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Beyond Omnivores and Univores: The Promise of a Concept of Musical Habitus

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Abstract

In recent years the omnivore thesis has come to take centre stage in debates surrounding cultural taste and its social structural co-ordinates. On the assumption that tastes for music are reflective of people's tastes in other cultural domains, the matter of musical preference has received substantial attention within omnivore-related empirical research. Yet while the ongoing omnivore debate has seen the concept's original formulation undergo revision and refinement in light of new findings, a number of substantive and theoretical difficulties continue to receive inadequate attention, especially in respect of music. These difficulties include commonly made assumptions about the sanctity of musical genre categories and hierarchies of cultural legitimacy, the reliability of decontextualized expressions of taste for disclosing real-world cultural practices, and questions about the deployment of cultural capital. This article assesses the implications of these difficulties and goes on to outline the concept of musical habitus, a heuristic theoretical construct with which to think through questions about musical objects' correlations with actors' social locations and the contemporary role of music in status competition.

Keywords

Bourdieu, genre, habitus, music, omnivore, taste, univore

Introduction

Questions about contemporary trends in cultural taste and consumption, and their correlations with social class and social status, have received significant attention within cultural sociology over recent years. While Bourdieu's *Distinction* (1979) continues to be seen by many commentators as fundamental to the debate about tastes and their social co-ordinates, more recently the 'omnivore' thesis (Peterson, 1992; Peterson and Simkus,

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1992) has come to take centre stage, attracting a wide degree of interest and considerable, if occasionally qualified, agreement. In its basic form the omnivore thesis proposes that the relationship, or 'homology' as Bourdieu termed it, between high- and lowbrow cultural commodities and their consumers had, at the close of the 20th century, altered. Higher-status social actors, previously conceived of as 'highbrow snobs' for their exclusive consumption of, for instance, classical music and opera, were shown to exhibit 'omnivorous' tastes, taking in not only highbrow musical genres but also middle and lowbrow ones. Low-status actors, limiting their tastes to fewer and typically 'popular' genres, were correspondingly said to exhibit 'univorous' taste profiles.

While the broad trends uncovered by the omnivore thesis have been confirmed by much subsequent research (see Peterson, 2005, and Virtanen, 2006, for overviews), further complexities have also arisen around the concept of 'omnivorousness', which has led a number of scholars to seek further clarity about precisely what kind of people omnivores are (e.g. Ollivier, 2008; Van Eijck and Lievens, 2008) and what the purported changes in taste regimes might mean for processes of distinction (see e.g. Warde et al., 2008). Indeed, though there is little disagreement that the contemporary era has witnessed shifts in the way cultural preferences and practices map onto social locations, the extent to which this implies changes in the functioning of cultural capital remains unclear. This article seeks to contribute to the debate about the operation of cultural and, specifically, musical tastes (and related practices) by problematizing some of the commonly made assumptions of music-taste research and proposing an alternative theoretical lens through which we might consider how musical tastes and practices intersect with social class and cultural capital.

The article adopts the following structure. First I inspect the omnivore thesis and the ongoing debates that surround it, paying particular attention to the methodological approaches adopted by its proponents. Following this, I discuss the implications of several commonly overlooked trends in music consumption and listening practices alongside shifts in terms of genre categorizations, considering their implications for the study of musical tastes and their relationship to actors' social locations. Next I turn to a brief examination of Lahire's (2008) contribution to the debate, highlighting the effects of the foregoing discussion for his propositions regarding 'cultural dissonance'.

Following this, I outline a novel means of theorizing actors' modes of engagement with music and the implications of these for the deployment and accumulation of cultural capital. This approach is based in the concept of *musical habitus* – a supple theoretical construct based upon Bourdieu's original formulation of habitus. The concept of musical habitus is here deployed in an attempt to incorporate the processes involved in Bourdieu's conception of habitus into a picture of people's relationship to and taste for music. Finally, in order to briefly demonstrate the potential utility of a concept of musical habitus, I present findings from my own quasi-ethnographic research project. In conclusion I call for an alternative approach to the study of musical taste and practices which, while acknowledging significant changes both in actors' relationships to musical materials and in the nature of those materials themselves, nevertheless seeks to maintain in clear view some of the obdurate cleavages in music's social role(s) across social classes and the enduring patterning of related tendencies, however complex these may be.

Changing Status of the Omnivore Thesis

Since its initial formulation by Peterson and colleagues, the concept of cultural omnivorousness has been subject to a series of efforts at clarifying and uncovering greater precision in its functioning (see e.g. Bryson, 1996; Emmison, 2003; Erickson, 1996; Lopez-Sintas and Katz-Gerro, 2005; Ollivier, 2008; Sullivan and Katz-Gerro, 2007; Van Eijck, 2001; Van Eijck and Lievens, 2008; Warde et al., 2008). Over the course of its continued examination, across numerous national contexts (principally North America, Europe and Australia) and through the adoption of differing conceptualizations (breadth, volume, diversity or orientation of tastes), methods and measurements (linear scales of preference, participation, knowledge and dislike; constructed typologies of cultural consumers), the concept of cultural omnivorousness has gradually become uncoupled from its exclusive association with highbrow cultural consumers, so that it is now understood as also functioning within middlebrow and lowbrow taste regimes, albeit to varying extents in different countries. This has led some commentators to conceive of omnivorousness as symptomatic of the arrival of a new 'master cultural schema' characterized by a 'conspicuous openness to diversity' (Fridman and Ollivier, 2002, 2004), enduringly reflective of power relations yet ultimately bypassing highbrow/lowbrow discourses. In apparent recognition of the concept's diminishing specificity, by 2005 its chief architect, Richard Peterson, noted in his overview of the extant omnivore research that, despite the attention paid to the concept by numerous scholars,[1] the subtypes of omnivorousness suggested by them were 'diverse and fall into no recurrent patterns' (Peterson, 2005: 264). While such a lack of recurrent patterning may, at one level, imply little more than the kind of variation liable to arise out of diverse national-historical contingencies, it nevertheless also suggests that attributions of 'omnivorousness' now beg as many questions as they might purport to answer.

