

Affect and Taste: Bourdieu, Traditional Music, and the Performance of Possibilities

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Abstract

In his famous *Distinction*, Bourdieu set forth musical and artistic taste as reflections of class positions developed early in life. With classical music as an explanatory tool, Bourdieu argued that cultural capital becomes deeply embodied and difficult to change. In temperance of Bourdieu's use of class, we suggest an affective theory of taste through the case of traditional music, based on a performance of possibilities inspired by our experiences in two pubs, one English and one Irish. Commonly played in pubs, traditional music can draw on rural lore to share its message with singing patrons of mixed class backgrounds. We use traditional music to argue that place shapes diverse social ties at all levels of economics, education, and age. We do not dispute that class powerfully shapes taste. But through what we term the joy of transcendence – formed through distinct and relative experiences, bonds, and friendships, enacted through place – participants can find pleasure in opening the cages of class and connecting across difference.

Bourdieu at Tig Coili

We were, would you say, a little tipsy. We had been in and out of pubs all afternoon, spending our Sunday in our own religious way. Bourdieu had been busy too, writing manuscripts, dissecting classes, and unearthing dominations. At long last, he had a free moment to walk with us down the streets of Galway.

As we walked, Bourdieu fit in a few lessons. An elderly lad with rumpled clothes wavered unsteadily on Shop Street. We knew Pat, and often he looked dishevelled. Today he was muttering, staring downward, shuffling his feet as he wandered along. Nearby, a neatly dressed man in a pinstriped suit passed him by at a brisk pace, not very leisurely for a Sunday. Bourdieu noted the passing humanity and remarked,

Style is thus foregrounded, and the most typically bourgeois deportment can be recognized by a certain breadth of gesture, posture and gait, which manifests by the amount of physical space that is occupied, the place occupied in social space; and above all by a restrained, measured, self-assured tempo. This slow pace, contrasting with working-class haste or petit-bourgeois eagerness, also characterizes bourgeois speech, where it similarly asserts awareness of the right to take one's time – and other people's. (1984, p. 218)

But who was Bourdieu describing, we puzzled? Pat's walk certainly was not restrained, nor self-assured, but it was indeed slow. The tidily dressed man commanded the social space of the sidewalk, but his pace was quick. Bourdieu had few other details to share, but we did. When we first started frequenting our now favourite pub Tig Coili during the height of the 'Celtic Tiger' period of Ireland's economy, we inquired about the wandering man. Galway was then the fastest growing city of its size in Europe, and Pat, we learned, owned a nearby farm valued at over €2 million. Pat had much to celebrate, apparently, for he chose to drink often, sleeping mostly on the streets, while pub frequenters speculated about whether and when he would sell his ground.

The neatly dressed man, on the other hand, we did not know. But he did not seem to fit Bourdieu's pronouncements either. He walked his pinstripes fast, on a Sunday no less.

The three of us continued our 'gait' up the street, not with haste, nor with slowness, but certainly with speculation. As we walked, Bourdieu continued his observations. It was July, and the festivals were bustling at the height of the season. Street performers waved brands of fire, buskers sang in the streets, puppets danced, and crowds gathered. People gasped at the fire, clapped with the buskers, and laughed at the puppets. Bourdieu noted that the audience members were clearly of the working class, drawn to spectacles that appealed to apparently raw, unrefined senses. Bourdieu began to stress that those learned in 'legitimate culture' (1984, p. 54) would not partake in such a scene, for it was too easily accessed, commonly understood, and simple, like an animal's tastes:

Rejecting the 'human' clearly means rejecting what is generic, i.e., common, 'easy' and immediately accessible, starting with everything that reduces the aesthetic animal to pure and simple animality, to palpable pleasure or sensual desire.

Bourdieu paused for a dry cough, and then continued:

The interest in the content of the representation which leads people to call 'beautiful' the representation of beautiful things, especially those which speak most immediately to the senses and the sensibility, is rejected in favour of the indifference and distance which refuse to subordinate judgement of the representation to the nature of the object represented'. (1984, p. 32)

We were somewhat willing to accept the legitimate culture that Bourdieu described, in an effort to appear as indifferent and distant sociological observers. We did not know these people or their backgrounds, and Bourdieu had a powerful, if obscure, way of putting things – a way that refused to subordinate judgement to immediately accessible qualities. This was free entertainment in the street, aimed at a broad audience. Although we thought we could spy a few tourists, who must have had some

substantial funds to travel to Ireland, we could not be sure. Perhaps this spectacle was indeed designed to attract the working-class, and some petite bourgeoisie. How were we to know that Bourdieu was wrong? But how were we to know that he was right? Unless we had substantial interaction with all of these individuals in the crowd, and documented their backgrounds, experiences, income levels, subjected their clothing to some code of fashionability defined by some elite, and found out why they were watching (boredom was not unlikely, nor was the possibility that many were, like us, merely curious about those who were watching, making a spectacle of the spectators themselves), we could not possibly subject them to his criteria.

We began to tire of our lessons. Although we were eager students, we needed some more Sunday refreshment. The gentle edge from our earlier Guinneses was wearing off. It was time for us and Bourdieu to hit a pub.

We continued up the street to hear a few tunes at our old faithful, Tig Coili, well known in the West of Ireland for its traditional music. The music rolled out the door of the pub, packed with listeners and onlookers that afternoon. We went straight to the counter to get drinks, while Bourdieu waited in the back. We greeted the bartender as we leaned in for an order, and waved at his brother filling pints of Guinness at the other end of the bar. A few of our friends beckoned us over and Bourdieu re-joined us as we wove our way through the throng. Before we made it, Bourdieu fit in one last lesson:

Thus, nothing more rigorously distinguishes the different classes than the disposition objectively demanded by the legitimate consumption of legitimate works. . .

