

ALSO BY MALCOLM GLADWELL

The Tipping Point

BLINK

*The Power
of Thinking
Without Thinking*

MALCOLM GLADWELL



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Millennium Challenge, the sequel, was won by Blue Team in a rout. There were no surprises the second time around, no insight puzzles, no opportunities for the complexities and confusion of the real world to intrude on the Pentagon's experiment. And when the sequel was over, the analysts at JFCOM and the Pentagon were jubilant. The fog of war had been lifted. The military had been transformed, and with that, the Pentagon confidently turned its attention to the real Persian Gulf. A rogue dictator was threatening the stability of the region. He was virulently anti-American. He had a considerable power base from strong religious and ethnic loyalties and was thought to be harboring terrorist organizations. He needed to be replaced and his country restored to stability, and if they did it right — if they had CROP and PMESI and DIME — how hard could that be?

FIVE

*Kenna's Dilemma:
The Right — and
Wrong — Way to Ask
People What They Want*

The rock musician known as Kenna grew up in Virginia Beach, the child of Ethiopian immigrants. His father got his degree from Cambridge University and was an economics professor. As a family, they watched Peter Jennings and CNN, and if music was played, it was Kenny Rogers. "My father loves Kenny Rogers because he had a message to tell in that song 'The Gambler,'" Kenna explains. "Everything was about learning lessons and money and how the world worked. My parents wanted me to do better than they did." Occasionally, Kenna's uncle would visit and expose Kenna to different things, such as disco or dancing or Michael Jackson. And Kenna would look at him and say, "I don't understand." Kenna's main interest was skateboarding. He built a ramp in the backyard, and he would play with a boy from across the street. Then one day his neighbor showed him his bedroom, and on the walls were pictures of bands Kenna had never heard of. The boy gave Kenna a tape of U2's *The Joshua Tree*. "I

destroyed that tape, I played it so much," Kenna says. "I just didn't know. It never dawned on me that music was like this. I think I was eleven or twelve, and that was that. Music opened the door."

Kenna is very tall and strikingly handsome, with a shaved head and a goatee. He looks like a rock star, but he has none of a rock star's swagger and braggadocio and staginess. There is something gentle about him. He is polite and thoughtful and unexpectedly modest, and he talks with the quiet earnestness of a graduate student. When Kenna got one of his first big breaks and opened at a rock concert for the well-respected band No Doubt, he either forgot to tell the audience his name (which is how his manager tells it) or decided against identifying himself (which is how he tells it.) "Who *are* you?" the fans were yelling by the end. Kenna is the sort of person who is constantly at odds with your expectations, and that is both one of the things that make him so interesting and one of the things that have made his career so problematic.

By his midteens Kenna had taught himself to play piano. He wanted to learn how to sing, so he listened to Stevie Wonder and Marvin Gaye. He entered a talent show. There was a piano at the audition but not at the show, so he got up onstage and sang a Brian McKnight song a cappella. He started writing music. He scraped together some money to rent a studio. He recorded a demo. His songs were different — not weird, exactly, but different. They were hard to classify. Sometimes people want to put Kenna in the rhythm-and-blues category, which irritates him because he thinks people do that just because he's black. If you look at some of the Internet servers that

store songs, you can sometimes find his music in the alternative section and sometimes in the electronica section and sometimes in the unclassified section. One enterprising rock critic has tried to solve the problem simply by calling his music a cross between the British new wave music of the 1980s and hip-hop.

How to classify Kenna is a difficult question, but, at least in the beginning, it wasn't one that he thought about a great deal. Through a friend from high school, he was lucky enough to get to know some people in the music business. "In my life, everything seems to fall in place," Kenna says. His songs landed in the hands of a so-called A and R man — a talent scout for a record company — and through that contact, his demo CD landed in the hands of Craig Kallman, the co-president of Atlantic Records. That was a lucky break. Kallman is a self-described music junkie with a personal collection of two hundred thousand records and CDs. In the course of a week, he might be given between one hundred and two hundred songs by new artists, and every weekend he sits at home, listening to them one after another. The overwhelming majority of those, he realizes in an instant, aren't going to work: in five to ten seconds, he'll have popped them out of his CD player. But every weekend, there are at least a handful that catch his ear, and once in a blue moon, there is a singer or a song that makes him jump out of his seat. That's what Kenna was. "I was blown away," Kallman remembers. "I thought, I've got to meet this guy. I brought him immediately to New York. He sang for me, literally, like this" — and here Kallman gestures with his hand to indicate a space of no more than two feet — "face-to-face."

Later, Kenna happened to be in a recording studio with one of his friends, who is a producer. There was a man there named Danny Wimmer who worked with Fred Durst, the lead singer of a band called Limpbizkit, which was then one of the most popular rock groups in the country. Danny listened to Kenna's music. He was entranced. He called Durst and played him one of Kenna's songs, "Freetime," over the phone. Durst said, "Sign him!" Then Paul McGuinness, the manager of U2, the world's biggest rock band, heard Kenna's record and flew him to Ireland for a meeting. Next Kenna made a music video for next to nothing for one of his songs and took it to MTV2, the MTV channel for more serious music lovers. Record companies spend hundreds of thousands of dollars on promotion, trying to get their videos on MTV, and if they can get them broadcast one hundred or two hundred times, they consider themselves very lucky. Kenna walked his video over to MTV himself, and MTV ended up playing it 475 times over the next few months. Kenna then made a complete album. He gave it to Kallman again, and Kallman gave the album to all of his executives at Atlantic. "Everyone wanted it," Kallman remembers. "That's amazingly unusual." Soon after Kenna's success opening for No Doubt, his manager got a call from the Roxy, a nightclub in Los Angeles that is prominent in the city's rock music scene. Did Kenna want to play the following night? Yes, he said, and then posted a message on his Website, announcing his appearance. That was at forty-three the day before the show. "By the next afternoon, we got a call from the Roxy. They were turning people away. I figured we'd have at most a hundred people," Kenna says.

"It was jam-packed, and the people up front were singing along to all the lyrics. It tripped me out."

In other words, people who truly know music (the kind of people who run record labels, go to clubs, and know the business well) love Kenna. They hear one of his songs, and, in the blink of an eye, they think, *Wow!* More precisely, they hear Kenna and their instinct is that he is the kind of artist whom other people — the mass audience of music buyers — are going to like. But this is where Kenna runs into a problem, because whenever attempts have been made to verify this instinct that other people are going to like him, other people haven't liked him.

When Kenna's album was making the rounds in New York, being considered by music industry executives, on three separate occasions it was given to an outside market-research firm. This is common practice in the industry. In order to be successful, an artist has to get played on the radio. And radio stations will play only a small number of songs that have been proven by market research to appeal — immediately and overwhelmingly — to their audience. So, before they commit millions of dollars to signing an artist, record companies will spend a few thousand dollars to test his or her music first, using the same techniques as the radio stations.

