

## The Embourgeoisement of Beer: Changing Practices of 'Real Ale' Consumption

### Introduction

*'People's idea of a nice country pub is definitely one that has hand pumps and serves Real Ale...the supplements in the nationals are covering beer in a different way now, and the last couple of years certainly you've had this explosion of these very trendy boutiques...where beer is very much presented as a high end luxury product. [Its] where you can expect to pay four or five quid for a half. Its beer that has provenance, you can be a bit of a geek about it, you can impress your friends by knowing about a very rare beer. You can identify the hop variety, you can talk about whether they've used the hop as a flavour hop or an aroma hop...that's very similar to wine, you can be a bit of a pretentious arse about it' (Pete, salaried staff, Campaign for Real Ale)*

Recent years have seen palpable changes in the ways in which beer is consumed, spoken about, understood and appreciated. Whereas once beer might have exclusively been seen as the common drink of the working class (Mass Observation, 1984), the contemporary beer consumer is increasingly likely to deploy a range of attitudes and competencies relating to taste and appreciations more typically associated with the more venerated, and more middle class, practice of wine consumption. There is evidence to suggest that there has been an emergence of a dedicated 'educated beer drinker' (Flack, 1997; Thurnell-Read, 2016). It appears, then, that beer consumption can be said to be increasingly subject to raised standards of cultural prestige (Spracklen et al., 2013). For example, former British Prime Minister David Cameron is reported as stating his favourite drink to be the Cornish bitter *Doom Bar* (Pukas, 2014), and has also presented US President Barak Obama – himself a confessed beer aficionado and home-brewer – a gift of bottled ales on his 2011 visit to the UK (Youde and Letley, 2010).

Given the apparent 'class pattern associating certain drinking styles with high social status and others with low social status' (Järvinen et al, 2014: 384), these developments raise interesting questions about the relationship between consumer practices, cultural capital and social change. Given the widespread application of Bourdieu's (1984) theories in explaining social class distinctions in consumer taste and practice, there is now little doubt that consumption is both structured by and, in turn, involved in structuring social hierarchies. However, a common criticism of Bourdieu's work is that it is strikingly static (Lamont, 1992) and presents culture as a fixed and unchanging hierarchy (Warde et al., 1999). How, then, can the status of a particular cultural practice change over time and is it possible for previously low status pursuits or tastes to gain cultural legitimacy and valorisation, and in doing so enter the canonical 'aristocracy of culture' (Bourdieu and Nice, 1980)?

Drawing on advances in practice theory (Reckwitz, 2002) and its specific application to understanding consumption (Warde, 2005, Shove et al. 2012; Warde, 2014), this article draws on qualitative research to explore how beer consumption practices have undergone significant changes. However, only recently has consumer practice theory begun to make headway in understanding change, innovation and evolution in consumer practices (Gram-Hanssen, 2011; Halkier, Katz-Gerro and Martens, 2011). Arguably, too few studies have explored practices which involve the valorisation of a consumer practice previously

characterised by its generally low status and lack of cultural prestige. In becoming domain of middle class consumer, such consumer practices can be said to have undergone a process of embourgeoisement. The analysis therefore seeks to add to Shove's (2014, 418) assertion that consumer practices that are 'recognisable entities that exist across time and space' and 'that are enacted by cohorts of more and less consistent or faithful carriers' can in fact emerge, adapt, persist or disappear over time.

### **Consumption, Practice Theory and Changing Tastes**

Practice theories have now gained huge influence in the sociology of consumption and offer a useful means to resolve tensions between rigid structural accounts of consumption, on the one hand, and agentic, overly individualistic, descriptions on the other. This has involved understanding how specific consumer practices are routinised, stabilised and embedded into everyday lives in a manner that neither gives priority to the empowered individual consumer nor an undue and unchanging determinism to structural arrangements (see Warde, 2005; 2014). Practice theory therefore allows a far more holistic analysis of consumption. While practice theories are diverse they 'all highlight the significance of shared or collective symbolic structures of knowledge in order to grasp both action and social order' (Reckwitz, 2002: 246). More specifically, a distinction can be drawn between 'practices-as-entities' which persist and develop over time and the 'practices-as-performance' represented by the many individual enactments of that practice without which the practice-as-entity would cease to exist (Shove et al., 2012; Shove, 2014: 418). Shove et al. (2012: 21) thus propose that 'social practices consist of elements that are integrated when practices are enacted' and that 'practices emerge, persist and disappear as links between their defining elements are made and broken'. Importantly, practices evolve over time or, more accurately, they 'co-evolve' as new practitioners, new technologies and ways of understanding emerge, establish and dissipate. Thus, as Sahakian and Wilhite (2013: 24) observe, 'one important property of social practices is that they are far from static'.

