where B brings out another energy.*” This quote shows that

consumers develop attachments (Gomart and Hennion 1999) to both highbrow and lowbrow products. Additionally, unlike what past literature has claimed (Lizardo and Skiles 2012), consumers do not aestheticize lowbrow coffee. They choose to not pay attention to the inferior aromas, they accept the waiters' lack of technical skills, they embrace the lack of friendly and informative interactions, and they do not care about the farmers and roasters who have mass-produced cheap beans. Instead, they enjoy lowbrow coffee for its functions.

For our participants, lowbrow coffee remains a means to increase energy. They regularly drink coffee in *cafés* to wake up or to have a quick pick-me-up during the day that provides them with physiopleasure (Karababa and Ger 2011). For example, Rose (consumer) looks for a “*functional benefit*” when she gets a coffee. Louis (consumer) talks about a “*purely utilitarian goal*” and explains that he drinks lowbrow coffee “*for the effects of caffeine.*” Lowbrow coffee is also an excuse to gather socially. Consumers who are looking to have a good time with others regularly go to *cafés* because terraces and proximate tables facilitate the gathering of groups. The configuration of space holds socializing consumers captive. Once in a *café*, consumers keep ordering coffee because it is a simple, routinized practice featuring a familiar product. Sylvain explains: “*The beverage is often disgusting, but I don't go to cafés because of coffee. I go to cafés to be with someone, and I have a coffee because it is an old habit.*” This quote shows that a consumption practice is not always associated with a high level of excitement (Lahire 2003). The higher number of *cafés* compared to specialty coffee shops fuels the socializing function of lowbrow coffee. When they plan to meet people, our interviewees choose a place that is convenient for everyone. They are not willing to inconvenience friends or family members by having them travel far to meet in a coffee shop, especially when there are *cafés* on every corner.

The affordability of coffee in *cafés* also feeds its socializing function. Our participants find that coffee in *cafés* is a good option when a group member refuses to pay for or cannot afford highbrow coffee, which comes with a higher price. Adele (consumer) explains:

Prices are often cheaper [in *cafés*] than in coffee shops, this gets people to agree... Usually, a coffee easily costs four or five euros [in coffee shops], not everybody is ready to put that amount of money into a coffee. So, if I am with a group of friends, usually they will tell me “No, let’s go to the terrasse of the Café des Négociants or anywhere else, and have a 1.80 euro coffee or a beer or something else.”

Because of its affordability, lowbrow coffee consumption can be an unchosen practice (Lahire 2008), meaning a cultural activity not associated with a personal preference but that constitutes a compromise between other people and oneself. Adele’s quote also shows that consumers are immersed in heterogeneous socializing spheres (Lahire 2003). Although highbrow coffee consumers are economically and culturally privileged people, they have friends from the lower classes. Elaborating on the bill he paid in a specialty coffee shop, Sylvain (consumer) admits, “*It is outrageous for people who do not have so much money.*” Our participants perceive lowbrow coffee as a beverage that can be co-consumed inclusively, allowing less privileged relatives and friends to join in, something not possible with highbrow coffee. In these circumstances, consumers deploy the common disposition that they acquired during their primary socialization to lowbrow coffee, instead of their aesthetic disposition.

The Conditions for and Failures in the Formation of the Omnivorous Consumer Subject

Our fieldwork of coffee consumption in France highlights the enabling conditions for the emergence of the omnivorous consumer subject. First, consumers must have internalized both common and aesthetic dispositions during their socialization. The omnivorous subject is a plural social actor (Lahire 2011) who can appreciate cultural products both commonly and formally.

This enabling condition explains why only economically and culturally privileged consumers can become omnivorous subjects (e.g., Lizardo and Skiles 2012; Van Eijck 1999, 2000). Second, culturally and economically privileged coffee consumers need to be exposed to market work to transpose their aesthetic disposition. Coffee consumers with the right background must live in areas where there are coffee shops that can offer them opportunities to interact with specialty coffee market professionals. This requirement explains why the first author has met plural, yet univorous, consumers during her seven-year ethnography. Third, their common appreciation must remain active. For this to be the case, consumers need opportunities to socialize in *cafés*, by having, for example, friends, colleagues, and family who regularly enjoy lowbrow coffee.