There are firms, for example, that post new songs on the Web and then collect and analyze the ratings of anyone who visits the Website and listens to the music. Other companies play songs over the phone or send sample CDs to a stable of raters. Hundreds of music listeners end up voting on particular songs, and over the years the rating

systems have become extraordinarily sophisticated. Pick the Hits, for instance, a rating service outside Washington, D.C., has a base of two hundred thousand people who from time to time rate music, and they have learned that if a song aimed, say, at Top 40 radio (listeners 18 to 24) averages above 3.0 on a score of 1 to 4 (where 1 is "I dislike the song"), there's roughly an 85 percent chance that it will be a hit.

These are the kinds of services that Kenna's record was given to — and the results were dismal. Music Research, a California-based firm, sent Kenna's CD to twelve hundred people preselected by age, gender, and ethnicity. They then called them up three days later and interviewed as many as they could about what they thought of Kenna's music on a scale of 0 to 4. The response was, as the conclusion to the twenty-five-page "Kenna" report stated politely, "subdued." One of his most promising songs, "Freetime," came in at 1.3 among listeners to rock stations, and .8 among listeners to R&B stations. Pick the Hits rated every song on the album, with two scoring average ratings and eight scoring below average. The conclusion was even more blunt this time: "Kenna, as an artist, and his songs lack a core audience and have limited potential to gain significant radio airplay."

Kenna once ran into Paul McGuinness, the manager of U2, backstage at a concert. "This man right here," McGuinness said, pointing at Kenna, "he's going to change the world." That was his instinctive feeling, and the manager of a band like U2 is a man who knows music. But the people whose world Kenna was supposed to be changing, it seemed, couldn't disagree more, and when the results of all of the consumer research came in, Kenna's once promis-

ing career suddenly stalled. To get on the radio, there had to be hard evidence that the public liked him — and the evidence just wasn't there.

1. *A Second Look at First Impressions*

In *Behind the Oval Office*, his memoir of his years as a political pollster, Dick Morris writes about going to Arkansas in 1977 to meet with the state's thirty-one-year-old attorney general, an ambitious young man by the name of Bill Clinton:

I explained that I got this idea from the polling my friend Dick Dresner had done for the movie industry. Before a new James Bond movie or a sequel to a film like *Jaws* came out, a film company would hire Dresner to summarize the plot and then ask people whether they wanted to see the movie. Dresner would read respondents proposed PR blurbs and slogans about the movie to find out which ones worked the best. Sometimes he even read them different endings or described different places where the same scenes were shot to see which they preferred.

"And you just apply these techniques to politics?" Clinton asked.

I explained how it could be done. "Why not do the same thing with political ads? Or speeches? Or arguments about the issues? And after each statement, ask them again whom they're going to vote for. Then you can see which arguments move how many voters and which voters they move."

We talked for almost four hours and ate lunch at his desk. I showed the attorney general sample polls I'd done.

He was fascinated by the process. Here was a tool he could use, a process that could reduce the mysterious ways of politics to scientific testing and evaluation.

Morris would go on to become a key advisor to Clinton when Clinton became President, and many people came to view his obsession with polling as deeply problematic — as a corruption of the obligation of elected officials to provide leadership and act upon principle. In truth, that's a little harsh. Morris was simply bringing to the world of politics the very same notions that guide the business world. Everyone wants to capture the mysterious and powerful reactions we have to the world around us. The people who make movies or detergent or cars or music all want to know what we think of their products. That's why it wasn't enough for the people in the music business who loved Kenna to act on their gut feelings. Gut feelings about what the public wants are too mysterious and too iffy. Kenna was sent to the market researchers because it seems as though the most accurate way to find out how consumers feel about something is to ask them directly.

But is that really true? If we had asked the students in John Bargh's experiment why they were standing in the hall so patiently after they had been primed to be polite, they wouldn't have been able to tell us. If we had asked the Iowa gamblers why they were favoring cards from the blue decks, they wouldn't have been able to say — at least not until they had drawn eighty cards. Sam Gosling and

John Gottman found that we can learn a lot more about what people think by observing their body language or facial expressions or looking at their bookshelves and the pictures on their walls than by asking them directly. And Vic Braden discovered that while people are very willing and very good at volunteering information explaining their actions, those explanations, particularly when it comes to the kinds of spontaneous opinions and decisions that arise out of the unconscious, aren't necessarily correct. In fact, it sometimes seems as if they are just plucked out of thin air. So, when marketers ask consumers to give them their reactions to something — to explain whether they liked a song that was just played or a movie they just saw or a politician they just heard — how much trust should be placed in their answers? Finding out what people think of a rock song sounds as if it should be easy. But the truth is that it isn't, and the people who run focus groups and opinion polls haven't always been sensitive to this fact. Getting to the bottom of the question of how good Kenna really is requires a more searching exploration of the intricacies of our snap judgments.

2. *Pepsi's Challenge*

In the early 1980s, the Coca-Cola Company was profoundly nervous about its future. Once, Coke had been far and away the dominant soft drink in the world. But Pepsi had been steadily chipping away at Coke's lead. In 1972, 18 percent of soft drink users said they drank Coke exclusively, compared with 4 percent who called themselves exclusive Pepsi drinkers. By the early 1980s, Coke had

dropped to 12 percent and Pepsi had risen to 11 percent — and this despite the fact that Coke was much more widely available than Pepsi and spending at least \$100 million more on advertising per year.

In the midst of this upheaval, Pepsi began running television commercials around the country, pitting Coke head-to-head with Pepsi in what they called the Pepsi Challenge. Dedicated Coke drinkers were asked to take a sip from two glasses, one marked Q and one marked M. Which did they prefer? Invariably, they would say M, and, lo and behold, M would be revealed as Pepsi. Coke's initial reaction to the Pepsi Challenge was to dispute its findings. But when they privately conducted blind head-to-head taste tests of their own, they found the same thing: when asked to choose between Coke and Pepsi, the majority of tasters — 57 percent — preferred Pepsi. A 57 to 43 percent edge is a lot, particularly in a world where millions of dollars hang on a tenth of a percentage point, and it is not hard to imagine how devastating this news was to Coca-Cola management. The Coca-Cola mystique had always been based on its famous secret formula, unchanged since the earliest days of the company. But here was seemingly incontrovertible evidence that time had passed Coke by.

Coca-Cola executives next did a flurry of additional market research projects. The news seemed to get worse. "Maybe the principal characteristics that made Coke distinctive, like its bite, consumers now describe as harsh," the company's head of American operations, Brian Dyson, said at the time. "And when you mention words like

'rounded' and 'smooth,' they say Pepsi. Maybe the way we assuage our thirst has changed." The head of Coke's consumer marketing research department in those years was a man named Roy Stout, and Stout became one of the leading advocates in the company for taking the results of the Pepsi Challenge seriously. "If we have twice as many vending machines, have more shelf space, spend more on advertising, and are competitively priced, why are we losing [market] share?" he asked Coke's top management. "You look at the Pepsi Challenge, and you have to begin asking about taste."