Bourdieu could sense our impatience as we began to ignore him and look for some other conversational opportunity for an escape. We longed for him to reflect back on his French rural upbringing rather than remain entrenched in dissecting the elitism that now consumed his attention. But he held up his hand and elaborated:

. . . the aptitude for taking a specifically aesthetic point of view on objects already constituted aesthetically – and therefore put forward for the admiration of those who have learned to recognize the signs of the admirable – and the even rarer capacity to constitute aesthetically objects that are ordinary or even ‘common’ (because they are appropriated, aesthetically or otherwise, by the ‘common people’) or to apply the principles of a ‘pure’ aesthetic in the most everyday choices of everyday life, in cooking, dress or decoration, for example. (1984, p. 40)

Where was verb and subject in that one? We had not even re-started drinking, and could no longer follow him. Was he insinuating that aesthetically he could methodologically separate the classes of people based on their clothes or decoration in the space of a street or a pub? And what would we do if he started pontificating to the denizens of the pub? Would he be safe?

We decided to pick our introductions carefully. First, we introduced Bourdieu to Bill who tidily sported a collared shirt and dark pants. We casually added that Bill was an engineer who owned one of the largest construction companies in Galway. Nearby were a few of his construction workers – all children of his friends, mainly farmers and fisherman, who lived throughout County Galway. These young men were half Bill’s age, and we introduced them one by one to Bourdieu. In their

button-up shirts, trendy t-shirts, and sweaters, they were hard to classify without their construction gear. In other words, they did not look like they stepped out of *Distinction*, and Bourdieu merely mumbled when we tried to get a bit of banter going. Bill raised an eyebrow at us, and he and his workers went back to their own conversation, and to listening to the fiddle, the tin whistle, and the bhodrán take up another tune.

Bourdieu did not say anything as we moved further into the pub. Both the noise of the music and the conversation prevented it, and we like to imagine that Bourdieu was beginning to understand, at least intuitively, what we call an *affective theory of taste*: how tastes are often created and accumulated based on attachments and situated events that expand beyond the habitus that Bourdieu argues distinguishes the common from the bourgeois. Perhaps he was morose. Perhaps he was seeking to recalibrate his observations. Or perhaps he was enjoying his drink and our company. We hoped at least the latter.

Our next introduction was to middle-aged Shane, who was on the dole, but spent some of his time at a small oyster farm he had in County Mayo. Next to Shane was Eliza, a young academic who had just recently completed her PhD. A few seats up, Bourdieu met a famous Irish singer, elderly now, who had landed in his corner seat, known to any frequenter of the pub to be reserved for him alone. Nearby rested his long-time friend Colman, who enjoyed his retirement on a yacht, and came in often to enjoy a few drinks.

At this point, Bourdieu too took up a seat. He seemed defeated, exhausted, and ready for another beverage. Bourdieu stayed until closing time, thinking and brooding, perhaps with a bit of 'nostalgia for his origins' in rural France (Robbins 2009, p. 147). We were optimistic, if even just for a moment, that Tig Coili could move Bourdieu away from those elite orchestra halls of the city that consumed his attention, and lead him back to the music of the countryside. For the traditional case glowed with affection, joy, and place – as well as beer, that beverage of transcendence – all displaced from Bourdieu's theories of taste.

Fading distinctions

Bourdieu's pivotal 1984 work, *Distinction*, remains highly regarded in sociology since its triumph in Western academia in the mid-1980s. Using a dense prose that Wacquant describes as an 'idiolect' necessary to 'break with the common-sense understandings embedded in common language' (1989, p. 31), Bourdieu contends that culture is inextricably tied to class, which he details in the two interdependent theories of habitus and homology (LiPuma 1993). Homology captures class structures and functions that bind people together through opposition and resemblance, like buskers as vulgar, and an orchestra as refined (Swartz 1997; Tampubolon 2008). What Bourdieu calls habitus complements homology by contending that the class circumstances from one's youth form a deeply seated logic (Bennett 2007), which feels natural and unknowingly defines a person's way of judging and perceiving.

Homology and the naturalised habitus most recognisably culminate in Bourdieu's conception of musical taste: '...nothing more clearly affirms one's "class", nothing more infallibly classifies, than tastes in music' (Bourdieu 1984, p. 18). While

recognising that classical music and the French case are distinct ones, Bourdieu uses them to argue that music, like all taste, is largely unattached from specific places, relationships, and communications that develop over time. Bourdieu admits that place brings with it some differences, but those differences, he argues, are superseded by shared structures like class (Bourdieu 2012). Especially in modernity, Bourdieu argues that societies are organised into fields shaped and parcelled by habitus and homology that transcend geography. Born into the structure of habitus and homology, musical taste acquired in one's youth renders each of us victims of a pre-ordained class hierarchy. The particularities of place and its associated emotions become of little matter.