In a more recent attempt to move the cultural omnivore debate forward, Van Eijck and Lievens (2008) rely upon the quantitative approach typical of much omnivore research in their examination of the relationships between actors' omnivorous tendencies in musical taste and the normative values they hold (in this case, attitudes towards social integration[2] and social networks). Despite finding, in their survey responses, an empirical patterning of musical genre preference with social integration attitudes, the study also reveals the content of actors' musical tastes to be a more significant differentiator of attitudes than their breadth per se. This leads the authors to echo other commentators in proposing that 'different omnivore types have a different way of being in the world' (Van Eijck and Lievens, 2008: 25) and to conclude that 'prevailing dichotomies like highbrow–lowbrow or omnivore–univore do not suffice if we want to understand what kind of people we are actually dealing with' (Van Eijck and Lievens, 2008: 25). Indeed, given the multiply qualified and, as the authors admit, 'unexpected' nature of some of their findings, there emerges a distinct sense, perceptible in the stated interest to 'delve deeper' (Van Eijck and Lievens, 2008: 25), in which the quantitative approach adopted allows their analysis to go only so far.

Other recent efforts to posit more precisely the constitutive elements of omnivorous orientations (Warde et al., 2008) and the different ways people exhibit openness to cultural diversity (Ollivier, 2008) have seen omnivore-related research beginning to turn

away from a predominant reliance upon quantitative data. This situation may well reflect the reservations and qualifications raised by Silva (2006) and Warde et al. (2007) in their discussion of the quantitative *and* qualitative findings issuing from the Centre for Research on Socio-Cultural Change's British study *Cultural Capital and Social Exclusion*. Despite interview data being 'messier and less consistent' (Silva, 2006: 1175) than the quantitative data emerging from this project, both articles highlight the valuable supplementary detail that it adds to the overall picture. In their discussion of the substantially variant approaches to taste demonstrated by those categorized as 'omnivores' on the basis of their survey responses, for instance, Warde et al. (2007) refer to one interviewee whose omnivorous score 'might also derive from an inability to discriminate, caused by a relative lack of confidence over what one is supposed to like and do' (Warde et al., 2007: 156). Such findings reveal not only that an exclusive reliance on quantitative methods for exploring questions of taste risks overlooking significant aspects of actors' approach to and use of cultural objects, but that the link between omnivorousness and increased cultural capital may not be as sound as is often assumed.

While the discussions offered by Warde et al. (2007) and Silva (2006) are revealing, they go only some way in disclosing limitations inherent to quantitatively based approaches to cultural taste and cultural capital. As I shall illustrate below, these limitations are particularly marked when relying upon musical taste expressions as a means of understanding the operation of cultural capital. A key reason for this lies in changes taking place across the musical field as they affect musical practices and the categorization of musical works.

Limitations of Quantitative Approaches to Musical Taste

In line with Peterson and Simkus's (1992) assertion that musical preference regimes are generally homologous to those of other cultural domains, their measurement in quantitative studies of cultural taste has achieved an almost pre-eminent status (see e.g. Bryson, 1996; Chan and Goldthorpe, 2007; Ollivier, 2004; Peterson, 2002; Peterson and Simkus, 1992; Savage, 2006; Van Eijck, 2001; Van Eijck and Lievens, 2008). Within such work, musical taste is predominantly assessed by survey respondents stating their level of preference for a number of musical genres, the terms of which tend to be broad in nature ('jazz', 'folk', 'classical', 'opera', 'rock/pop' and so on). Each genre is also generally assumed to be representative of a 'brow' (low/middle/high), from which the cultural capital resources of respondents are subsequently read. Although this approach is largely reflective of the quantitative component of Bourdieu's seminal study of cultural tastes, *Distinction* (1979), it is not, in the contemporary era, without significant weaknesses.

While it may be true, as authors such as Negus (1999) have shown, that musical genre categories inform the organization of music companies and the perceptions of audiences, it also remains the case that the former are constantly subject to shifts, both internally and in relation to others occupying the musical field (see e.g. Brackett, 2002; Frith, 1996; Holt, 2007). Over time, particular genres may blossom or wane in their popularity, fall out of usage, become institutionalized or else hybridize and 'crossover'. While such processes may be said to affect genres in an uneven way, a number of contemporary mechanisms pertinent to musical genres, to music listening and to consumption practices

have, I believe, increased the need to question assumptions about genre–listenership correlations, their relative cultural 'legitimacy' and the cultural capital endowments of listeners.

One such factor issues from processes related to the widespread digitization of music. In essence, music's contemporary status as a commodity of which a hugely increased amount (and information and opinion about) can now be relatively easily accessed by, and exchanged between, listeners, has set into motion more exploratory modes of music listening and consumption for many. Initial research findings in this area 'strongly suggest that greater internet use increases the range of musical tastes' (Peterson and Ryan, 2004: 234). Accompanying the widespread digitization of music within developed economies are changes in the ways listeners can access, and are often provided with, information about music. From Amazon's 'Customers who bought this item also bought' recommendations, to the 'listening suggestions' put forward by the plethora of music streaming and download websites, to the music blogs, Myspace pages, online magazines, forums, message boards and peer-to-peer music-sharing applications, there now exist a range of interactive resources through which internet users may become (digitally) converted to new or other musical forms.