This was the genesis of what came to be known as New Coke. Coke's scientists went back and tinkered with the fabled secret formula to make it a little lighter and sweeter — more like Pepsi. Immediately Coke's market researchers noticed an improvement. In blind tastes of some of the early prototypes, Coke pulled even with Pepsi. They tinkered some more. In September of 1984, they went back out and tested what would end up as the final version of New Coke. They rounded up not just thousands but hundreds of thousands of consumers all across North America, and in head-to-head blind taste tests, New Coke beat Pepsi by 6 to 8 percentage points. Coca-Cola executives were elated. The new drink was given the green light. In the press conference announcing the launch of New Coke, the company's CEO, Roberto C. Goizueta, called the new product "the surest move the company's ever made," and there seemed little reason to doubt what he said. Consumers, in the simplest and most direct manner imaginable, had been asked for their reaction,

and they had said they didn't much like the old Coke but they very much liked the new Coke. How could New Coke fail?

But it did. It was a disaster. Coke drinkers rose up in outrage against New Coke. There were protests around the country. Coke was plunged into crisis, and just a few months later, the company was forced to bring back the original formula as Classic Coke — at which point, sales of New Coke virtually disappeared. The predicted success of New Coke never materialized. But there was an even bigger surprise. The seemingly inexorable rise of Pepsi — which had also been so clearly signaled by market research — never materialized either. For the last twenty years, Coke has gone head-to-head with Pepsi with a product that taste tests say is inferior, and Coke is still the number one soft drink in the world. The story of New Coke, in other words, is a really good illustration of how complicated it is to find out what people really think.

3. *The Blind Leading the Blind*

The difficulty with interpreting the Pepsi Challenge findings begins with the fact that they were based on what the industry calls a sip test or a CLT (central location test). Tasters don't drink the entire can. They take a sip from a cup of each of the brands being tested and then make their choice. Now suppose I were to ask you to test a soft drink a little differently. What if you were to take a case of the drink home and tell me what you think after a few weeks? Would that change your opinion? It turns out it would.

Carol Dollard, who worked for Pepsi for many years in new-product development, says, "I've seen many times when the CLT will give you one result and the home-use test will give you the exact opposite. For example, in a CLT, consumers might taste three or four different products in a row, taking a sip or a couple sips of each. A sip is very different from sitting and drinking a whole beverage on your own. Sometimes a sip tastes good and a whole bottle doesn't. That's why home-use tests give you the best information. The user isn't in an artificial setting. They are at home, sitting in front of the TV, and the way they feel in that situation is the most reflective of how they will behave when the product hits the market."

Dollard says, for instance, that one of the biases in a sip test is toward sweetness: "If you only test in a sip test, consumers will like the sweeter product. But when they have to drink a whole bottle or can, that sweetness can get really overpowering or cloying." Pepsi is sweeter than Coke, so right away it had a big advantage in a sip test. Pepsi is also characterized by a citrusy flavor burst, unlike the more raisiny-vanilla taste of Coke. But that burst tends to dissipate over the course of an entire can, and that is another reason Coke suffered by comparison. Pepsi, in short, is a drink built to shine in a sip test. Does this mean that the Pepsi Challenge was a fraud? Not at all. It just means that we have two different reactions to colas. We have one reaction after taking a sip, and we have another reaction after drinking a whole can. In order to make sense of people's cola judgments, we need to first decide which of those two reactions most interests us.

Then there's the issue of what is called sensation transference. This is a concept coined by one of the great figures in twentieth-century marketing, a man named Louis Cheskin, who was born in Ukraine at the turn of the century and immigrated to the United States as a child. Cheskin was convinced that when people give an assessment of something they might buy in a supermarket or a department store, without realizing it, they transfer sensations or impressions that they have about the packaging of the product to the product itself. To put it another way, Cheskin believed that most of us don't make a distinction — on an unconscious level — between the package and the product. The product is the package and the product combined.

One of the projects Cheskin worked on was margarine. In the late 1940s, margarine was not very popular. Consumers had no interest in either eating it or buying it. But Cheskin was curious. Why didn't people like margarine? Was their problem with margarine intrinsic to the food itself? Or was it a problem with the associations people had with margarine? He decided to find out. In that era, margarine was white. Cheskin colored it yellow so that it would look like butter. Then he staged a series of luncheons with homemakers. Because he wanted to catch people unawares, he didn't call the luncheons margarine-testing luncheons. He merely invited a group of women to an event. "My bet is that all the women wore little white gloves," says Davis Masten, who today is one of the principals in the consulting firm Cheskin founded. "[Cheskin] brought in speakers and served food, and there were little pats of butter for some and little pats of margarine for others. The margarine was yellow. In the context of it, they

didn't let people know there was a difference. Afterwards, everyone was asked to rate the speakers and the food, and it ended up that people thought the 'butter' was just fine. Market research had said there was no future for margarine. Louis said, 'Let's go at this more indirectly.'

Now the question of how to increase sales of margarine was much clearer. Cheskin told his client to call their product Imperial Margarine, so they could put an impressive-looking crown on the package. As he had learned at the luncheon, the color was critical: he told them the margarine had to be yellow. Then he told them to wrap it in foil, because in those days foil was associated with high quality. And sure enough, if they gave someone two identical pieces of bread — one buttered with white margarine and the other buttered with foil-wrapped yellow Imperial Margarine — the second piece of bread won hands-down in taste tests every time. "You never ask anyone, 'Do you want foil or not?'" because the answer is always going to be 'I don't know' or 'Why would I?' says Masten. "You just ask them which tastes better, and by that indirect method you get a picture of what their true motivations are."

The Cheskin company demonstrated a particularly elegant example of sensation transference a few years ago, when they studied two competing brands of inexpensive brandy, Christian Brothers and E & J (the latter of which, to give some idea of the market segment to which the two belong, is known to its clientele as Easy Jesus). Their client, Christian Brothers, wanted to know why, after years of being the dominant brand in the category, it was losing market share to E & J. Their brandy wasn't more expensive. It wasn't harder to find in the store. And they

weren't being out-advertised (since there is very little advertising at this end of the brandy segment). So, why were they losing ground?

Cheskin set up a blind taste test with two hundred brandy drinkers. The two brandies came out roughly the same. Cheskin then decided to go a few steps further. "We went out and did another test with two hundred different people," explains Darrel Rhea, another principal in the firm. "This time we told people which glass was Christian Brothers and which glass was E & J. Now you are having sensation transference from the name, and this time Christian Brothers' numbers are up." Clearly people had more positive associations with the name Christian Brothers than with E & J. That only deepened the mystery, because if Christian Brothers had a stronger brand, why were they losing market share? "So, now we do another two hundred people. This time the actual bottles of each brand are in the background. We don't ask about the packages, but they are there. And what happens? Now we get a statistical preference for E & J. So we've been able to isolate what Christian Brothers' problem is. The problem is not the product and it's not the branding. *It's the package.*" Rhea pulled out a picture of the two brandy bottles as they appeared in those days. Christian Brothers looked like a bottle of wine: it had a long, slender spout and a simple off-white label. E & J, by contrast, had a far more ornate bottle: more squat, like a decanter, with smoked glass, foil wrapping around the spout, and a dark, richly textured label. To prove their point, Rhea and his colleagues did one more test. They served two hundred people Christian

Brothers Brandy out of an E & J bottle, and E & J Brandy out of a Christian Brothers bottle. Which brandy won? Christian Brothers, hands-down, by the biggest margin of all. Now they had the right taste, the right brand, *and* the right bottle. The company redesigned their bottle to be a lot more like E & J's, and, sure enough, their problem was solved.