But is the rigid structure of class always the definitive factor in musical and artistic judgement? We find that the persistence of traditional music, and its place-laden meanings, challenges the understanding of musical and artistic judgement in such rigidly classed terms. As some others have complained right from the first introduction of Bourdieu's work to Anglophone readers (Jenkins 1982), we find Bourdieu's approach could benefit from more contextualisation of the interactive and affective components of taste. We suggest an *affective theory of taste* that focuses on the pleasure actors find in crossing social boundaries, inspired by the social relations of place. Actors may forge diverse social ties across levels of economics, education, and age, creating shared commitments to cultural forms and traditions. Class certainly strongly influences tastes, but it is not a permanent and insurmountable factor, locking habitus into homology. Taste also results from complex relationships formed by affections that develop through distinct and relative experiences, bonds, and friendships, all of which are situated in particular places. Moreover, it is the relations themselves, whatever their origin, that are decisive in shaping taste. Affection for culture emerges from the culture of affection, as much as the other way around. To cut to the chase: It matters hugely for the sharing of cultural taste whether people actually like each other, and whether the setting they find themselves in encourages that affection.

Traditional music, with its rural roots in the social relations of place, provides a useful example for thinking about place, affection, and the shaping of musical tastes. These relations by no means must remain limited to the rural, however. Wherever it is played, traditional music characteristically emphasises place. The opening and closing vignettes in this article are based on real characters that we came to know in urban pubs while we spent years in Ireland and England. Our presentation choice brings to light an oft hidden secret of theory: that the ideas we present come from our everyday engagement and experiences in the world. We embrace that reality here, by walking with Bourdieu through our own experiences in England and Ireland. Drawing on Madison (2005), we call this a *performance of possibilities*, using our own experiences to create a performance of possibility with Bourdieu.¹ Our vignettes are an attempt to use Butler's (1997) idea of performativity to work outside of the academy's everyday habitus (to put it in Bourdieuan terms) by bringing Bourdieu into pub life (Lovell 2003). By walking the reader with us down the streets of Galway in Ireland and Morpeth in England to hear music tied to place in action and meaning, this article presses the importance of incorporating situation and affection into thinking about how musical tastes are formed. The scenes we present here inspired our

theory of taste, and as we share this performance of possibility to situate the development of our theory within our own experiences, we simultaneously do not mean to present it as empirical evidence. We invite sociologists to test the validity of our theory through primary data collection.

Such work is sorely needed. Music remains understudied in the rural social sciences, although a genre like traditional music offers much for mainstream sociology and Bourdieuan scholarship to think about. Our project expands existing scholarship on musical tastes by using traditional music, *rus in urbe*, to discuss affection and place. Much current research on musical preferences explores popular culture (Fowler 2012), or genres such as country or classical music (Hennion 2001). And why has traditional music yet to enter into the Bourdieuan theoretical debate when it has so much to offer? Primarily because rural sociologists rarely study music. Rural sociologists have used Bourdieu to discuss social and cultural capital, sustainable agriculture, food and tourism, and marriage (Wall *et al.* 1998; Carolan 2005; Sutherland and Burton 2011; Kaberis and Koutsouris 2013; Paddock 2015). Music, though, has yet to be the centre of analysis in articles appearing in *Sociologia Ruralis* or *Rural Sociology*.² In part, this helps explain why traditional music has not been explored as a case offering a counterargument to Bourdieu's bold conclusion that nothing is more affirmative of class than musical taste.

In many senses, traditional music is oppositional to classical. Traditional music is sometimes known as 'folk music' that emphasises oral transmission across generations, and typically originates from non-elites. The composers of its tunes and ballads are often unknown and usually unpaid. With the word traditional can also come other associated terms – primitive, tribal, rural, of the country – all uncertain descriptors used to describe this music as relative to cultures of place. That is not to say that such music does not sometimes aspire to reach a global or commercial audience. The most popular of traditional bands tour globally. And even less popular traditional music sells on iTunes. Music of place often does transcend it. Yet simultaneously, traditional music frequently ties itself to two traditions: it appeals to its listeners based on its regional roots, dialect, and dialogue; and second, its transmission, whether global or local, is often live at festivals, concerts, and most of all, bars and pubs. As such, traditional music hits place twice, what we call the *play of place* and the *place of play*.

Our use of traditional music in this article speaks to Bourdieu's own habitus and homology. Bourdieu's upbringing in a rural village inspired some of his early work on bachelors and the influence of class on marriageability. When writing about his own home community, Bourdieu pitied those in the rural class system he documented, some who were victims of their own habitus and symbolic violence (Jenkins 2006). Jenkins suggests that Bourdieu's sympathising with his participants may have diminished his ability to understand them, and produced his 'marginalisation in the account of peasant initiatives' and underlying 'pessimism' about their ability to act, as change becomes irreversible (2006, p. 68). In fact, this brief show of emotion is at odds with Bourdieu's larger vision of promoting a reflexive sociology where academics are distant and objective (Flanagan 2008). By analysing music with largely rural roots, our hope is that we can work around some of Bourdieu's pessimism to understand place as more than a limiting structure, but also an affective possibility.

Bourdieu uses classical music as his exemplar, a genre of music popularly tied to material means and the resulting inaccessibility of the symphony hall – a place that definitely structures some limits (Holt 2007). But as Bourdieu openly recognises, his scholarly decision excludes musical tastes that are less suited to his argument, such as more relational or accessible music. In similar fashion, we choose to emphasise a genre particularly suited to our counter-argument.