The musical technologies implicated in contemporary musical listening practices are also worthy of note, given how their storage capacities and the 'random shuffle' features commonly built into them allow listeners to experience musical texts from across the gamut of their taste spectrums each time they listen in this way. Far from being a marginal trend, according to high-tech consumer researchers such as Marcus Giesler, 'random shuffle … isn't just a novel way to listen to music; it's one of the key constructs of digital entertainment' (Kahney, 2005). Michael Bull's recent work on iPod culture confirms the significance of such new technologies for the listening and taste practices associated with them. As Bull (2008: 151) affirms: 'The use of Shuffle enables users to break with their traditional listening habits … thus extending the user's openness to the variety of music within their own collection'. Indeed, following Bull's statements about how iPod users 'embrace the ideology that "more is better"' (Bull, 2008: 128) and 'appear to give themselves over to their randomly played music collection' (Bull, 2008: 150), it might well be the case that the development of MP3 technology and its associated listening apparatus (such as computers and mobile phones) facilitates not only a broadening of taste regimes but also shifts in the nature of music 'choosing'. Effectively, then, by enabling listeners to acquire and exchange an abundance of music quickly and easily, and subsequently allowing them to experience it in novel ways (e.g. random shuffle, personalized playlists), the digitization of music has built into it a tendency to weaken the experiential relationship binding listening practices to works from single genres, instead encouraging many to develop tastes in the form of 'cross-stylistic groupings that transcend genre' (D'Arcangelo, 2007).

In tandem with such shifts in consumption and listening practices, the 'hyper-commodification of popular cultural forms', it is argued, 'has accelerated the transmutation of genres in the digital age' (Sandywell and Beer, 2005: 107), bringing changes to the ways that many previously stable genre categories now *sound* as well as to what the listening experience *means* for listeners. Heavy metal, for instance, a genre category often subsumed under 'rock' in quantitative music-taste studies, has bifurcated into,

among others, the following subgenres: black metal, death metal, doom metal, folk metal, glam metal, gothic metal, groove metal, industrial metal, metalcore, neoclassical metal, nu metal, post-metal, power metal, progressive metal, sludge metal, speed metal, stoner metal, thrash metal. Cross-genre terms include: alternative metal, avant-garde metal, Christian metal, extreme metal, rap metal, symphonic metal and Viking metal.[3] In numerous cases such subgenres today bleed, particularly in sonic-aesthetic terms, into the subgenres of other genres in ways that make them increasingly difficult to differentiate. To better help us understand the phenomena whereby contemporary artists and groups may straddle, switch between and hybridize genres, Sandywell and Beer (2005) have usefully proposed the terms 'intra-morphing', 'inter-morphing' and 'trans-morphing'.

Three implications for quantitatively based understandings of musical taste and their relationship to cultural capital resources emerge as a result of such trends. Firstly, the increased blurring of genres, combined with digital consumption and listening practices, points towards a weakening of claims about the meaning of people's preferences for multiple genres. Secondly, the combination of genre deepening and expansion with faster and easier access to an unprecedented amount of music suggests that claims about the meaning of preferences for single, broadly defined genres lack adequate specificity. Taken together the above tendencies imply that the hierarchies of cultural legitimacy relevant to musical genres are undergoing a shift: what Savage and Gayo-Cal (2009) have referred to as the 'Classic FM effect' – whereby survey respondents expressing a preference for classical music in fact only liked more accessible types – may thus represent just one way, among many, in which assumptions about the 'legitimacy' of musical genres are, in the contemporary era, in need of re-examination. On this basis, to infer the cultural capital endowments of listeners from stated preferences for broadly defined genres risks ignoring a number of key factors inherent to the operation of taste as a process of social distinction.

A further important difficulty plagues efforts to determine the cultural capital endowments of musical genre listeners by quantitative means alone, however. This results from the fact, as Holt (1997) highlights, that much quantitative work in this area objectifies cultural capital so that it is inferred from the supposed aptitude of the consumers of particular cultural objects. Yet examining stated taste preferences tells us next to nothing about consumer practices, about the significance granted by listeners to their taste in and for music, or of the role played by such tastes in the context of their lives and interactions. Given how a centrally important aspect of the sociological study of cultural tastes is their implications for processes of social reproduction – a fact that makes Bourdieu's work an enduring reference point in the omnivore debate – it would appear unfortunate that so much of the research conducted in this area fails to inspect cultural practices beyond the matter of 'attendance'. Yet instances of cultural resources' *use*, by actors, represent a key juncture at which cultural capital comes to acquire its social force, in its deployment within meaningful social interactions.

Musical Practices

In a recent article outlining a number of reservations about Peterson's omnivore work, Bernard Lahire suggests that expressions of taste represent 'no more than the visible

– and signposted – part of an enormous iceberg' (Lahire, 2008: 8). For Lahire, a shift of focus is required if we are to accurately interpret and understand the meaning of cultural preferences: away from decontextualized expressions of tastes (and their objects) and instead towards contextualized cultural practices. Lahire proposes this focus on the basis of previous work in which he uncovered among his research participants significant levels of 'cultural dissonance': individual cultural profiles composed of elements that belong to both very legitimate cultural registers and others considered much less legitimate. On the basis of the statistical frequency of dissonant profiles which are 'absolutely or relatively in the majority within all the major social groups', Lahire proposes the need for full recognition of 'intra-individual variations' in cultural tastes and practices, something which 'leads to preparing individual portraits', since these provide 'the only way of describing how cultural practices and preferences vary in relation to the domains, subdomains, contexts or circumstances of cultural activity or practice' (Lahire, 2008: 4).