Cheskin's offices are just outside San Francisco, and after we talked, Masten and Rhea took me to a Nob Hill Farms supermarket down the street, one of those shiny, cavernous food emporia that populate the American suburbs. "We've done work in just about every aisle," Masten said as we walked in. In front of us was the beverage section. Rhea leaned over and picked up a can of 7-Up. "We tested Seven-Up. We had several versions, and what we found is that if you add fifteen percent more yellow to the green on the package — if you take this green and add more yellow — what people report is that the taste experience has a lot more lime or lemon flavor. And people were upset. 'You are changing my Seven-Up! Don't do a 'New Coke' on me.' It's exactly the same product, but a different set of sensations have been transferred from the bottle, which in this case isn't necessarily a good thing."

From the cold beverage section, we wandered to the canned-goods aisle. Masten picked up a can of Chef Boyardee Ravioli and pointed at the picture of the chef on the label of the can. "His name is Hector. We know a lot about people like this, like Orville Redenbacher or Betty Crocker or the woman on the Sun-Maid Raisins package. The general rule is, the closer consumers get to the food

itself, the more consumers are going to be conservative. What that means for Hector is that in this case he needs to look pretty literal. You want to have the face as a recognizable human being that you can relate to. Typically, close-ups of the face work better than full-body shots. We tested Hector in a number of different ways. Can you make the ravioli taste better by changing him? Mostly you can blow it, like by making him a cartoon figure. We looked at him in the context of photography down to cartoon character kinds of things. The more you go to cartoon characters, the more of an abstraction Hector becomes, the less and less effective you are in perceptions of the taste and quality of the ravioli."

Masten picked up a can of Hormel canned meat. "We did this, too. We tested the Hormel logo." He pointed at the tiny sprig of parsley between the *r* and the *m*. "That little bit of parsley helps bring freshness to canned food."

Rhea held out a bottle of Classico tomato sauce and talked about the meanings attached to various kinds of containers. "When Del Monte took the peaches out of the tin and put them in a glass container, people said, 'Ahh, this is something like my grandmother used to make.' People say peaches taste better when they come in a glass jar. It's just like ice cream in a cylindrical container as opposed to a rectangular package. People expect it's going to taste better and they are willing to pay five, ten cents more — just on the strength of that package."

What Masten and Rhea do is tell companies how to manipulate our first impressions, and it's hard not to feel a certain uneasiness about their efforts. If you double the

size of the chips in chocolate chip ice cream and say on the package, "New! Bigger Chocolate Chips!" and charge five to ten cents more, that seems honest and fair. But if you put your ice cream in a round as opposed to a rectangular container and charge five to ten cents more, that seems like you're pulling the wool over people's eyes. If you think about it, though, there really isn't any practical difference between those two things. We are willing to pay more for ice cream when it tastes better, and putting ice cream in a round container convinces us it tastes better just as surely as making the chips bigger in chocolate chip ice cream does. Sure, we're conscious of one improvement and not conscious of the other, but why should that distinction matter? Why should an ice cream company be able to profit only from improvements that we are conscious of? You might say, "Well, they're going behind our back." But who is going behind our back? The ice cream company? Or our own unconscious?

Neither Masten nor Rhea believes that clever packaging allows a company to put out a bad-tasting product. The taste of the product itself matters a great deal. Their point is simply that when we put something in our mouth and in that blink of an eye decide whether it tastes good or not, we are reacting not only to the evidence from our taste buds and salivary glands but also to the evidence of our eyes and memories and imaginations, and it is foolish of a company to service one dimension and ignore the other.

In that context, then, Coca-Cola's error with New Coke becomes all the more egregious. It wasn't just that they placed too much emphasis on sip tests. It was that the

entire principle of a blind taste test was ridiculous. They shouldn't have cared so much that they were losing blind taste tests with old Coke, and we shouldn't at all be surprised that Pepsi's dominance in blind taste tests never translated to much in the real world. Why not? *Because in the real world, no one ever drinks Coca-Cola blind.* We transfer to our sensation of the Coca-Cola taste all of the unconscious associations we have of the brand, the image, the can, and even the unmistakable red of the logo. "The mistake Coca-Cola made," Rhea says, "was in attributing their loss in share to Pepsi entirely to the product. But what counts for an awful lot in colas is the brand imagery, and they lost sight of that. All their decisions were made on changing the product itself, while Pepsi was focusing on youth and making Michael Jackson their spokesman and doing a lot of good branding things. Sure, people like a sweeter product in a sip test, but people don't make their product decisions on sip tests. Coke's problem is that the guys in white lab coats took over."

Did the guys in the white lab coats take over in Kenna's case as well? The market testers assumed that they could simply play one of his songs or part of one of his songs for someone over the telephone or on the Internet and the response of listeners would serve as a reliable guide to what music buyers would feel about the song. Their thinking was that music lovers can thin-slice a new song in a matter of seconds, and there is nothing wrong with that idea in principle. But thin-slicing has to be done in context. It is possible to quickly diagnose the health of a marriage. But you can't just watch a couple playing Ping-

Pong. You have to observe them while they are discussing something of relevance to their relationship. It's possible to thin-slice a surgeon's risk of being sued for malpractice on the basis of a small snippet of conversation. But it has to be a conversation with a patient. All of the people who warmed to Kenna had that kind of context. The people at the Roxy and the No Doubt concert saw him in the flesh. Craig Kallman had Kenna sing for him, right there in his office. Fred Durst heard Kenna through the prism of one of his trusted colleagues' excitement. The viewers of MTV who requested Kenna over and over had seen his video. Judging Kenna without that additional information is like making people choose between Pepsi and Coke in a blind taste test.

4. "The Chair of Death"

Several years ago, the furniture maker Herman Miller, Inc., hired an industrial designer named Bill Stumpf to come up with a new office chair. Stumpf had worked with Herman Miller before, most notably on two previous chairs called the Ergon and the Equa. Yet Stumpf wasn't satisfied with his two previous efforts. Both had sold well, but Stumpf thought that the Ergon was clumsy — an immature effort. The Equa was better, but it had since been copied by so many other firms that it no longer seemed special to him. "The chairs I had done previously all looked alike," Stumpf says. "I wanted to come up with something that looked different." He called his new project the Aeron, and the story of the Aeron illustrates a second, deeper

problem with trying to measure people's reactions: it is hard for us to explain our feelings about unfamiliar things.