Besides these consumer-related conditions, we identify market work-related conditions. First, market professionals qualify the product to establish a taste hierarchy between lowbrow and highbrow options. Many cultural fields, such as wine and music, have a long history of organization around such taste hierarchies (Chauvin 2013; Hennion and Fauquet 2001). Other fields, such as beer, coffee, and olive oil, have recently undergone an aestheticization process that has led to newly established taste hierarchies (Dagalp and Hartmann 2022; Dolbec et al. forthcoming; Maciel and Wallendorf 2017) through recent qualification processes. In either case, the establishment of a taste hierarchy is a result of the qualification work carried out by market professionals. Second, market professionals work to attract consumers to cultural products that are new to them by raising their curiosity. Market professionals also deploy efforts to retain consumers by feeding their curiosity. Third, market professionals activate consumers' aesthetic disposition and overwrite their common disposition. Market professionals teach consumers how to appreciate coffee formally while organizing space in a way that prevents them from enjoying the functional aspects of coffee. These three types of market work enable consumers to transpose their aesthetic disposition to coffee. Consumers navigate the taste hierarchy and formally

appreciate highbrow coffee while continuing to consume and commonly appreciate lowbrow coffee. Figure 1 summarizes the formation of the omnivorous consumer subject.

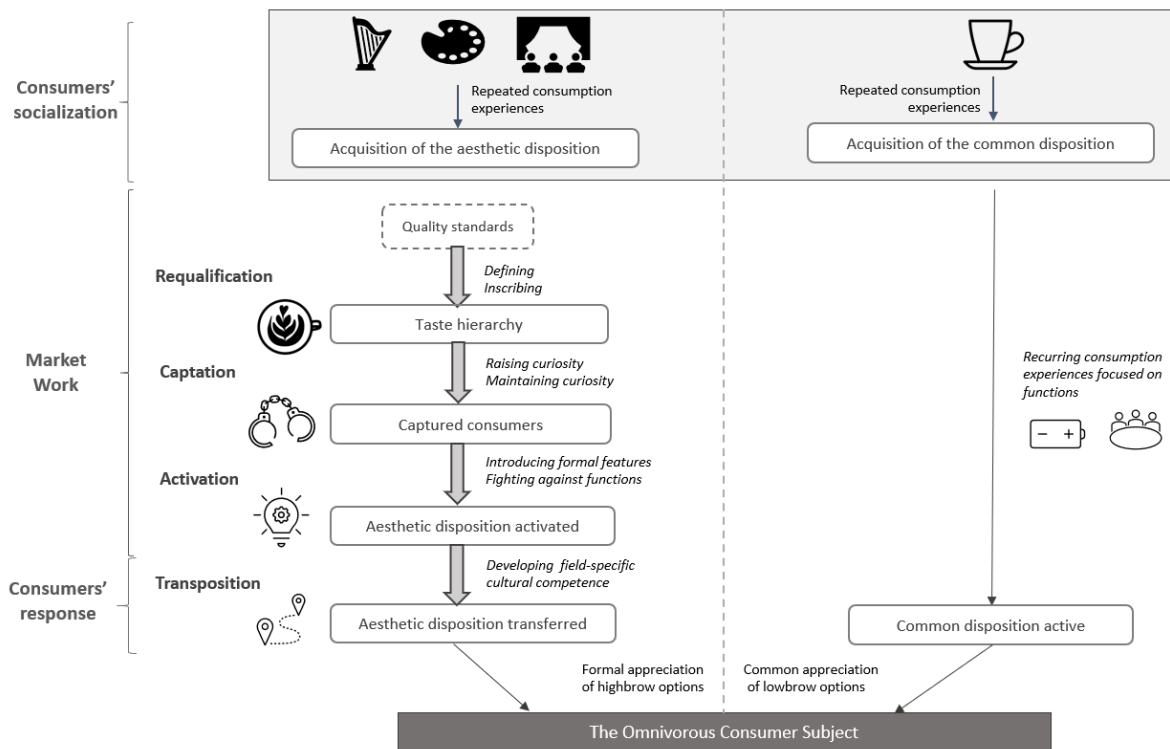


Figure 1: The Formation of the Omnivorous Consumer Subject

The formation of omnivorous subjects is a fragile phenomenon, however, and failures can happen at any stage. Consumers' unique socialization patterns can obstruct the conditions that enable them to form multiple attachments. We found that consumers equipped with both aesthetic and common dispositions may remain univorous. This was reflected in the case of Tom, the only univorous participant in our sample. Although Tom was formerly omnivorous, he has stopped consuming coffee in traditional *cafés*. His desire to avoid lowbrow coffee makes sense in the light of his secondary socialization in a status-conscious social group that valorizes sophisticated cultural goods. Tom's personal trajectory has overwritten the common disposition internalized during his primary socialization and has hindered his journey toward omnivorousness. The

heterogenous socializing forces consumers experience can both inhibit and fuel their dispositions (Lahire 2003, 2008) and therefore, shape their taste practices.