But in what follows, we discuss more than traditional music. Indeed, it is no longer so clear that even classical music fits in the Bourdieuan cage of habitus and homology. Classical music was actually already fading from highbrow social networks when Bourdieu published *Distinction* in the 1980s. Taruskin (2007) uses the favourite music of US presidents as a signifier of classical music's elite position, arguing that the prestige of an art corresponds to the perceived social advantage in purporting appreciation of it. He first dates tastes changing away from classical music to the time of Nixon. Although he was an accomplished classical pianist, and even performed on television a couple of times, Nixon cited Mexican folk tunes and the musical *Oklahoma!* among his favourite pieces. Jimmy Carter listed Bob Dylan, the Allman Brothers, Paul Simon, and the Marshall Tucker Band as his favourites (Haydon 2010). Gerald Ford on his visit to China in 1975 requested the Michigan Fight Song (Taruskin 2007). Bill Clinton famously played pop and jazz standards on his saxophone. In the iPod era, George W. Bush said in 2005 that his was filled with country music and light rock (Haydon 2010). Barack Obama told *Rolling Stone* in 2008 that his iPod could cue up pop, jazz, and rap – but no classical (Haydon 2010). And Obama made a media splash when he sang (rather well) a snippet of Al Green's 'I'm So in Love with You' at a rally at Harlem's Apollo Theatre in 2012.

The dynamic goes both ways. Not only do elites no longer necessarily exhibit or trumpet classical music tastes, classical music is also increasingly enjoyed by those who are not elite – even though most observers argue that economic inequality has greatly increased in recent decades. Blockbuster movie soundtracks routinely draw on classical styles, as they have long done, confounding traditional notions of what is popular and what is elite (Kramer 2007). Cell phones ring out with phrases from Mozart's *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik* and Bach's *Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring*. Literally millions of children learn Beethoven, Chopin, Debussy, Kabalevsky, and Vivaldi through their music lessons on piano, violin, flute, and more, and play these pieces in recitals and school concerts. Many of these children have parents wealthy enough to pay for private lessons, but many receive the lessons for free through public schools, despite budget cuts.

How can we better understand constantly transforming musical tastes, if class is an infallible dividing line? To do so, we suggest an affective theory of taste.

Breaking habitus and homology: the individual and the omnivore

We are not alone in contending that homology and habitus are an overly structural framework for musical tastes. But we should also point out that many scholars have reaffirmed Bourdieu's theories on musical taste, writing that tastes in high arts vary significantly by social class. A classic paper by Dimaggio and Useem found that taste

in art and music were strongly correlated with class and issued a call for an examination of the origins of varying class rates of cultural consumption and competition for control over resources (1978, p. 157). More recently, Roy and Dowd (2010) write that this hierarchy was maintained by wealthy donors to the classical music, opera, and jazz scene. This facilitated the dominance of high-class snobbery in these categories, in spite of low popular demand.

Increasingly, however, scholars question this received view, as some always have. Coulangeon and Lemel (2007) argue that habitus is ‘... no longer defensible’ (209), and contend that experience, rather than class culture, is the main factor in people’s musical tastes. Along the same lines is Peterson’s (2005) conclusion that the diffusion of art and music, in conjunction with broader education, makes taste increasingly less about exclusion. Tanner *et al.* similarly conclude that ‘We are unsure whether to question Bourdieu’s emphasis on social class as a differentiator of musical taste, or to flag its waning influence’ (2008, p. 132).

Studies widely document that high-class tastes are now eclectic, and often mixed with popular and widely accessible music (Bryson 1996; Peterson 2005; Chan and Goldthorpe 2007; Coulangeon and Lemel 2007; Tanner *et al.* 2008; Roy and Dowd 2010), as in the example of presidential tastes that we noted earlier. Much current research contends that there no longer exists a particularly privileged high-class music, such as Bourdieu found. Rather, scholars find that tastes have become bridged (Roy and Dowd 2010), or that what is distinctive about elite tastes is not that they are exclusively high-brow, but instead that they are omnivorous (Peterson 2005). Scholars do differ on their interpretation of cultural omnivory. For Friedman (2012) the omnivore is culturally homeless, focused on upward mobility and caught between cultures. Savage and Gayo (2011) take a more positive view and suggest that omnivores are better understood as musical ‘experts.’ But whatever the interpretation, these studies document increasingly diverse tastes amongst the wealthy. They are united in challenging Bourdieu’s notion of homology and the reproduction of class interests, while stopping short of pursuing the appeal of transcending difference as influential in the formation of musical taste (Peterson 2005; Coulangeon and Lemel 2007; Tanner *et al.* 2008).

Some scholars propose an individualisation thesis to explain these recent trends in musical taste, further complicating Bourdieu’s agency poor and structurally rich approach. ‘Instead of being permanently marked by their initial class socialization and restricted to a limited set of predefined lifestyles’, Chan and Goldthorpe (2007, p. 2) write in their documentation of the approach, ‘individuals not only can but have to choose – to “pick-and-mix” – from the vast array of possibilities that the highly commercialised ‘consumer societies’ of today make available to them: lifestyle becomes a “life project”’. The stagnation of habitus is replaced by the individual’s freedom in a global society where each person can cross cut all sorts of social boundaries, including class. Cultural omnivory, then, is cultural consumerism. Chan and Goldthorpe (2007) in their measurement of English society, though, conclude that the individualisation thesis is overdrawn because a significant relationship persists between taste and social stratification. They find that univores – those who only like one kind of music – are mostly working class. Similarly, in a study of the US General Social Survey, Bryson (1996) found that tolerant musical tastes were not free of class

implications, as they are closely tied with increased educational attainment. Nonetheless, both Bryson (1996) and Chan and Goldthorpe (2007) challenge homology because the privileged in their studies report enjoying popular music and having less exclusive tastes. Coulangeon and Lemel (2007) suggest either that Giddens's thesis of social mobility holds, or that rising omnivore-univore tastes are prompted by a new culture of tolerance and openness.