Stumpf's idea was to try to make the most ergonomically correct chair imaginable. He had tried that with the Equa. But with the Aeron he went even further. An enormous amount of work, for instance, went into the mechanism connecting the back of the chair with what chair designers call the seat pan. In a typical chair, there is a simple hinge connecting the two so you can lean back in the chair. But the problem with the hinge is that the chair pivots in a different way from how our hips pivot, so tilting pulls the shirt out of our pants and puts undue stress on our back. On the Aeron, the seat pan and back of the chair moved independently through a complex mechanism. And there was much more. The design team at Herman Miller wanted fully adjustable arms, and that was easier if the arms of the chair were attached to the back of the Aeron, not underneath the seat pan, as is ordinarily the case. They wanted to maximize support for the shoulders, so the back of the chair was wider at the top than at the bottom. This was exactly the opposite of most chairs, which are wide at the bottom and taper at the top. Finally, they wanted the chair to be comfortable for people who were stuck at their desks for long periods of time. "I looked at straw hats and other things like wicker furniture," Stumpf says. "I've always hated foam chairs covered in fabric, because they seemed hot and sticky. The skin is an organ, it breathes. This idea of getting something breathable like the straw hat was intriguing to me." What he settled on was a specially engineered, thin elastic mesh, stretched tight over the plastic frame. If you looked

through the mesh, you could see the levers and mechanisms and hard plastic appendages which were out in plain sight below the seat pan.

In Herman Miller's years of working with consumers on seating, they had found that when it comes to choosing office chairs, most people automatically gravitate to the chair with the most presumed status — something senatorial or thronelike, with thick cushions and a high, imposing back. What was the Aeron? It was the exact opposite: a slender, transparent concoction of black plastic and odd protuberances and mesh that looked like the exoskeleton of a giant prehistoric insect. "Comfort in America is very much conditioned by La-Z-Boy recliners," says Stumpf. "In Germany, they joke about Americans wanting too much padding in their car seats. We have this fixation on softness. I always think of that glove that Disney put on Mickey Mouse's hand. If we saw his real claw, no one would have liked him. What we were doing was running counter to that idea of softness."

In May of 1992, Herman Miller started doing what they call use testing. They took prototypes of the Aeron to local companies in western Michigan and had people sit in them for at least half a day. In the beginning, the response was not positive. Herman Miller asked people to rate the chair's comfort on a scale of 1 to 10 — where 10 is perfect, and at least 7.5 is where you'd really love to be before you actually go to market — and the early prototypes of the Aeron came in at around 4.75. As a gag, one of the Herman Miller staffers put a picture of the chair on the mock-up cover of a supermarket tabloid, with the headline CHAIR OF DEATH: EVERYONE WHO SITS IN IT DIES and made

it the cover of one of the early Aeron research reports. People would look at the wiry frame and wonder if it would hold them, and then look at the mesh and wonder if it could ever be comfortable. "It's very hard to get somebody to sit on something that doesn't look right," says Rob Harvey, who was Herman Miller's senior vice president of research and design at the time. "If you build a chair that has a wiry frame, people's perception is that it isn't going to hold them. They get very tentative about sitting in it. Seating is a very intimate kind of thing. The body comes intimately into contact with a chair, so there are a lot of visual cues like perceived temperature and hardness that drive people's perceptions." But as Herman Miller tinkered with the design, coming up with new and better prototypes, and got people to overcome their qualms, the scores began to inch up. By the time Herman Miller was ready to go to market, the comfort scores were, in fact, above 8. That was the good news.

The bad news? Just about everyone thought the chair was a monstrosity. "From the beginning, the aesthetic scores lagged way behind the comfort scores," said Bill Dowell, who was research lead on the Aeron. "This was an anomaly. We've tested thousands and thousands of people sitting in chairs, and one of the strongest correlations we've always found is between comfort and aesthetics. But here it didn't happen. The comfort scores got above eight, which is phenomenal. But the aesthetic scores started out between two and three and never got above six in any of our prototypes. We were quite perplexed and not unworried. We'd had the Equa chair. That chair was controversial, too. But it was always seen as beautiful."

In late 1993, as they prepared to launch the chair, Herman Miller put together a series of focus groups around the country. They wanted to get some ideas about pricing and marketing and make sure there was general support for the concept. They started with panels of architects and designers, and they were generally receptive. "They understood how radical the chair was," Dowell said. "Even if they didn't see it as a thing of beauty, they understood that it had to look the way it did." Then they presented the chair to groups of facility managers and ergonomic experts — the kinds of people who would ultimately be responsible for making the chair a commercial success.

This time the reception was downright chilly. "They didn't understand the aesthetic at all," says Dowell. Herman Miller was told to cover the Aeron with a solid fabric and that it would be impossible to sell it to corporate clients. One facility manager likened the chair to lawn furniture or old-fashioned car-seat covers. Another said it looked as though it came from the set of *RoboCop*, and another said that it looked as if it had been made entirely from recycled materials. "I remember one professor at Stanford who confirmed the concept and its function but said he wanted to be invited back when we got to an 'aesthetically refined prototype,'" Dowell remembers. "We were behind the glass saying, 'There isn't going to be an aesthetically refined prototype!'"

Put yourself, for a moment, in Herman Miller's shoes. You have committed yourself to a brand-new product. You have spent an enormous amount of money retooling your furniture factory, and still more making sure that, say, the mesh on the Aeron doesn't pinch the behinds of people

who sit in it. But now you find out that people don't like the mesh. In fact, they think the whole chair is ugly, and if there is one thing you know from years and years in the business, it is that people don't buy chairs they think are ugly. So what do you do? You could scrap the chair entirely. You could go back and cover it in a nice familiar layer of foam. Or you could trust your instincts and dive ahead.

Herman Miller took the third course. They went ahead, and what happened? In the beginning, not much. The Aeron, after all, was ugly. Before long, however, the chair started to attract the attention of some of the very cutting-edge elements of the design community. It won a design of the decade award from the Industrial Designers Society of America. In California and New York, in the advertising world and in Silicon Valley, it became a kind of cult object that matched the stripped-down aesthetic of the new economy. It began to appear in films and television commercials, and from there its profile built and grew and blossomed. By the end of the 1990s, sales were growing 50 to 70 percent annually, and the people at Herman Miller suddenly realized that what they had on their hands was the best-selling chair in the history of the company. Before long, there was no office chair as widely imitated as the Aeron. Everyone wanted to make a chair that looked like the exoskeleton of a giant prehistoric insect. And what are the aesthetic scores today? The Aeron is now an 8. What once was ugly has become beautiful.