Yet, in spite of these conceptual advances, consumer practice theory remains more readily applied to routinised and stable practices than it does to those undergoing rapid or contested periods of change. Where the issue of change has emerged from recent studies, it has usually sprung from the focus on sustainable, ethical or ecologically orientated consumption (Halkier, 2009; Gram-Hanssen, 2011; Halkier, Katz-Gerro and Martens, 2011). However, few studies have considered how the emergence and evolution of consumer practices involves the movement of the practice in terms of cultural prestige and the social class of its practitioners. The article therefore seeks to demonstrate why practice theories of consumption should remain attuned to the fact that cultural tastes are 'struggled over' in ways that mean 'declarations of what is 'good taste' can be used as a way of exercising power' (Turner and Edmunds, 2002: 221). Indeed, Warde (2005: 143: 146) observes that 'some practices offer greater external social rewards than others' and asserts that Bourdieusian approaches that help elaborate 'where a practice fits in a hierarchy of prestige' might be a means of further refining understandings of particular consumer practices.

However, since this initial allusion to a potential affinity with Bourdieu's accounts of the reproduction of cultural taste as a mechanism of social distinctions, exponents of consumer practice theory have largely avoided discussion of potential grading of prestige and legitimacy. Paradoxically, this has come at a time when such hierarchies of cultural

legitimacy appear to be most open to change and renegotiation (Peterson and Kern, 1996). In recent years, consumption has been reconfigured by a range of new understandings of what 'good', desirable and, hence, status bearing consumption involves (Gronow, 2002). Thus, we see increased cultural capital emerge from consumption which is 'local' (Sims, 2009), 'ethical' (Johnston, Szabo and Rodney, 2011), 'craft' (Ulver-Sneistrup et al., 2011), 'ethnic' (Goldstein-Gidoni, 2005) and 'organic' (Cairns, Johnston and Baumann, 2010). Several prescient example of this include Roseberry's (1996) analysis of the reconfiguration of coffee as a 'gourmet' or 'yuppie' consumer item and Gaytán's (2014: 2) recent study exploring the 'shifting patterns of prestige' that have 'helped alter the perception of tequila from a common and unfashionable drink to an exclusive and trendy product' (Gaytán, 2014: 2).

Importantly, all of these bring new prestige to fields of consumption that would not, for Bourdieu (1984), be seen as prestigious and would not confer status distinction. Thus, in spite of Bourdieu's wide influence on consumer studies, it is possible to question the extent to which his mapping of cultural practices in France, with its 'distinct high cultural tradition' supported by 'a strong assumption of high cultural hegemony' (Swartz, 1997: 81), are applicable to contemporary conditions characterised by 'the pluralisation, diversification and fragmentation of cultural taste' (Bennet et al, 2009: 23). Due regard must therefore be given to the cycles of introduction, incorporation and habituation which mean that 'as one good loses its distinction and is incorporated into the standard, another replaces it and the cycle starts again' (Dwyer, 2009: 335).

By utilising insights from both consumer practice theory and Bourdieusian conceptions of the centrality of cultural taste to the reproduction of class structures, this article illustrates how the practice of beer consumption has acquired increased legitimacy and greater levels of cultural prestige. Following an outline of the research context and methods, the article therefore identifies various changes in each of the three 'elements' of practice identified by Shove et al. (2012); *materialities*, *meanings* and *competencies*. This is then followed by an analytical discussion which further draws on the overlaps between consumer practice theory and Bourdieusian cultural taste distinction to consider how particular beer consumption practices have undergone a process of 'embougeoisement'.

## **Research Methods**

The diverse methodological approaches employed in the empirical study of consumer practices includes qualitative interviews (Magaudda, 2011), focus groups (Halkier, 2009) and in situ observations (Domaneschi, 2012). Following Watson and Shove (2008), the research this article was based on drew on a broad range of research undertakings that seek to provide insight into both the thoughts and actions of individual practitioners as well as the broader picture of how 'practices-as-entities expand, contract and change as they acquire and lose variously faithful cohorts of carriers' (Shove et al., 2012, 77).

The research on which this paper is based therefore consisted of a multi-sited qualitative study conducted between August 2012 and April 2014. This included 53 semi-structured qualitative interviews with staff and local level branch members of the beer consumption pressure group the Campaign for Real Ale (CAMRA). Established in 1971, and having enjoyed a steady rise in membership from an initial few thousand in the 1970s to over

180,000 in 2016, CAMRA has played a significant role influencing trends in the beer and pub industry of the UK and, as such, represents the core of the study by which changing patterns of consumption are explored. Further, as in Domaneschi's (2012) work on food consumption practice, it is important that both consumers and producers are considered. Research therefore extended to brewers and brewery staff as well as a number of individuals involved in beer promotion or in writing about beer such as drinks journalists and bloggers. On average interviews lasted for 65 minutes with the longest lasting over two hours and the shortest taking 38 minutes.

Beyond the core of interviews, throughout the research period, participant-observation was conducted on a number of levels including attendance of local branch meetings, beer festivals and branch AGMs. At a national level this involved attendance of two CAMRA AGMs, as well as volunteering for four days of the *Great British Beer Festival*, CAMRA's showpiece event. Participant-observation was also conducted with the University Student Ale Society and involved regular socials in and around the local area, attendance of annual beer festivals hosted on the University Campus and day trips to CAMRA beer festivals held in Oxford and in Manchester.