Although Lahire focuses, rightly I believe, on the need to attend to the variability of cultural practices as individuals undertake them across diverse contexts, the basis of his argument for doing so rests upon an understanding of cultural legitimacy rooted in 'the specific properties of cultural activities, namely whether they are individual or collective, organised or unconfined, formal or informal, tight or loose, contemplative or participative' (Lahire, 2008: 3). A key problem with this account, however, is that precisely how the relative collectivity, organization, formality, looseness or participatory nature of cultural activities should be judged in terms of the legitimacy they confer upon objects remains opaque. While I do not deny that the concept of cultural legitimacy remains useful for understanding some aspects of cultural life, to base the case for widespread intra-individual dissonance (characterized by a multiplicity of dispositions) upon it is unsafe because, in so doing, Lahire overlooks the possibility that actors rely upon evaluations of cultural objects' legitimacy that differ from his own. Where Lahire thus sees discontinuity and 'dissonance' in actors' cultural registers (something indicative, he suggests, of the inadequacy of Bourdieu's concept of habitus), he appears to be transferring the fluidity nowadays associated with cultural objects' legitimacy away from these objects, instead locating it in actors.

A further reason given by Lahire (2008: 21) for emphasizing individuals' dispositional plurality is that today 'every individual … traverses a plurality of social contexts'. Yet placing such an emphasis upon the diversity of the contexts between which actors move, and seeing this as a key moment in the adoption of varied dispositions, risks, I suspect, downplaying enduring consistencies in actors' recourse to cultural repertoires. Such an emphasis also assumes that all people traverse contexts that call for or encourage the adoption of multiple dispositions. While dispositional variety and flexibility may indeed be characteristic of some actors (and perhaps especially those with much to gain or lose in the appropriate deployment of cultural capital), this does not necessarily mean that it endures for people with relatively little at stake in such status games, nor for those who move between contexts characterized by a high degree of consistency.

In order to remedy the shortcomings in Lahire's approach while maintaining his justifiable injunctions regarding the importance of examining cultural practices, a subtle yet significant shift in focus is required. This lies in the need to approach the matter of cultural taste through seeing cultural capital as, first and foremost, *embodied* by individuals

(Holt, 1997) and expressed by them in the way they put cultural repertoires to *use*. Such a focus reminds us of the considerable emphasis given by Bourdieu to dispositions as primarily embodied and expressed most clearly through styles of interaction, modes of appreciation and their representation in the expression or deployment of cultural capital. Indeed, as Bourdieu (1979: 40) noted, when the objects within particular cultural fields no longer offer their consumers *ipso facto* distinction, the expression of cultural capital becomes a matter of consuming the same goods in ways that are inaccessible to those from subordinate classes. As the above discussion has demonstrated, it would appear that the weakening of hierarchies of legitimacy relevant to musical objects has limited their ability to confer status through consumption alone.

What is therefore required, if we are to better understand the contemporary extent and nature of music's relationship to cultural capital, is a conceptualization of listeners which is attentive to their differential (e)valuations of musical objects' legitimacy, to the different extents to which they engage in practices aimed at generating or consolidating cultural capital, and to the embodied nature of their deployment and accumulation of it. In order to incorporate these into an account that also recognizes the enduring force of relatively homogeneous/heterogeneous contexts of socialization and practice, we might fruitfully invoke a central component of Bourdieu's social theory and extend its reach in a specifically musical direction, in the form of a concept of *musical habitus*.

Musical Habitus

Several key features of Bourdieu's concept of habitus make it particularly adaptable to an exploration of actors' whole relationships to music, and therefore to the role of music in status competition and the ways this might connect with people's social locations. Fundamental in this is the concept's ability to see beyond any false opposition between objectivism and subjectivism: individuals' habituses both produce and are produced by the social world. Following this, the concept of musical habitus provides a means of explaining how individuals' relationships to music and their associated embodiment of cultural capital, of the sort approximately described by quantitative omnivore studies, enduringly connect to factors associated with their socialization and social locations. Indeed, the general trend of upward mobility for many in western societies – seen by some as bringing what were previously exclusive 'higher status' cultural materials into the reach of lower- and middle-status actors (Coulangeon and Lemel, 2007; Van Eijck, 2001) – sets the patterns uncovered in much recent research on musical taste into line with this key proposition at the core of the concept of musical habitus.

This concept is capable of performing much more theoretically useful work, however. By virtue of two further operations in the functioning of habitus, conceiving of a musical habitus allows us to successfully overcome problems inherent in perspectives that assume cultural legitimacy to function in an equivalent manner across society. Here the operations of the *habitus as classifying structure* together with those of the *habitus as evaluative structure* mean that individuals apply a quasi-objective map of social space and relations according to its 'interest'[4] for them. This has two implications relevant to the present discussion. Firstly, those who share understandings of the meanings inscribed in the social order and who occupy similar social locations will be more likely to perceive,

classify and evaluate social phenomena in broadly similar ways. Secondly, while those occupying different social locations may have a taste for or consume the same good or object (a piece of music, say), they do not necessarily all do so in the same way.

Further, not only do the operations at work in the musical habitus disclose to actors a common-sense world in which certain features of cultural legitimacy are broadly classified, but also, and more importantly for the current discussion, they instil in them modes of apprehension, appreciation and discernment along with repertoires of particularized knowledge which intersect with specific cultural artefacts' meaning(s) and their 'interest' for actors. The significant, shared features of people's social locations might therefore provide a basis upon which to gain insights into the configuration of their approaches to music and its role for them in status competition, even in instances when stated preferences may seem to dissemble, rather than straightforwardly reflect, actors' social conditions.