In the case of a blind sip test, first impressions don't work because colas aren't supposed to be sipped blind. The blind sip test is the wrong context for thin-slicing

Coke. With the Aeron, the effort to collect consumers' first impressions failed for a slightly different reason: the people reporting their first impressions misinterpreted their own feelings. They said they hated it. But what they really meant was that the chair was so new and unusual that they weren't used to it. This isn't true of everything we call ugly. The Edsel, the Ford Motor Company's famous flop from the 1950s, failed because people thought it looked funny. But two or three years later, every other car maker didn't suddenly start making cars that looked like the Edsel, the way everyone started copying the Aeron. The Edsel started out ugly, and it's still ugly. By the same token, there are movies that people hate when they see them for the first time, and they still hate them two or three years later. A bad movie is always a bad movie. The problem is that buried among the things that we hate is a class of products that are in that category only because they are weird. They make us nervous. They are sufficiently different that it takes us some time to understand that we actually like them.

"When you are in the product development world, you become immersed in your own stuff, and it's hard to keep in mind the fact that the customers you go out and see spend very little time with your product," says Dowell. "They know the experience of it then and there. But they don't have any history with it, and it's hard for them to imagine a future with it, especially if it's something very different. That was the thing with the Aeron chair. Office chairs in people's minds had a certain aesthetic. They were cushioned and upholstered. The Aeron chair of course

isn't. It looked different. There was nothing familiar about it. Maybe the word 'ugly' was just a proxy for 'different.'"

The problem with market research is that often it is simply too blunt an instrument to pick up this distinction between the bad and the merely different. In the late 1960s, the screenwriter Norman Lear produced a television sitcom pilot for a show called *All in the Family*. It was a radical departure from the kind of fare then on television: it was edgy and political, and it tackled social issues that the television of the day avoided. Lear took it to ABC. They had it market-tested before four hundred carefully selected viewers at a theater in Hollywood. Viewers filled out questionnaires and turned a dial marked "very dull," "dull," "fair," "good," and "very good" as they watched the show, with their responses then translated into a score between 1 and 100. For a drama, a good score was one in the high 60s. For a comedy, the mid-70s. *All in the Family* scored in the low 40s. ABC said no. Lear took the show to CBS. They ran it through their own market research protocol, called the Program Analyzer, which required audiences to push red and green buttons, recording their impressions of the shows they were watching. The results were unimpressive. The recommendation of the research department was that Archie Bunker be rewritten as a soft-spoken and nurturing father. CBS didn't even bother promoting *All in the Family* before its first season. What was the point? The only reason it made it to the air at all was that the president of the company, Robert Wood, and the head of programming, Fred Silverman, happened to like it, and the network was so dominant at that point that it felt that it could afford to take a risk on the show.

That same year, CBS was also considering a new comedy show starring Mary Tyler Moore. It, too, was a departure for television. The main character, Mary Richards, was a young, single woman who was interested not in starting a family — as practically every previous television heroine had been — but in advancing her career. CBS ran the first show through the Program Analyzer. The results were devastating. Mary was a "loser." Her neighbor Rhoda Morgenstern was "too abrasive," and another of the major female characters on the show, Phyllis Lindstrom, was seen as "not believable." The only reason *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* survived was that by the time CBS tested it, it was already scheduled for broadcast. "Had *The MTM* been a mere pilot, such overwhelmingly negative comments would have buried it," Sally Bedell [Smith] writes in her biography of Silverman, *Up the Tube*.

All in the Family and *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, in other words, were the television equivalents of the Aeron chair. Viewers said they hated them. But, as quickly became clear when these sitcoms became two of the most successful programs in television history, viewers didn't actually hate them. They were just shocked by them. And all of the ballyhooed techniques used by the armies of market researchers at CBS utterly failed to distinguish between these two very different emotions.

Market research isn't always wrong, of course. If *All in the Family* had been more traditional — and if the Aeron had been just a minor variation on the chair that came before it — the act of measuring consumer reactions would not have been nearly as difficult. But testing products or

ideas that are truly revolutionary is another matter, and the most successful companies are those that understand that in those cases, the first impressions of their consumers need interpretation. We like market research because it provides certainty — a score, a prediction; if someone asks us why we made the decision we did, we can point to a number. But the truth is that for the most important decisions, there can be no certainty. Kenna did badly when he was subjected to market research. But so what? His music was new and different, and it is the new and different that is always most vulnerable to market research.

5. *The Gift of Expertise*

One bright summer day, I had lunch with two women who run a company in New Jersey called Sensory Spectrum. Their names are Gail Vance Civile and Judy Heylmun, and they taste food for a living. If Frito-Lay, for example, has a new kind of tortilla chip, they need to know where their chip prototype fits into the tortilla chip pantheon: How much of a departure is it from their other Doritos varieties? How does it compare to Cape Cod Tortilla Chips? Do they need to add, say, a bit more salt? Civile and Heylmun are the people they send their chips to.

Having lunch with professional food tasters, of course, is a tricky proposition. After much thought I decided on a restaurant called Le Madri, in downtown Manhattan, which is the kind of place where it takes five minutes to recite the list of daily specials. When I arrived,

Heylmun and Civile were seated, two stylish professional women in business suits. They had already spoken to the waiter. Civile told me the specials from memory. A great deal of thought obviously went into the lunch choices. Heylmun settled on pasta preceded by roasted-pumpkin chowder with a sprinkling of celery and onion, finished with crème fraîche and bacon-braised cranberry beans garnished with diced pumpkin, fried sage, and toasted pumpkin seeds. Civile had a salad, followed by risotto with Prince Edward Island mussels and Manila clams, finished with squid ink. (At Le Madri, rare is the dish that is not “finished” in some way or adorned with some kind of “reduction.”) After we ordered, the waiter brought Heylmun a spoon for her soup. Civile held up her hand for another. “We share everything,” she informed him.

“You should see us when we go out with a group of Sensory people,” Heylmun said. “We take our bread plates and pass them around. What you get back is half your meal and a little bit of everyone else’s.”

The soup came. The two of them dug in. “Oh, it’s fabulous,” Civile said and cast her eyes heavenward. She handed me her spoon. “Taste it.” Heylmun and Civile both ate with small, quick bites, and as they ate they talked, interrupting each other like old friends, jumping from topic to topic. They were very funny and talked very quickly. But the talking never overwhelmed the eating. The opposite was true: they seemed to talk only to heighten their anticipation of the next bite, and when the next bite came, their faces took on a look of utter absorption. Heylmun and Civile don’t just taste food. They

think about food. They dream about food. Having lunch with them is like going cello shopping with Yo-Yo Ma, or dropping in on Giorgio Armani one morning as he is deciding what to wear. "My husband says that living with me is like a taste-a-minute tour," Civille said. "It drives everyone in my family crazy. Stop talking about it! You know that scene in the deli from the movie *When Harry Met Sally?* That's what I feel about food when it's really good."

