

Arthur Asa Berger

TASTE: Why You Like What You Like

A Cultural Studies Analysis

SERIES IN SOCIOLOGY

Summary

Taste is an enigmatic topic. We recognize that taste plays an important role in our life in that everything we buy and many things we do are governed by our sense of taste. But what exactly is taste? How do we get our sense of taste and how does it affect our everyday lives? Does it evolve as we grow older or is it a constant in our lives? Is it affected by all the “influencers” to whom we are exposed as we watch TikTok and commercials, or do influencers merely spark some kind of inner sense of taste that was with us all the time? Is our taste based on our social and economic status or something else? What role do income and cost have in determining what we choose to buy? What role do the qualities of what we buy and the choices we make shape our decisions? Is taste based on logical thinking about things we wish to do or buy upon emotions we have generated by things like identification, status, or cultural imperatives? Taste always involves some element of choice, because if there is no choice, taste is irrelevant or moot. But what are the determinants when we compare things to buy or get or do when we have choices to make? This book takes its point of departure from the work of the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, whose book ‘Distinction’ is considered a classic work of sociological analysis. The topics dealt with are shown in the table of contents below. The book is distinctive in that it offers discussions of four methodologies/theories used in discussing taste: semiotics, psychoanalytic theory, sociological theory and Marxist theory and then applies these theories in the second part of the book to a variety of topics involving taste, such as yogurt, dogs, the singer Celine Dion, ocean

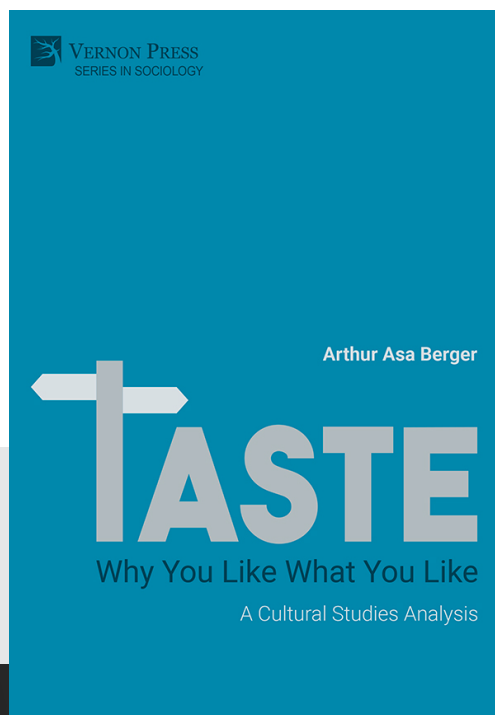
cruises, brands, smartphones, men’s facial hair, and so on. Readers of the book will learn four methodologies they can use in analyzing taste and see how these methodologies were applied.

About the author

Arthur Asa Berger is Professor Emeritus of Broadcast and Electronic Communication Arts at San Francisco State University, where he taught between 1965 and 2003. He graduated in 1954 from the University of Massachusetts, where he majored in literature and philosophy. He received an MA degree in journalism and creative writing from the University of Iowa in 1956. He was drafted shortly after graduating from Iowa and served in the US Army in the Military District of Washington in Washington DC, where he was a feature writer and speechwriter in the District’s Public Information Office. While in the army, he wrote about high school sports for The Washington Post.

Berger spent a year touring Europe after he got out of the Army and then went to the University of Minnesota, where he received a Ph.D. in American Studies in 1965. He wrote his dissertation on the comic strip ‘Li’l Abner’. In 1963-64, he had a Fulbright scholarship to Italy and taught at the University of Milan. He spent a year as a visiting professor at the Annenberg School for Communication at The University of Southern California in Los Angeles in 1984 and two months in the fall of 2007 as a visiting professor at the School of Hotel and Tourism at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University. He spent a month lecturing at Jinan University in Guangzhou and two weeks lecturing at Tsinghua University in Beijing in the Spring of 2009.

He was inducted into the University of Iowa School of Journalism and Communication’s Hall of Fame many years ago. He is the author of more than one hundred articles published in the United States and abroad, numerous book reviews, and more than 80 books on mass media, popular culture, humor, tourism, and everyday life. Among his books are ‘Bloom’s Morning’; ‘The Academic Writer’s Toolkit: A User’s Manual’; ‘Media Analysis Technique’; ‘Seeing is Believing: An Introduction to Visual Communication’; ‘Ads, Fads and Consumer Culture’; ‘The Art of Comedy Writing’; ‘Humor, Psyche and Society’; ‘Searching for a Self: Identity in Popular Culture, Media and Society’; and ‘Shop ‘Til You Drop: Consumer Behavior and American Culture’. His books have been translated into ten languages, including Persian, Italian, German, Russian, Chinese, and Turkish. Berger is also an artist and has illustrated many of his books.



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