An affective theory: the joy of transcending difference

These alternative explanations for the rise of the highbrow omnivore remain detached from concrete social relations, however. The framing is global in scope, without being reflective to the local, in which an unbounded society is marked by cultured tastes resulting from a wider accessibility to genres via disembodied iPods and other new media. Although the univore-omnivore thesis importantly challenges habitus and homology, there remains a detachment from affection and place. It overlooks how music is not only an individually consumed commodity, but also a relationship embedded in contingent social networks. Even music streamed and gathered through the Internet is ultimately played in particular spaces that are cultivated by different experiences relative to each social context. Nor are these relationships unbounded. A social context is not without edge, shape, and tension. But the existence of social boundaries does not necessarily mean isolation and rejection.

The affective component of our theory of taste, inspired by the traditional music scene, derives from Bell's (1998) theory of the dialogue of solidarities. The dialogue of solidarities argues that social commitments are shaped through the interaction of two forms of social solidarity: solidarities based on interests, and solidarities based on sentiments (Bell and Ashwood 2016). Solidarities of interests form through shared or complementary self-interests, where the rational actor promotes his or her material desires, but recognises that self-interests can most easily be accomplished in collaboration with others who achieve their self-interests as well. Solidarities of sentiments are shaped by shared or complementary other-interests, as Bell terms them, where the relational actor promotes the interests of others out of a sense of affective commitment to them, and experiences the same in kind from those others.

The two forms of solidarity are mutually constitutive. Solidarities of interests almost always involve a gap of time and space in the achievement of reciprocity, setting up the possibility that actors will not uphold each other once their own interests have been satisfied. But if the actors involved sense that their social tie is based on more than mere self-interests – that there is also a mutual sentimental commitment to the interests of others – they can have trust that others will come through for them. Thus, solidarity of sentiments helps maintain solidarity of interests, while interests also help sustain sentiments. It is easy to like those who do well by you – and difficult to like those who do not. Thus, if the solidarity of interests fails, probably in time the solidarity of sentiments will too (Bell and Ashwood 2016).

Our affective theory of taste understands musical taste as emerging from the dialogue between solidarities of interests and sentiments. In traditional pub music, the music serves as a tie between interest and sentiment for musicians, the bartenders,

and the listeners. Those who are part of this musical activity have material self-interests in creating ties to advance musical careers, to achieve social standing, to arrange a business deal, to cure a headache, to get tipsy or even drunk (despite getting another headache), and, for the publican, to make a living through the sale of ale. Simultaneously, sentiments too form. Sometimes the affection is cultivated first, and material ties follow, and sometimes it goes the other way around. The scene is interactive. Conversations intersect, new friendships form, and regulars become recognisable. They love the music because they love the relationships it engenders.

A common misunderstanding of social solidarity, however, is that ties form only between those who are similar. This birds-of-a-feather-flock-together view is not without reason, and we have been at pains in this article already not to come across as merely dismissing Bourdieu's linkage of habitus and homology. People of a similar class position, for example, may readily see how collective action to maintain that position, or to overcome it, is mutually beneficial. And they may readily sense sentimental ties of common norms of interaction and taste that stem from their similar social conditions. But social theory also needs to take account of the opposites-attract, Romeo-and-Juliet, West-Side-Story view. We do not need to get the same thing as each other out of a social relationship for it to be strong and lasting. Indeed, if we seek the same thing, there is likely to be conflict over attaining it. Plus, on the side of sentiments, there can be a common, special thrill in relationships that cross identities of difference. A sentimental tie between those who are similar may seem too expected, too routine, and requiring too little effort to demonstrate its depth and strength. But when consistent effort is made to cross an evident gap, social actors may more easily feel that there is truly something behind the show of sentiment, and that it is not merely a play for interests. For social solidarities contend with doubt. On the one hand, there is doubt about whether the other will come through on their end of the bargain in creating solidarity of interests. On the other hand, there is doubt about the reality of the sentiment that reassures the other about the bargain. In a situation of a solidarity across difference, there seems to actors less chance that one will rob the other of their interests, for the interests are not the same, and more chance that sentiments are not merely for show, for they are not expected.³

Thus there can be special pleasure in building unexpected connections. We suggest the *joy of transcendence* as the key factor in our affective theory of taste that explains how class can serve as a difference to be crossed, and thus a basis for the sentimental appeal of transcending social distinctions. To build ties across difference – whether those ties are based on class or heritage or gender or sexuality or any of the host of human social boundaries – is to build ties with the unknown. Such ties carry the feeling of being less conditional, for they are embraced without the degree of foreknowledge of ties of sameness. Music can serve as a space to marvel in the pleasure of difference, to learn other ways of knowing and living, and to gain the deep connection that comes from a mutual acceptance that is less conditional, less calculated, less worked out and predictable: a community of the strange, as Simmel might have put it (Simmel 1971 [1908]). Our term, the joy of transcendence, captures the euphoria that music sometimes carries with it, which scholars have identified in other work on music. Hennion, in her discussion of music lovers, writes that music

'should be seen as something transitory, not as a given but as a "new arrival", a relatively irreducible present: it happens, it passes – despite people's efforts to pin it down and bring it into line with a more "authentic" norm' (2001, p. 2). The player of the music and the listener engage in something that is constantly changing (Cohen 2001), and the transcendence itself is an act that moves past the structure and determinism of class alone.