The waiter came offering dessert: crème brûlée, mango and chocolate sorbet, or strawberry saffron and sweet-corn vanilla gelato. Heylmun had the vanilla gelato and the mango sorbet but not before she thought hard about the crème brûlée. "Crème brûlée is the test of any restaurant," she said. "It comes down to the quality of the vanilla. I don't like my crème brûlée adulterated, because then you can't taste through to the quality of the ingredients." An espresso came for Civille. As she took her first sip, an almost imperceptible wince crossed her face. "It's good, not great," she said. "It's missing the whole winy texture. It's a little too woody."

Heylmun then started talking about "rework," which is the practice in some food factories of recycling leftover or rejected ingredients from one product batch into another product batch. "Give me some cookies and crackers," she said, "and I can tell you not only what factory they came from but what rework they were using." Civille jumped in. Just the previous night, she said, she had eaten two cookies — and here she named two prominent brands. "I could *taste* the rework," she said and made another face. "We've spent years and years developing these skills," she

went on. "Twenty years. It's like medical training. You do your internship, and then you become a resident. And you do it and do it until you can look at something and say in a very objective way how sweet it is, how bitter it is, how caramelized it is, how much citrus character there is — and in terms of the citrus, this much lemon, this much lime, this much grapefruit, this much orange."

Heylmun and Civille, in other words, are experts. Would they get fooled by the Pepsi Challenge? Of course not. Nor would they be led astray by the packaging for Christian Brothers, or be as easily confused by the difference between something they truly don't like and something they simply find unusual. The gift of their expertise is that it allows them to have a much better understanding of what goes on behind the locked door of their unconscious. This is the last and most important lesson of the Kenna story, because it explains why it was such a mistake to favor the results of Kenna's market research so heavily over the enthusiastic reactions of the industry insiders, the crowd at the Roxy, and the viewers of MTV2. The first impressions of experts are *different*. By that I don't mean that experts like different things than the rest of us — although that is undeniable. When we become expert in something, our tastes grow more esoteric and complex. What I mean is that it is really only experts who are able to reliably account for their reactions.

Jonathan Schooler — whom I introduced in the previous chapter — once did an experiment with Timothy Wilson that beautifully illustrates this difference. It involved strawberry jam. *Consumer Reports* put together a panel

of food experts and had them rank forty-four different brands of strawberry jam from top to bottom according to very specific measures of texture and taste. Wilson and Schooler took the first-, eleventh-, twenty-fourth-, thirty-second-, and forty-fourth-ranking jams — Knott's Berry Farm, Alpha Beta, Featherweight, Acme, and Sorrell Ridge — and gave them to a group of college students. Their question was, how close would the students' rankings come to the experts? The answer is, pretty close. The students put Knott's Berry Farm second and Alpha Beta first (reversing the order of the first two jams). The experts and the students both agreed that Featherweight was number three. And, like the experts, the students thought that Acme and Sorrell Ridge were markedly inferior to the others, although the experts thought Sorrell Ridge was worse than Acme, while the students had the order the other way around. Scientists use something called a correlation to measure how closely one factor predicts another, and overall, the students' ratings correlated with the experts' ratings by .55, which is quite a high correlation. What this says, in other words, is that our jam reactions are quite good: even those of us who aren't jam experts know good jam when we taste it.

But what would happen if I were to give you a questionnaire and ask you to enumerate your reasons for preferring one jam to another? Disaster. Wilson and Schooler had another group of students provide a written explanation for their rankings, and they put Knott's Berry Farm — the best jam of all, according to the experts — second to last, and Sorrell Ridge, the experts' worst jam,

third. The overall correlation was now down to .11, which for all intents and purposes means that the students' evaluations had almost nothing at all to do with the experts' evaluations. This is reminiscent of Schooler's experiments that I described in the Van Riper story, in which introspection destroyed people's ability to solve insight problems. By making people think about jam, Wilson and Schooler turned them into jam idiots.

In the earlier discussion, however, I was referring to things that impair our ability to solve problems. Now I'm talking about the loss of a much more fundamental ability, namely the ability to know our own mind. Furthermore, in this case we have a much more specific explanation for why introspections mess up our reactions. It's that we simply don't have any way of explaining our feelings about jam. We know unconsciously what good jam is: it's Knott's Berry Farm. But suddenly we're asked to stipulate, according to a list of terms, why we think that, and the terms are meaningless to us. Texture, for instance. What does that mean? We may never have thought about the texture of any jam before, and we certainly don't understand what texture means, and texture may be something that we actually, on a deep level, don't particularly care much about. But now the idea of texture has been planted in our mind, and we think about it and decide that, well, the texture does seem a little strange, and in fact maybe we don't like this jam after all. As Wilson puts it, what happens is that we come up with a plausible-sounding reason for why we might like or dislike something, and then we adjust our true preference to be in line with that plausible-sounding reason.

Jam experts, though, don't have the same problem when it comes to explaining their feelings about jam. Expert food tasters are taught a very specific vocabulary, which allows them to describe precisely their reactions to specific foods. Mayonnaise, for example, is supposed to be evaluated along six dimensions of appearance (color, color intensity, chroma, shine, lumpiness, and bubbles), ten dimensions of texture (adhesiveness to lips, firmness, denseness, and so on), and fourteen dimensions of flavor, split among three subgroups — aromatics (eggy, mustardy, and so forth); basic tastes (salty, sour, and sweet); and chemical-feeling factors (burn, pungent, astringent). Each of those factors, in turn, is evaluated on a 15-point scale. So, for example, if we wanted to describe the oral texture of something, one of the attributes we would look at is slipperiness. And on the 15-point slipperiness scale, where 0 is not slippery at all and 15 is very slippery, Gerber's Beef and Beef Gravy baby food is a 2, Whitney's vanilla yogurt is a 7.5, and Miracle Whip is a 13. If you taste something that's not quite as slippery as Miracle Whip but more slippery than Whitney's vanilla yogurt, then, you might give it a 10. Or take crispiness. Quaker's low-fat Chewy Chocolate Chunk Granola Bars are a 2, Keebler Club Partners Crackers are a 5, and Kellogg's Corn Flakes are a 14. Every product in the supermarket can be analyzed along these lines, and after a taster has worked with these scales for years, they become embedded in the taster's unconscious. "We just did Oreos," said Heylmun, "and we broke them into ninety attributes of appearance, flavor, and texture." She paused, and I could tell that she was re-creating in her

mind what an Oreo feels like. "It turns out there are eleven attributes that are probably critical."

Our unconscious reactions come out of a locked room, and we can't look inside that room. But with experience we become expert at using our behavior and our training to interpret — and decode — what lies behind our snap judgments and first impressions. It's a lot like what people do when they are in psychoanalysis: they spend years analyzing their unconscious with the help of a trained therapist until they begin to get a sense of how their mind works. Heylmun and Civile have done the same thing — only they haven't psychoanalyzed their feelings; they've psychoanalyzed their feelings for mayonnaise and Oreo cookies.