Other failures can happen at the level of market work. First, we found that market professionals operating in *cafés* can counteract the qualification efforts made by specialty coffee market professionals to create a well-defined taste hierarchy. Adam (roaster and SCA member) mentioned that a few traditional *cafés* have started to switch to higher-quality beans and to send waiters to training workshops. Although this phenomenon remains limited, it shows that traditional coffee market professionals can borrow some formal features of highbrow coffee and inscribe them into their products. Such an aestheticization of lowbrow coffee may flatten the taste hierarchy created by specialty coffee market professionals. In consequence, consumers with the right background for omnivorousness who have developed field-specific competence might stop going to coffee shops and instead enjoy both the function *and* the form of coffee served in *cafés*.

Second, we found that captation can fail. Our data show that specialty coffee shops are sociomaterially organized in a way that breaks customers' habits by first disorienting them. We found that market professionals need to guide puzzled consumers and identify the beverage most likely to satisfy them in order for new customers to be successfully initiated into specialty coffee. However, market professionals are not always willing to adjust to newcomers' preferences. Baptiste (barista) argues that some baristas are "*coffee extremists*" who refuse to answer some of customers' requests, such as lengthening an espresso to fill the cup or adding sugar. These baristas impose a beverage far outside customers' preferences instead of compromising what they believe is the right way to make coffee. Ultimately, "*a shock happens, and things do not go well*" (Baptiste). Moreover, Xavier (barista) explains how complicated it is to find the right moment to propose something different to loyal customers. It is not easy to know "*when a customer is ready*" for this (Xavier). Consequently, baristas can serve an acidic coffee or a slow brew too

early in a customer's cultural journey, leading to dissatisfaction. When dissatisfaction prevails over curiosity, newcomers and loyal consumers may be demotivated from coming back.

Third, we found that the activation of consumers' aesthetic disposition itself can fail. As we have already discussed, market professionals need to introduce the formal features of highbrow coffee to customers. However, this work takes time. Specialty coffee market professionals cannot properly present coffee to customers when the shop is crowded. Therefore, customers may not be adequately taught the right way to formally appreciate coffee. Furthermore, market professionals may fail to overwrite consumers' common appreciation of coffee. Our observation data show that some customers remain uninterested in their beverage and spend their time scrolling on their phone, resisting market professionals' efforts to make them pay formal attention to their coffee. Ineffective market work can fail to overwrite consumers' common appreciation for highbrow products, with the result that some consumers with the aesthetic disposition do not come to consider coffee as a complex product. Consumers whose aesthetic dispositions remain inactive cannot deploy a formal gaze to appreciate highbrow coffee.

The challenges discussed above can interfere with the formation of omnivorous consumer subjects. They prevent consumers from appreciating highbrow products formally and lowbrow products commonly. Our analysis thus explains why plural consumers can remain univorous and accounts for heterogeneous taste practices among consumers belonging to the same social class.

DISCUSSION

Contributions

By theorizing the formation of the omnivorous consumer subject, as the outcome of market professionals' work and the consequent transposition of consumers' aesthetic disposition to new cultural contexts, we extend the literature on taste, omnivorousness and consumer subject formation.

Taste. Bourdieu (1984) theorized the mechanism leading to homogeneous aesthetic preferences and taste practices in each social class. His theory has given birth to a rich tradition of work that emphasizes how social class shapes taste practices (Allen 2002; Arsel and Bean 2013; Holt 1998; Kravets and Sandikci 2014; Maciel and Wallendorf 2017; Üstüner and Holt 2010; Weinberger et al. 2017). We contribute to this stream of work by showing how these taste practices can be further shaped by market work. Consequently, we also address Lahire (2008)'s call to explain why and how some consumers from the same social class may have different taste practices. Our theory also acknowledges that successes and failures of market work further shape the differences in taste practices between consumers from the same social class.