What draws listeners to music – not just to classical music, but to any music – is what cannot be paraphrased: the stuff that sets your voice a-humming, your toes a-tapping, your mind's ear ringing, your ear's mind reeling. And that is not the kind of response anyone's books can instil. It is picked up, like language, from exposure and reproduction, which eventually lead to internalization. (Truskin, 2010, p. 15)

Not only in the pub. Claudio Benzecry (2011) describes how opera is a tool for fans to embody their attachments – not simply to consume, but also to love. Rather than the cages of class and habitus, the word love – a surprisingly uncommon one in sociological writing – captures the unstructured and non-rational events that often overcome the pessimism that Jenkins (2006) describes in some of Bourdieu's writing or even French cultural studies' very own habitus (Fowler 2012). To counter what Denora (2003) calls Bourdieu's exclusion, Denora (2000) suggests affordance as a way to understand how music can actively shape experience. Music can establish conditions for an event (Hennion 1999, 2007), or even to set the stage for action in a social movement (Eyerman and Jamieson 1998). In short, music is not necessarily a cultural trap.

Acknowledgement of these uses of notes and song brings scholars closer to a conception of music as actively creating social conditions, but stop short of reversing that recipe to also claim that social relations actively create music, which affective relations of taste help to capture. Here, the traditional music scene serves as a particularly vibrant example. Musical tastes are affective – between performer and listener, performer and performed, listener and listener. Sometimes the roles visibly blend. The musicians create tunes in dialogue with those seated at the pub, and the social relations of the room actively help produce the music, as listeners turn into singers and tunes change with the banter of those holding the instruments. To understand the forging of these tastes, and the joy of transcendence they manifest, the situation is critical.

Place and musical taste

Moreover, taste is continually situated, and re-situated, even for the omnivore. Traditional music may play into budded ears on an airplane crossing an ocean, in a car crossing a nation, or in a house that calls its home the same region the song sings about. Regardless of what the place is, a place certainly exists in the playing of music, shaping tastes and meanings as it goes along. Despite scholarly attempts to rebuke Giddens' individualisation thesis, place – both in its boundlessness and boundedness – remains elusive to current accounts of musical taste. Datasets often exclude social location and the feelings experienced when listening to music, shaped by the place where the music plays (Bryson 1996). Place plays a role in forming musical tastes

and preferences, and arguably provides much of the bread and butter for traditional musicians.

An affective theory of taste takes place into account by arguing that the emotions that influence taste are shaped by the contexts of the playing of or listening to music, the *place of play*. That's not to say that rural music is explicitly more wedded to place than music that tells more urban stories and is inspired by more urban settings. All music, even classical, capitalises on the places where it plays as part of the currency of taste.

Take the role of place in the broadening of appreciation for classical music, as demonstrated by two widely reported cases. Both happened at subway stations, not concert halls. One was in Washington, DC and the other in New York City. In the Washington, DC example, a Washington Post reporter set up a quasi-experiment in January of 2007 in which the good-looking, famous violinist Joshua Bell opened his case, took out his Stradivarius, and played solo at the entrance of the Washington Metro's L'Enfant Plaza station. Hundreds of busy travellers passed him by without a second glance. The experiment went as planned: Only about five people stopped to enjoy Bell's playing, and each only briefly. Only one passer-by recognised him. There was very little transcending of difference. He made \$32 in donations in 43 minutes of playing some of the most difficult solos in the classical literature on an instrument valued at \$3.5 million dollars. The intended point was in part Bourdieuan and in part just plain classist: to demonstrate and to lament public ignorance of even the very best of classical music and musicians.

Kramer (2007) made a very different claim based on an incident he observed at Times Square Station. He reports on how he once watched an attractive, twenty-something female violinist that Kramer calls Persephone play Bach for an attentive crowd of 15 or 20 people, who burst into applause when she finished. Kramer does not report (and likely hesitated to opine on) the class specifics of those gathered around Persephone. But they were likely reasonably diverse, given that Perspehone situated herself at the Times Square station, with its wide range of nearby destinations and employment. It was not your typical classical music concert-going crowd. But transcendence happened.

Why in one instance and not the other? Taruskin (2007) in his review of Kramer makes a critical observation. Each of these buskers was pursuing different ends: Bell, a deliberate actor in an experiment, and the other, a musician genuinely working in the pursuit of some extra money. They chose their places distinctly. Both played in a subway station, but the Times Square site allowed the audience to listen in full sight of where the next train would arrive, a gathering point where people have leisure for a few minutes of interaction. The L'Enfant Plaza site where Bell played was some distance from the platform, where a listener would be at some jeopardy of missing an incoming train. As Taruskin (2007, p. 18) observes, 'The Post reporter chose the least appropriate location possible. One of them was trying to make money, the other was trying to make a point. And Bach served them both equally well'.

Taruskin thus helps us appreciate a crucial aspect of the affections of music: How the place of play profoundly alters the social relations of the situation and the capacity for listeners to enjoy transcending difference. The classical style of the music was not the defining factor. Both buskers equally interfered with habitus. They entered

everyday spaces that exposed others and their own musical talents and tastes to new potential relationships. Bell entered into a space where the obligations of rushing to catch the train meant that few stopped to listen, while Persephone situated herself in a space where people had the leisure to absorb the music in association with others – their travelling companions and the strangers with whom they shared in the delight of transcending difference. These relative contexts differed in their affordance of the social. Difference itself was not the limiting factor. Each of the buskers found a space that profoundly shaped their relationship with those around them, leaving each a different capacity to speak to others through music – and for audience members to speak to each other through music.