All experts do this, either formally or informally. Gottman wasn't happy with his instinctive reactions to couples. So he videotaped thousands of men and women, broke down every second of the tapes, and ran the data through a computer — and now he can sit down next to a couple in a restaurant and confidently thin-slice their marriage. Vic Braden, the tennis coach, was frustrated by the fact that he knew when someone was about to double-fault but didn't know how he knew. He is now teamed up with some experts in biomechanics who are going to film and digitally analyze professional tennis players in the act of serving so that they can figure out precisely what it is in the players' delivery that Braden is unconsciously picking up on. And why was Thomas Hoving so sure, in those first two seconds, that the Getty's kouros was a fake? Because, over the course of his life, he'd experienced countless

ancient sculptures and learned to understand and interpret that first impression that crossed his mind. "In my second year working at the Met [Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York], I had the good luck of having this European curator come over and go through virtually everything with me," he says. "We spent evening after evening taking things out of cases and putting them on the table. We were down in the storerooms. There were thousands of things. I mean, we were there every night until ten o'clock, and it wasn't just a routine glance. It was really poring and poring and poring over things." What he was building, in those nights in the storerooms, was a kind of database in his unconscious. He was learning how to match the feeling he had about an object with what was formally understood about its style and background and value. Whenever we have something that we are good at — something we care about — that experience and passion fundamentally change the nature of our first impressions.

This does not mean that when we are outside our areas of passion and experience, our reactions are invariably wrong. It just means that they are shallow. They are hard to explain and easily disrupted. They aren't grounded in real understanding. Do you think, for example, that you can accurately describe the difference between Coke and Pepsi? It's actually surprisingly difficult. Food tasters like Civile and Heylmun use what they call a DOD (degree-of-difference) scale to compare products in the same category. It goes from 0 to 10, where 10 is for two things that are totally different and 1 or 2 might describe just the production-range differences between two batches of the same product. Wise's and Lay's salt and vinegar potato

chips, for instance, have a DOD of 8. ("Ohmigod, they are so different," says Heylmun. "Wise is dark, and Lay's is uniform and light.") Things with a DOD of 5 or 6 are much closer but still possible to tell apart. Coke and Pepsi, though, are only a 4, and in some cases the difference may be even less, particularly if the colas have aged a bit and the level of carbonation has decreased and the vanilla has become a little more pronounced and pruney.

This means that if we are asked to give our thoughts on Coke and Pepsi, most of our answers aren't going to be very useful. We can say whether we like it. We can make some vague and general comments about the level of carbonation or flavor or sweetness and sourness. But with a DOD of 4, only someone schooled in colas is going to be able to pick up on the subtle nuances that distinguish each soft drink.

I imagine that some of you, particularly those who are diehard cola drinkers, are bristling at this point. I'm being a bit insulting. You think you really do know your way around Pepsi and Coke. Okay, let's concede that you can reliably tell Coke from Pepsi, even when the DOD hovers around 4. In fact, I urge you to test yourself. Have a friend pour Pepsi into one glass and Coke into another and try to tell them apart. Let's say you succeed. Congratulations. Now let's try the test again, in a slightly different form. This time have your tester give you *three* glasses, two of which are filled with one of the Colas and the third with the other. In the beverage business, this is called a triangle test. This time around, I don't want you to identify which is Coke and which is Pepsi. All I want you to say is which of the three drinks is not like the other two. Believe it or not, you will find this task incredibly hard. If a thousand

people were to try this test, just over one-third would guess right — which is not much better than chance; we might as well just guess.

When I first heard about the triangle test, I decided to try it on a group of my friends. *None of them got it right.* These were all well-educated, thoughtful people, most of whom were regular cola drinkers, and they simply couldn't believe what had happened. They jumped up and down. They accused me of tricking them. They argued that there must have been something funny about the local Pepsi and Coke bottlers. They said that I had manipulated the order of the three glasses to make it more difficult for them. None of them wanted to admit to the truth: their knowledge of colas was incredibly shallow. With two colas, all we have to do is compare two first impressions. But with three glasses, we have to be able to describe and hold the taste of the first and then the second cola in our memory and somehow, however briefly, convert a fleeting sensory sensation into something permanent — and to do that requires knowledge and understanding of the vocabulary of taste. Heylmun and Civile can pass the triangle test with flying colors, because their knowledge gives their first impressions resiliency. My friends were not so fortunate. They may drink a lot of cola, but they don't ever really *think* about colas. They aren't cola experts, and to force them to be — to ask too much of them — is to render their reactions useless.

Isn't this what happened to Kenna?

6. "It Sucks What the Record Companies Are Doing to You"

After years of starts and stops, Kenna was finally signed by Columbia Records. He released an album called *New Sacred Cow*. Then he went on his first tour, playing in fourteen cities throughout the American West and Midwest. It was a modest beginning: he opened for another band and played for thirty-five minutes. Many people in the audience didn't even realize that he was on the bill. But once they heard him play, they were enthusiastic. He also made a video of one of his songs, which was nominated for an award on VH-1. College radio stations began playing *New Sacred Cow*, and it started to climb the college charts. He then got a few appearances on television talk shows. But the big prize still eluded him. His album didn't take off because he couldn't get his first single played on Top 40 radio.

It was the same old story. The equivalent of Gail Vance Civile and Judy Heylmun had loved Kenna. Craig Kallman heard his demo tape and got on the phone and said, "I want to see him *now*." Fred Durst heard one of his songs over the telephone and decided that this was *it*. Paul McGuinness flew him to Ireland. The people who had a way to structure their first impressions, the vocabulary to capture them, and the experience to understand them, loved Kenna, and in a perfect world, that would have counted for more than the questionable findings of market research. But the world of radio is not as savvy as the world of food or the furniture makers at Herman Miller.

They prefer a system that cannot measure what it promises to measure.

“I guess they’ve gone to their focus groups, and the focus groups have said, ‘No, it’s not a hit.’ They don’t want to put money into something that doesn’t test well,” Kenna says. “But that’s not the way this music works. This music takes faith. And faith isn’t what the music business is about anymore. It’s absolutely frustrating, and it’s overwhelming as well. I can’t sleep. My mind is running. But if nothing else, I get to play, and the response from the kids is so massive and beautiful that it makes me get up the next day and fight again. The kids come up to me after the show and say, ‘It sucks what the record companies are doing to you. But we’re here for you, and we’re telling everybody.’”

Seven Seconds in the Bronx: The Delicate Art of Mind Reading

The 1100 block of Wheeler Avenue in the Soundview neighborhood of the South Bronx is a narrow street of modest two-story houses and apartments. At one end is the bustle of Westchester Avenue, the neighborhood’s main commercial strip, and from there, the block runs about two hundred yards, flanked by trees and twin rows of parked cars. The buildings were built in the early part of the last century. Many have an ornate façade of red brick, with four- or five-step stoops leading to the front door. It is a poor and working-class neighborhood, and in the late 1990s, the drug trade in the area, particularly on Westchester Avenue and one street over on Elder Avenue, was brisk. Soundview is just the kind of place where you would go if you were an immigrant in New York City who was looking to live somewhere cheap and close to a subway, which is why Amadou Diallo made his way to Wheeler Avenue.