We also extend Maciel and Wallendorf (2017) in two ways. First, the authors show that sociality is an important factor in cultural competence acquisition. They argue that consumers need social interactions with their peers in their trajectory toward cultural competence. We complement their work by showing that social interactions with service providers also contribute to the acquisition of cultural competence. With the help of market professionals, consumers unlock their cultural journey and transpose their aesthetic disposition to coffee. Second, Maciel and Wallendorf (2017) show that craft beer aficionados develop a field-specific cultural competence, as do our participants. However, our participants' cultural competence remains limited, and most are comfortable with this limitation. They do not have any interest in embarking on a pursuit of knowledge to become aficionados. We argue that activating the

aesthetic disposition is indeed a condition for consumers' pursuit of deeper cultural competence, but that this activation does not necessarily have to lead to full competence. The deliberate taste project that beer aficionados pursue is a gendered project of middle-class self-betterment (Maciel and Wallendorf 2017). In contrast, the people we interviewed do not have such a goal-directed project; they rather act as aesthetic subjects who are exploring a novel sensory experience. Further research could explore under which conditions consumers switch from the pleasurable engagement pursued by our omnivorous consumers to the analytical engagement of aficionados.

Omnivorousness. We contribute to the literature on omnivorousness in two ways. First, we complement existing work that uses consumer-focused arguments such as social mobility, heterogamous relationships, and involvement in a heterogenous socializing environment (Lahire 2003, 2008) to explain omnivorousness. Consistent with the literature (Lizardo and Skiles 2012; Weinberger et al. 2017), we find that consumers have the capacity to develop omnivorous tastes due to their socialization. However, we argue that having the right background is not enough. The development of consumers' omnivorousness requires interventions from market professionals. We echo Ocejo (2014) in drawing attention to the role of market professionals in creating upscale products and in educating consumers about quality. Yet we complement his work by highlighting the contingency of market work and its impact. Creating highbrow products and appealing to the aesthetic disposition through craft performances in service interactions does not necessarily create omnivorous consumer subjects, since market work can fail. We also complement Ocejo's (2014) work by showing that market professionals' efforts to activate consumers' aesthetic disposition do not completely suppress consumers' common appreciation, since they continue to consume lowbrow products. Our primary contribution to the literature on omnivorousness is in demonstrating the role of market work in consumers' dual and flexible cultural competence.

Second, we offer a complementary explanation for cultural omnivorousness that is not based on social distinction (Warde et al. 1999) or status signaling (Bellezza and Berger 2020; Peterson and Kern 1996). We argue that cultural objects cannot be reduced to social signals with static properties, but rather, that they should be seen as complex sets of features continuously defined by market professionals. To consider cultural products as monolithic signals ignores what market professionals inscribe into them through qualification. Without denying that people might express their social position through omnivorousness, we show that they also develop multiple attachments, and these multiple attachments feed consumers' cultural omnivorousness.

On this note, when omnivorous consumers engage with lowbrow products, they do so without the formal gaze described by Holt (1998), Lizardo and Skiles (2012) and Van Poecke (2018). Although market professionals overwrite consumers' common appreciation in highbrow consumption contexts, they do not completely erase it. Instead of always deploying the formal schemes of appraisal they have gained from their engagement with highbrow products, omnivorous consumers switch between formal evaluation schemes (introduced by specialty coffee market professionals) and practical schemes (coming from their former consumption experiences in *cafés*). This finding can apply to other cultural practices such as movie and wine consumption. Omnivorous consumers may enjoy lowbrow genres without constituting them aesthetically. Their taste for independent movies may not prevent them from watching *Fast and Furious* at home after a long workday for their familiarity, simplicity, and ease. Similarly, their taste for complex Saint-Emilion may not prevent them from drinking a simple and inexpensive rosé to refresh themselves and share a nice moment with family and friends.