The functioning of the musical habitus *as classifying structure* also provides a theoretical basis upon which we might found an understanding of how the weakening, over time, of the classificatory distinctions relevant to music (i.e. genre boundaries) contributes to the reduced capacity of particular cultural objects to retain cultural legitimacy. That is, as genre boundaries destabilize and musical artefacts become less easily classifiable in terms of their legitimacy, we might expect to see a decreased prevalence in the social divisions of musical consumption. As research in this area has illustrated, a contemporary tendency is for younger (Savage, 2006; Van Eijck, 2001) and more technologically au fait (D'Arcangelo, 2007) listeners to demonstrate notably low regard for traditional genre boundaries in their music consumption habits. The changing nature of the boundaries and legitimating operations across the field of music might thus be posited as here interacting, in certain ways and to a certain extent, with the classifying operations relevant to musical habitus.

It is worth noting at this juncture that any recognition of the aforementioned weakening of genre boundaries does not necessarily imply a denial of enduring relationships between musical texts (grouped by 'genre' or 'style'[5]) and their particular listenerships or communities. Jason Toynbee (2000: 110) has offered some notably robust arguments for maintaining an appreciation of 'genre' for its enduring ability to 'express the collective interest or point of view of a community', arguments based on the links between numerous communities and particular musical styles. In this I broadly concur with Toynbee, although in the context of the present discussion I would encourage attention to his emphasis on the need to remain alert to the *complexity* of both communities and genres. Similarly, while it has been demonstrated that terms such as 'scene' (see e.g. Shank, 1994; Straw, 1991) or 'subculture' (Willis, 1978) can be usefully invoked to uncover insights about text–audience relationships, such concepts, I would suggest, can be most appropriately understood as providing one lens through which to view *specific* formations between musical texts and the social/socio-spatial, rather than necessarily hoping to account for all text-formation relationships. In proposing the concept of musical habitus then, I am in no way suggesting a need to ignore the potential utility of 'genre' and 'scene'. Rather I am affirming the need to attend to the contemporary complexity of genres and intra-genre variability in both listener(s)–text(s) relationships and listeners' cultural capital endowments.

As mentioned above, the destabilization of legitimacy hierarchies relevant to much music requires that any contemporary assessment of the role of cultural capital must explore the latter's embodied nature. In this regard, too, the concept of musical habitus reveals its value owing to the significance it affords to what Bourdieu termed the 'bodily schemas' and 'operations' of habitus. This makes a concept of musical habitus valuable for addressing two centrally important aspects of actors' relationships to music. Firstly, the concept is capable of providing an account of the way music's material qualities (DeNora, 2000) embody and resonate with structures-in-habitus (that is, for example, an affinity for the sonically codified 'gentle' and 'sensuous', or else a negative valuation of such properties). Secondly, musical habitus incorporates into its understanding of actors' relationships with music the (associated) embodied nature of cultural capital and its expression through embodied practices. In this instance the material qualities and/or meanings inherent to actors' preferred musical texts can be seen as corresponding, in albeit diverse (and multiply interpreted) ways, with embodied dimensions of their whole habitus and thus with their embodied cultural capital.

A final, relevant feature of habitus, pertinent to its attempt to conceptualize the functioning of individuals' 'tendencies' or 'feel for the game' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 128), concerns its strict indeterminacy. Following this, musical habitus affords room for the sometimes serendipitous and unexpected nature of actors' engagements with music, while never allowing them to drift completely beyond the limits of reasonable expectation. The quasi-unpredictability of individuals' musical preferences, whose underlying grounds (social aesthetics) are largely unknown to actors themselves, can, through the concept of musical habitus, be seen to obey a certain logic of practice, however complex.

Formation and Functioning of Musical Habitus

To gain a better sense of how the musical habitus might function in practice we need to take account of the nature and force of the structures experienced by contemporary actors in instances beyond those of a purely cultural or musical nature. The reason for this is that, as well as echoing Bourdieu's conception of habitus in its operations, the musical habitus is also integrally embedded in, and intimately interwoven with, the latter. That is, since factors whose origins lie in diverse domains of experience will influence the whole of any individual's habitus, they cannot fail to impinge upon the operations of the musical habitus. The operations of the broader habitus must therefore be seen to always play a part in the uptake of specifically *musical* practices as well as in the deployment of *musical* preferences. That said, we might nevertheless strive to isolate the principal operative dimensions of the musical habitus and the main factors serving in its distinctive formation and generation.

Just as 'primary socialization' can be considered crucial in its effects upon the developing habitus, so too can the musical dimensions of this process, *primary musical socialization*, be expected to play a key role in the development of actors' musical habitus. *Primary musical socialization* requires us to consider factors such as the (relative) presence or absence of musical sounds in the home, the regularity of their use and the

way(s) in which they are used, their material nature (volume, timbre, tempo, etc.) and sources (e.g. hi-fi, radio, television, musical instrument or human voice), as well as the types of relational interactions incorporated into them, for example child–child(ren) and child–adult(s) interactions. In addition, we might consider the influence of the social and physical nature of the spaces within which musical experiences unfurl, the times of day at which they occur, the nature and amount of physical movement involved, the associated actions/practices of the musical encounter (and thus their socially given meanings), as well as the types of emotion expressed by other listeners (subsequently seen as 'belonging' to the music). While such socialization strictly precludes nothing in terms of musical tastes, it nevertheless sets precedents, for individuals, about matters such as the fundamental significance of organized sound, the nature of attention to it and the forms of response and engagement appropriate to it.[6]

Following the above, a consideration of *secondary musical socialization* must engage with questions about the role of a greater range of actors and factors: whether and how peers, siblings and extended family members validate, normalize and engage with music; the vitally important role played by the media (especially television, radio and, of increasing significance, the internet); and actors' access and exposure to different musical materials and experiences. In line with Bourdieu's statements concerning secondary socialization, education must also be seen as a key arena within which further important musical habitus-forming processes take place.