In other words, the dialogue of social life is more than a matter of the language, musical or otherwise, and more than a matter of explicit meanings. The implications of situations matter just as much to our capacity for transcendence. But we have to stop to listen first, and to feel welcome to do so. We need the invitation of the pub, the train platform, the concert hall, and the teenagers at the back of the bus to situate music and internalise not just its stylistics but its social relations and their affective possibilities.

Boisterous musicians in the Irish public house operate on a different set of social expectations of those possibilities than do Carnegie Hall or buskers in a subway station.

Although the music is traditional and sometimes hundreds of years old, it is more than a standard, unchanging commodity for the consuming ear. Rather, the music is embedded in constantly transforming relationships. The live qualities of music fade under Bourdieuan categories of highbrow, lowbrow, legitimate, and illegitimate musical tastes. Such typologies can overlook the affect of music: how it acts in the context in which it is situated.

Moreover, in addition to the site in which music is played, an affective theory of taste recognises the role of place in the tunes and lyrics of music, the *play of place*. Here, the case of traditional music and its rural roots illuminates the foundational role of place in provoking emotions that can cross class differences. The rural idyll spans centuries, from elites like Horace writing about nature, to Thoreau's escape from the city, and everyday understandings of rural, working class culture expressed through songs like Alison's Krauss's rendition of the folk song 'I'm Just a Country Boy'. Or take the famous Fields of Athenry, a song written by Pete St. John that frequents many Irish pubs.

By a lonely prison wall
 I heard a young girl calling
 Michael they are taking you away
 For you stole Trevelyan's corn
 So the young might see the morn
 Now a prison ship lies waiting in the bay

Low lie the Fields of Athenry
 Where once we watched the small free birds fly
 Our love was on the wing we had dreams and songs to sing
 It's so lonely 'round the Fields of Athenry.

The song speaks of the struggles against the English during the Great Famine, and captures the palpable resentment that still lyrically lingers in Ireland towards their former English oppressors. The narrator stands in the small village of Athenry in County Galway, imagining the freedom that has been stripped away amidst the injustices of the English. Whether found on YouTube and enjoyed in the privacy of the home, or blared over speakers in the pub in the early hours of the morning, it carries the weight of its rural environs, the fields and birds of Athenry that represent the beauty of defiance against treachery. A song like this perhaps adds to the long list of rural idylls – the accuracy of which is not our task to debate here. But what is of interest is the resonance of such a message that transcends the specific classed norms of those listening. The rural idyll is quite effective at that. For both the wealthy elite and the pauper, the message bears a particularly rural form of appreciation. Even as a visitor from abroad, one can become consumed in the tale of Athenry, as relationships are forged with a place through the story of the music and the people who tell it. Traditional music vibrantly captures place lyrically, through stories, sometimes idyllic ones that reach across the difference of class.

As well, affect carries through the emotive quality of lyrics like those of *The Fields of Athenry*. Perhaps it's the Sean-nós styled voice, known to those who live in the rugged landscape of Connemara, that sings out the lyrics. Perhaps it's simply the silence of the pub on a Friday night that provides the setting for a clear rendition to fall on the ears of those keenly listening. The impact of the *play of place* does not necessarily limit itself to the *place of playing*. The iPod can carry the *Fields of Athenry* from the studio of *The Dubliners* to the parlour of a lonely immigrant, or an American connecting to an idealised notion of Ireland's past. In those sites, place too plays out, far from the Shamrock shores. Distinctions are forgotten in a moment of musical solidarity, as affect transcends difference.

Bourdieu at the Tap and Spile

We got a surprising email one day, cc-ed to both of us. It was from Bourdieu, but he sounded so different. 'Galway and le pub. Loved it. Reminded me of my youth. Music that brought everyone together, n'cest pas? Rich and poor. Monday giving talk at U of Edinburgh. Looking for music pub in la région. Suggestion?'

We did not have suggestions for Edinburgh, but we knew of a great music session on Sundays at noon in the Tap and Spile, a pub in Morpeth, a town near the Scottish border in the region of England known as Northumbria. Morpeth is only a modest train ride away from Edinburgh. We offered to go with him. Bourdieu wrote back a one-word reply: 'Oui'.

We got off the Intercity train at Morpeth. Bourdieu had already arrived. He sat on a bench by the platform, wearing a dark blazer and a scarf, scribbling something in a notebook. We walked together to the centre of this small, old market town, known for its heavy Geordie accent, formed in the nearby coal mining towns, so thick that even the English and Scottish have trouble understanding the locals. Bourdieu's eyes were darting around intently as we walked, taking everything and everyone in. But now it was he, rather than ourselves, who pointed out the man in worn clothes

walking slowly and proudly down the other side of the street, wearing a tattered jersey with the National Union of Mineworkers logo. He grinned and amiably said hello when we engaged in rapid-fire banter with an old friend who had been passing by in his smart new Vauxhall Insignia saloon car. (The old friend was a sociologist, and delighted to forge relations with Bourdieu). The friend offered us a ride, but Bourdieu wanted to walk, and so did we.

We got to 'the Tap', as its denizens like to call it, at about 12.30 p.m. The back room was already blossoming with music and conversation, and nearly every seat was taken. A few people were standing, but we managed to find a neglected stool for Bourdieu by the fireplace, and a bench for the two of us to share. Many a 'hey' and 'what news from America' and 'pleased to meet you' resounded through the room, plus several variants on 'who's your friend there, a Frenchman, right?'