The Consumer Subject. We bring two contributions to the literature on the formation of consumer subjects. First, by exploring the emergence of an aesthetic subject, we complement

existing work that is primarily focused on moral, classed, and ideological consumer subjects (Bajde and Rojas-Gaviria 2021; Coskuner-Balli 2020; Dion and Borraz 2017; Karababa and Ger 2011; Veresiu and Giesler 2018). Building on the premise that consumers integrate aesthetics into everyday consumption, Venkatesh and Meamber (2007) coined the notion of aesthetic subjects, arguing that aesthetic experiences contribute to identity construction. Following these authors' call for greater exploration of aesthetic consumer subjects, we recenter the analysis of aesthetic consumption from the process of identity construction to the market work that contributes to its emergence. We complement their phenomenological approach to understand how the aesthetic meanings that consumers give to their cultural practices are inscribed by market professionals.

Second, we show frictions between stakeholders' attempts to shape consumer subjects and consumers' reactions to these attempts. In their study of the formation of the coffeehouse consumer in Ottoman society, Karababa and Ger (2011) explain how consumers resisted the authority of political and religious actors who considered coffeehouse consumption immoral and illegal. Using countervailing discourses, consumers deployed tactics to construct their own self-ethics and to moralize their consumption practices. Just like Ottoman coffeehouse consumers, our participants are active subjects who refuse to strictly follow prescriptions from market professionals who produce a normative discourse about what coffee should be. Rather, omnivorous consumers select particular formal features to focus on and can even reject market professionals' attempts to educate them. Therefore, we complement Karababa and Ger (2011) by showing that consumer subjects develop their own way of relating to a cultural product. Despite market professionals' attempts to impose a hierarchy between highbrow and lowbrow products, consumers show agency and continue to appreciate lowbrow options.

Limitations and Future Research

Our work has two limitations. First, our sample of participants is mainly composed of omnivorous consumers, with the exception of one negative case who drinks only highbrow coffee because the socializing forces he has faced have suppressed his common appreciation. However, this consumer has not fully attached himself to all features of highbrow coffee. We encourage consumer researchers to complement this insight by paying greater attention to cases of incomplete attachments that nonetheless result in univorous consumption. Similarly, we have observed, but not interviewed, consumers who remain univorous lowbrow consumers because their cultural journey toward omnivorousness has been interrupted. Further empirical studies could complement our theorization by identifying additional obstacles to the formation of the omnivorous consumer subject. Future research could investigate the service transgressions and ineffective market work that disrupt consumers' cultural journey, consumers' experiences with these disruptions, and marketers' reparative strategies for regaining consumers.

Second, our empirical context is characterized by the recent development of the taste hierarchy of coffee in France, which gave us the advantage of collecting data on market work as it happened. We wonder to what extent the novelty of this taste hierarchy catalyzes omnivorous tastes. Consumers may have fewer preconceived ideas about a newly qualified highbrow cultural product. We suggest that researchers leverage this limitation and test the transferability of our findings to established cultural hierarchies. Consequently, we encourage consumer researchers to analyze contexts in which taste hierarchies have existed for a long time (e.g., music, wine). Market work may unfold differently in these contexts since consumers have already developed specific ways of relating to long-established products.

Finally, we invite taste researchers to further investigate the shaping of the aesthetic consumer subject beyond the economically and culturally privileged classes. The legacy of

Bourdieu's theory has privileged the assumption that the cultural consumption of lower classes comprises a functional and emotional engagement with aesthetic objects, thus framing aesthetic subjectivity as an exclusive privilege of high-status consumers. This assumption is reified by existing work on univorousness which states that lower classes tend to only consume lowbrow products. This view does not account for people belonging to lower socioeconomic classes who are exposed to market work and who appreciate cultural products beyond their function, nor does it account for the practices of lower-class consumers in developing an interest in highbrow products. Extending Lahire (2008)'s invitation to avoid the cultural caricaturing of social classes, we call for empirical studies about the ways in which lower-class consumers aesthetically relate to cultural objects without reducing them to simplistic class stereotypes. Future research could re-examine assumptions about the cultural consumption of people from less privileged classes and explore how aesthetic subjectivities of different social classes are shaped by market work.

DATA COLLECTION INFORMATION

The first author conducted the ethnographic fieldwork in France from 2013 to 2019. She conducted all the data collection, which includes interviews, observations, and secondary data. Because the data is in French—a language the second author does not speak well—the first author conducted the first steps of data analysis. However, emerging findings were discussed on multiple occasions by both authors, which enabled the second author to become familiar with the corpus of data. Portions of the data were also translated to English during analysis. Data are currently stored in a Dropbox folder under the management of the first author. The notebooks in which field notes are written are stored in the first author's home.

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