From my research into the musical activities of young people in the north of England[7] it was possible to discern a number of patterns in the ways that differently socialized respondents classified, evaluated and subsequently used musical materials. This study investigated, through a quasi-ethnographic approach (extending over a period of approximately 18 months and employing participant observation, informal discussion, focus groups and semi-structured interviews), the musical activities and tastes of 36 young people from four different social settings: an inner-city estate characterized by high levels of deprivation, a similarly deprived suburban estate, a declining industrial town and a relatively affluent yet remote rural village.

In respect of primary musical socialization it was clear that for those young people who had grown up in households where adults and significant others had close and active relationships with music (through, for instance, adults' selective playing of music or the presence of instruments in the home) the effects were notable. Alice, a girl with relatively broad musical tastes and a great enthusiasm for music learning, offered an account, characterized by a familiarity and ease with music choice and use, which was fairly typical of the young people I spoke to in the rural setting:[8]

M Did you grow up in a musical environment?

R Well, erm, my Grannie had been in opera for a long time and then Grandad got into it when they got married so, I was always over there where they lived so I suppose I got quite into music there …

M How about what was around the house, were there a lot of instruments say?

R Yeah, my Mum played the piano so there was always a piano and when I was 7 I started to learn how to play the piano.

(Alice, rural village, age 12)

It appeared that Alice, like many of her peers, had grown up within contexts where music was something to be attended to earnestly and with attention, to be appreciated, understood and, ultimately, manipulated.

This situation stood in some contrast to the reports I gleaned from the young people growing up within deprived inner-city and suburban settings. Tony and Lisa provided typical examples:

> M Was there much music in the house when you were growing up? I mean, was your family into music?
> R Nah, it was just my sister, my older sister she just listened to like her kind of music, likes of Christina Aguilera and all that … there was no sort of music for us then.
>
> (Tony, inner-city estate, age 15)

> M What about musical instruments and that kind of thing, is there anyone musical around your family?
> R [*shakes head*] Not really
> M Has anyone ever tried to teach you any music at home or …?
> R [*shakes head*]
> M Encouraged you to be musical?
> R No.
>
> (Lisa, suburban estate, age 13)

As was not the case for Tony or Lisa then, Alice's *primary musical socialization* appeared to furnish her with a sense of ease and confidence in approaching both a range of musical materials and the music learning opportunities subsequently made available during her *secondary musical socialization*. Indeed, for many of the young people I spoke to within the rural setting, the approach to music encouraged and facilitated at home was of a sort subsequently recognized and valued within educational contexts:[9]

> A lot of time [in school music lessons] is spent doing composition and I just really enjoy composition.
>
> (Craig, rural village, age 14)

> Music at High School's been great … it's not like a lesson, it's freedom.
>
> (Alex, rural village, age 14)

Again, this situation contrasted markedly with the reports from young people from deprived settings:

> M What about like, other stuff to do with music at school, what was that like, the music lessons?
> R It was boring.
>
> (Neil, inner-city estate, age 18)

> I hate the likes of [the] music what I did at school.
>
> (Tony, inner-city estate, age 15)

> [You] sit there, divvn't dae nowt [don't do anything].
>
> (James, inner-city estate, age 20)

Here we can see how the underlying nature of adolescent music preferences (especially in respect of their perceived uses) might be seen as implicated, in meaningful ways, in students' whole relationships to educational contexts. The correlations between educational achievement and musical preferences highlighted by, for example, Van Eijck (2001) and Savage (2006) broadly attest to the enduring force of this relationship across the life course.

In line with such variant experiences of primary and secondary musical socialization, there emerged a number of further characteristic traits in young people's relationships with music. For those from the rural village setting, these included an appreciation of a broad range of contexts and uses appropriate to music, an idealization of listening situations tending more towards the private and the restful rather than the social and physical ('It's about being able to relax to a song you know, just relax completely, unwind and just sit down and listen to it' – Jake), an openness towards unfamiliar musical forms and evidence of relatively omnivorous tastes ('loads of [different] stuff' – Alice). As was revealed in their common aversion to 'rave', however, there was, among these young people, evidence of the drawing of symbolic boundaries of the sort highlighted by others (e.g. Bryson, 1996). It also appeared that these young people gave greater prominence, in their evaluations of music, to sonic-aesthetic qualities than more symbolic/representational ones[10] ('Lyrics aren't generally important to me … [I like] mellow songs things like that … I always listen to the articulation of the beat, phrasing' – Craig; 'I just like the sound of it, so it's not the lyrics that make me like it' – Alice). Indeed, seeing music as something largely 'free' of associative or denotative meanings, Craig, along with peers such as Jake and Alex, displayed a sense of some bafflement towards young people who adhered strongly to particular styles of music and would dress or behave in a way reflective of such tastes:

> They're obviously trying to make some sort of statement … it seems strange to me … it's not what it [music] should be about at all …
>
> (Jake, rural setting, age 14)

> It's [music is] just a thing that doesn't say 'this is why you're listening to this'…
>
> (Alex, rural setting, age 14)

Again, this stood at some variance to the general patterns in evidence within more deprived settings and especially in the inner-city setting. In this instance, very many young people identified strongly with one or only a few styles of music (typically rave for the boys, pop and rave for the girls) and revealed, in their evaluations and uses of these forms, the significance of their symbolic/representational dimensions. In the case of the boys' rave music allegiance, these dimensions were not only evident in their accounts but also in the lyrics they performed – lyrics concerned with themes such as immediacy and 'atmosphere' (Diehl, 2000), collective experience, belonging and locality (exemplified in the 'shout outs' to particular individuals, 'crews' and neighbourhoods). In this context music was also closely intertwined with associations of physicality

('It gets us [me] into the rhythm to play football' – Carl, age 15; 'Jump about, [it] doesn't really matter how you dance' – Dale, age 18), significant quasi-ritual experiences (principally group musical performance and night club attendance) and numerous instances of bonding, sociality and exchange (listening together, practising DJing and MCing together, making and trading tapes with one another).