Bourdieu soon found himself with an ale in his hand, courtesy of Lionel, a boiler maintenance man at a local university with a button accordion on his lap, a loud and easy laugh, and a gift for making everyone else laugh too (especially if you can follow his Geordie accent). Across the room sat Liz, a university professor, huddled in the corner with her mandolin, with her 14-year old daughter Katrina beside her on fiddle. Next to her sat another fiddler, Gavin, a perpetually out of work artist and poet, and next to him was Alice, his girlfriend, an administrator at a different university, with her Northumbrian pipes. George, a local factory worker and a bodhran player, his huge white beard making him look like a cross between Santa Claus and a Rabbi, sat opposite them. Next to George was Simon, a medical doctor with an accordion, and Malcolm, a retired tax official with a fiddle.

George came right over to Bourdieu and clinked glasses, and started peppering him with questions. Bourdieu looked startled at first, but soon was grinning with evident pleasure. George had his stool in his other hand, and Bourdieu moved a bit to make room for George's. Meanwhile, Liz, Gavin, and Alice struck up a tune and Lionel joined in, fiddles, mandolin, pipes, and accordion sailing away on 'If You Will Not Love Me You Must Let Me Go', an old Northumbrian favourite. So we could not hear what Bourdieu and George were saying. But we could see that Bourdieu was laughing a lot.

People call the style of music at the Tap 'traditional', like at the pub in Galway, and some of the same tunes can be heard in both places. But at the Tap, the musicians perform music from anywhere, virtually, as long as it is something that others can easily pick up on, and that connects with the histories of those in the room. That means a lot of Scottish music, but also music from elsewhere in the Irish and British Isles, from France, from Scandinavia, from Eastern Europe, and from the USA and Canada. (This is northern England, after all, and these are where the histories of the locals mainly rest). Plus the players like to give special emphasis to the music of Northumbria, which has its own traditions and even its own instrument, the Northumbrian pipes, a quiet form of bagpipes with an air-bag filled by a bellows pumped with the arm, allowing one to play and sing at the same time.

'How about a tune from America?' Gavin called out to Mike, who had his mandolin along. Mike struck up 'Pretty Little Dog', knowing from a previous session that Gavin knew a version of it, and followed it with 'Kitchen Girl', another easy American fiddle tune that others could readily pick up on. Players generally run through

tunes in medleys, playing each 2 or 3 times, and occasionally more, before launching into the next. Gavin kept the medley going by immediately following with 'Cherokee Shuffle', another American tune. Then the music paused, beer glasses lifted and fell, and the conversation swelled.

'How about a song from France?' someone called out. Lionel, maybe it was. We did not hear exactly. Everyone looked at Bourdieu.

'Come on, mate', encouraged George. 'Give us a song'.

And Bourdieu stood up and began to sing. (The beer helped). No one knew or understood the song, but no one cared. They were getting to know and understand Bourdieu.

The upshot

The participants in these pub sessions that come together sometimes like each other, other times they don't. Sometimes they like each other's music, and sometimes they don't. What they do share, often, is an appreciation of the moment of transcendence that can come in a pub. That moment when the notes come together just right. That sharing of a feeling or a sense that otherwise may have stayed alone at home without the companionship of the pub. They are not unaware of a Bourdieu-esque understanding of the world. They know that social life has hierarchy. They know that hierarchy often works out in cultural tastes and habits that result in derision directed down as well as up. They know it but don't agree with it, at least in this social situation. Rather, they form affections across their differences not in spite of class-based taste, but precisely because of it, finding here a chance to reject the patterning of life by the economy, and to create in this dark and dank place a rowdy utopia inspired by the joy of transcending difference.

What we learn in the pubs of Galway and Morpeth, and in countless settings of the social elsewhere, is that musical taste, rather than a mere affirmation of class, sometimes cuts across it. As it plays out in concert halls, in pubs, and even at the ends of our fingers and our mouths, music brings with it the performance of possibilities for affections that affront what some might call rational self-interests. Traditional music's place of play and the play of place confront the clear-cut boundaries of Bourdieu's classical case. Therein lies a good measure of its joy. Transcendence does not always happen – but it most certainly can. And in doing so, structure bends to affect.

Yes, cultural taste is social. But as it is social, it is also affective. And as it is rooted in part in affect, cultural taste can cross boundaries as much as be confined by them, especially when the situation – both the place of its play and the play of its place – invites us to work through our differences. And when it does, we may discover a delightful possibility of social performance: That sometimes difference does not stand in the way of forming ties of taste and affection. Rather, it can give them special and lasting delight.

Notes

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¹ We use pseudonyms for the people who we describe in Galway and Morpeth.

² We used Academic Search Premier to search *Rural Sociology* and *Sociologia Ruralis*, for abstracts with the keyword music. *Sociologia Ruralis* had two hits: Munters' (1972) article on Max Weber as a rural sociologist, with a brief mention of music; and Schuurman and Nyman's (2014) discussion of the Finnhorse as a symbol of nationality, including musical references. *Rural Sociology* had one hit: Eyck's (2009) article on Cajun cuisine, again with a brief mention of music, but not a centrepiece of study. The situation is a bit better in the *Journal of Rural Studies*, a journal which is not specifically sociological, with three hits (Gibson and Davidson 2004; Yarwood and Charlton 2009; Edwards 2012).

³ This is a doubt that actors have not only about each other, but also about their own selves. Just as we worry that others are not true in their sentiments and may not come through in reciprocating interests, we consider that might be true of us as well.

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