Moreover, such valued dimensions of musical experience and associated activity generally reflected a series of attitudes and values widely held within this community – many of which bore resonances of its formerly industrial working-class culture (i.e. of pride in one's roots, a valuation of physicality/strength/toughness, solidarity and mutual support, social gatherings characterized by hedonic release) – as well as responding to the conditions now faced by its young people (social stigma, the threat of physical violence, poverty, limited resources).

While sonic/aesthetic considerations were far from wholly peripheral for these young people – the importance of the 'beat' (especially in terms of tempo and rhythmic emphasis) and 'catchiness' figured prominently – with respect to valued instances of music listening, understandings of how music might be put to use in the pursuit of pleasure or the criteria against which musical experiences ought to be evaluated, their perspectives clearly differed from those of the more affluent, rurally based young people. Interestingly, such differences were perhaps best revealed in instances where those from very dissimilar backgrounds expressed a liking for the same musical artist. For example, while an appreciation for female-fronted, alternative/gothic rock group Evanescence was expressed by the girls from more affluent backgrounds in largely sonic-aesthetic terms (the mixed textures of piano, violins, voice and 'rocky' guitars), for those young women from lower socio-economic backgrounds lyrical/representational dimensions (themes of lost love and sadness) figured more prominently.

Such classificatory and evaluative differences naturally fed into the sorts of musical taste profiles broadly characteristic of these groups of young people, especially in terms of breadth of taste. For instance, undoubtedly related to the fact that many of my inner-city respondents primarily engaged in and preferred musical experiences that were shared by peers rather than those that were solitary in nature, a strong and shared adherence to only one or two (shared) musical styles was common. The development of a broad palette of musical tastes was effectively something neither easily available to, nor valued by, many young people living in this setting. By contrast, in the (more geographically dispersed) rural setting, more considered, detached and omnivorous approaches to music taste predominated. Indeed, this group's wilfully selective approach to music echoed, in its form, the relative 'freedom to choose' applicable to numerous other domains of these young people's lives. Nevertheless, the musical habituses characteristic of each of these groups of young people do have at least one similarity in their functioning: in terms of their classificatory and evaluative schemes vis-à-vis valued musical experience and activity 'the most improbable practices are … excluded, as unthinkable' (Bourdieu, 1990: 54).

As the above findings suggest, social class proved an important variable in terms of many young people's classifications and evaluations of music. Nevertheless, a range of other factors, principally musical ties,[11] gender, biographical details, home life and family relations, local youth-cultural contexts and, as discussed, attitudes to

school also figured prominently. Although the patterns in evidence could be interpreted as corresponding superficially with musical genre preferences (in line with the cultural omnivore thesis), at a more fundamental level they coincided with factors both immanent and peripheral to particular musical materials and to the conditions and opportunities available to young people within the broader contexts of their lives. My research participants' stories thus revealed strands of internal consistency between aspects of their aesthetic judgements, objective social conditions, and their deployment of taste and uses of music in a way that revealed the operation of 'interests', in Bourdieu's sense of the term. By exploring individuals' musical preferences and practices in a way that brings together an understanding of their social locations, musical socialization and perspectives on diverse musical sub-fields, together with an analysis of the perceived 'affordances'[12] of both musical materials and the purposes to which these might be put, a picture of undoubted complexity emerges, yet one in which the operations of the musical habitus, like those of its Bourdieusian counterpart, never drift completely beyond the limits of reasonable expectation.

According to this perspective, the extent to which people are variously disposed to a diversity of musical forms can be seen to belie, in certain respects, the totality of their social beings. In Simon Frith's discussion of the way 'communal values' (Frith, 1996: 124) are inscribed in musical aesthetics, he argues that 'musical appreciation is, by its very nature, a process of musical identification, and the aesthetic response is, implicitly, an ethical agreement' (Frith, 1996: 114). This ethical component of the musical commitments people make resonates with ideas proposed by Andrew Sayer (2005) in his work on the moral dimensions of experiences of class. Sayer (2005: 6) extends the concept of habitus to include ethical dispositions and develops the notion of 'lay normativity' to describe the 'normative rationales, which matter greatly to actors, as they are implicated in their commitments, identities and ways of life. Those rationales concern what is of value, how to live, what is worth striving for and what is not.'

Insofar as Bourdieu is less explicit in stressing the ethical dimensions of habitus, Sayer's work highlights the need to pay attention to not just the instrumental aspects of social action (such as the deployment of taste), but the actual content and rationale of the moral sentiments which serve as its guide. As noted above, some recent omnivore-related research (see especially Van Eijck and Lievens, 2008) has begun to move towards an exploration of such considerations as they impinge upon the nature and functioning of musical taste profiles. In respect of people's musical lives, supplementing Bourdieu's conception of habitus with a sustained awareness of the reflective and ethical dimensions of chosen preferences and practices can yield explanatory dividends at the level of comprehending the blend of social, emotional, political or, conversely, largely instrumental purposes lying behind actors' musical preferences and practices.

Conclusion

A number of implications can be drawn from the foregoing discussion. Firstly, assessing musical tastes through broad genre categories offers only a very generalized picture of actors' musical tastes and no means of assessing the functional role of music in real lives, including, crucially, whether and how people might apply modes of musical appreciation

to enhance their social status. Secondly, recognition of the varied evaluative and classificatory operations undertaken by differently located social actors, together with that of the destabilization of genre boundaries, signals the need for a reappraisal of the assumed 'legitimacy' of musical genres and works. This renders straightforward ascriptions of cultural capital to specific consumption patterns problematic. Thirdly, this weakening of legitimacy alerts us to the need to attend to people's embodied music-related practices, as demonstrated through modes of appreciation and instances of putting cultural repertoires to use. Since it appropriately directs the focus of attention towards embodied taste-acts, contextualized practices of music's use, and the relationships of these to biographical and social structural factors, the concept of musical habitus offers a potentially rich resource for theorizing about contemporary formations of musical taste. In highlighting the ways the deployment and acquisition of musical taste can be seen as implicated in the processes and operations of habitus (as conceptualized by Bourdieu), and seeing the broad purview of this system of dispositions as necessarily co-operative in both the configuration of musical tastes and their embodied enactment and social expression, musical habitus presents a nuanced approach to questions about cultural capital and its social structural co-ordinates. That is, the concept is sensitive to the different degrees and types of attention granted to music by differently located social actors, seeing them as non-equivalent and thus difficult to reconcile with a singular hierarchy of cultural 'legitimacy' and cultural capital.

Indeed, while Bourdieu's concept of *field* is clearly one applicable to music and music-related activity, the foregoing argument implies that such a field would need to be conceptually disaggregated and viewed as consisting of numerous sub-fields, since, as Sarah Thornton has demonstrated through her elucidation of a concept of 'subcultural capital' (Thornton, 1995), different species of capital operate variably across the musical field.[13] Attentiveness to diverse social contexts, musical sub-fields and the embodied modes of appreciation enacted within these provides, then, a fruitful means of unpicking the nature of complex taste–class–capital correlations and of understanding the degree to which purported shifts in genre-taste patterns might actually reflect changes in music's functioning as a means of garnering social distinction.

Notes

1. Peterson (2005) references over 150 books and articles, many of which engage with the omnivore debate.
2. These were characterized by the authors as attitudes typical of utilitarian and expressive individualism, social isolation, social disorientation, solidarity and communitarianism.
3. For an even more exhaustive list of the subgenres and sub-subgenres of dance music, see McLeod (2001).
4. My use of the term 'interest' here corresponds with that of Bourdieu (1979: 48): 'it [interest] is their whole social being, everything which defines their own idea of themselves'.
5. See Moore (2001) for a discussion of ways of distinguishing between usages of the terms 'genre' and 'style'.
6. Consider, for example, how the conventional listener positions associated with experiences of listening to classical music on CD or vinyl (typically calling for stillness and attention), in

contrast to the experience of listening to pop music through a transistor radio (often related to singing, humming or moving *along to* the music), might accumulate, after repeated childhood exposure, into varying conceptualizations of the foundations of musical appreciation.

7. See also Rimmer (2009).
8. 'M' is used throughout to indicate my speech; 'R' indicates the speech of respondents.
9. The notion of cultural 'legitimacy' appears to reveal an enduring utility in respect of the musical forms valued within mainstream educational contexts. Despite the use of a broader range of musical forms within mainstream educational contexts over recent years, most British schools continue to rely on a range of musical styles (including classical music, folk/traditional, some ethnic/world music forms, jazz, popular song and mainstream popular music) which might be considered 'legitimate' when contrasted with 'disvalued' or 'illegitimate' forms (such as hard rock and heavy metal, techno/rave and most other dance music forms, most hip hop/rap, etc.). Such a hierarchy of legitimacy is implicitly encoded into educational music discourses and practices through certification, grading and material-structural support systems such as in-school and peripatetic teaching provision.
10. This distinction between the 'sonic-aesthetic' and the 'symbolic/representational' aspects of musical objects is here based on the relative primacy granted to these features of musical texts by research participants, as evidenced in their talk and action. The distinction is thus solely a heuristic one in this instance. I do not propose the possibility of disentangling their inherently interwoven appreciation and experience in instances of musical and music-related meaning-generation/creation. It nevertheless remains the case that listeners may lay greater emphasis upon the particularly 'sonic-aesthetic' aspects (e.g. rhythms, timbres, textures) rather than the 'symbolic/representational' dimensions (e.g. lyrics, themes, 'look') of musical texts in their accounts.
11. This term refers to the real-world social interactions and friendships resulting from, as well as informing, actors' musical experiences: the significant social networks and peer groupings implicated in specific forms of musical activity and interest. As has been persuasively argued (Blacking, 1995; Finnegan, 1989; Frith, 1985; Small, 1998), the social relations they imply are significant aspects of practically all forms of musical activity and can serve to influence, as well as being influenced by, many other aspects of individuals' lives than those restricted to music.
12. Tia DeNora (2000: 40) uses this term to describe how musical 'artefacts may possess specific and sometimes obdurate qualities' which leave them open to particular uses. This term is comparable to that of 'objective possibilities' as used by Paul Willis (1974) in support of his homological approach to musical meaning.
13. To recall Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992: 101) on the relationship between capital and field: 'a capital does not exist and function except in relation to a *field*'.

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