Supporting the interview and participant-observation data, and of significance to the task of tracking the nature of Real Ale appreciation as it changes over time, CAMRA documents and publications from its foundation in 1971 to the present day were analysed. This included significant archival research of the key CAMRA publications, *What's Brewing*, *The Good Beer Guide*, and *Beer* magazine. More generally, throughout the research period a range of over 300 different textual items were collected and analysed. This included over 80 branch newsletters and magazines, beer festival promotion materials, beer lists and tasting guides, as well as brewery promotional materials including leaflets, posters, bar mats and other point of sale materials.

## **The Changing Practice of Real Ale Consumption**

*Two men enter the pub and approach the bar. One is in his twenties and the other possibly in his late 50s or early 60s. 'What you having Dad?' Both initially approach the bar then perform identical half steps backwards accompanied by a stoop of the head and a squint of the eyes to read the many pump clips fixed to the hand pumps lining the bar. 'I've had that before, that's a good one' the son offers. 'Is that local? I want a local one', the Dad responds. The barman, who has been waiting for the pair to make their decisions of what to order, interjects: "Pig on the Wall" is local, that's from Dudley'. 'What's that one?' the Dad says, leaning in again and locating the pump clip, 'that's a mild. Not had a mild in years, yeah go on then we are in Birmingham after all!'. To this the son cuts in 'that's Black Country Dad, a Black Country mild!'. As the barman begins to pour the mild the son is still staring up and down the line of hand pumps. 'Something hoppy I think...pint of the 'Citra' please'. As they receive their drinks from the bar man, and the son pays, both men take an initial sip of their beers. 'Not bad' says the Dad. 'Huh, that's nice, really hoppy, try that Dad'. Both exchange a sip from each other's beers, nod approvingly then make their way to a table towards the rear of the pub and carry on drinking and talking.*

This vignette, reconstructed from notes taken during field observations in a Birmingham city centre pub famous for its extensive offering of Real Ale, took no longer than five minutes to unfold. Yet, in this brief 'snapshot' (Shove et al., 2012: 29), the complex assemblage of the elements of practice-as-performance can be viewed. We see *meanings* (specific styles, the value of locality, the son's quick judgment about which beer is a 'good one'), *competencies* (the stoop and pause of the body to survey the pump clips, the knowledge involved in recognition of specific breweries and beer styles and the barman's pouring of the beer) and *materiality* (the hand pumps, the pump clips and their designs, the layout of the pub and perhaps most importantly the glasses of beer). Taken together, they offer an instructive illustration of recent changes in beer consumption practices. This tendency for change has been towards, rather than away from, complexity. The discussion which follows will build upon this observation and offer an analysis of how this move towards complexity, which might be seen as an intellectualisation of beer consumption, has seen Real Ale appreciation and beer connoisseurship more generally, become recognisably middle class consumer practices.

These changes to the meanings, competencies and materialities can be understood to have occurred over recent decades, with CAMRA playing a significant role. Thus, the group was formed in 1971 by four friends from the North of England who sought to resist the uptake of new technologies by the dominant companies of the British brewing industry which meant that traditional British 'cask' beer – with its characteristic 'secondary fermentation' taking place in the barrel in the pub cellar prior to dispense and defined in the inaugural CAMRA *Good Beer Guide* in 1972 as a beer with 'no extraneous carbon dioxide added' – was being rapidly replaced by new pasteurisation, filtration and force carbonation 'keg' beers. CAMRA's founders therefore argued that in such a move the taste and quality of the beer itself were being relegated by the corporate concerns with profit and market share expansion, and that vastly inflated market budgets were being used to push an inferior product on often unwitting consumers. As one of the four founders commented during an interview: 'What we knew was that the brewers were trying to foist upon us some beer that was fizzy and had a metallic tang to it'.

During its history CAMRA has framed Real Ale as standing in opposition to mass-produced, heavily marketed and profit driven corporate beer which it has long been vocal in criticising for being 'bland' and 'tasteless'. Thus, a core task for CAMRA has been to work to associate Real Ale with notions of quality, by positioning it as being made with skill, care and high-grade ingredients, and locality, in being produced by local breweries who enact identity and belonging through, for example, the frequent use of names and imagery associated with local geography, history and culture (Flack, 1997; Schnell and Reese, 2003; Thurnell-Read, 2015). While both 'quality' and 'local' are contested concepts (see Domaneschi, 2012 and Sims, 2009 respectively), they have come to prominence in beer consumption in recent decades and now represent a key distinction underpinning the claims to value and status made by both producers and consumers of Real Ale and craft beer.

The observations thus far go some way in highlighting the worth of consumer practice theory in explaining changes to the practice of beer consumption. CAMRA's avid promotion of cask beer, and rejection of 'keg', exemplify how the introduction of new material technologies, that can be seen as 'a dynamic process of disruption and development of which no single actor appears to be in control of' (Shove et al., 2007: 86), play a fundamental role in (re)shaping

consumer practices. New materialities are promoted or resisted and their associated meaning contested (Bijker, 1995). The materialities and meanings of the practice 'co-evolve'. As such, while CAMRA can make a largely justified claim to having 'saved' Real Ale from 'extinction', this is set against a wider picture of precipitous decline in various measures of Real Ale consumption. Indeed, a truer account would depict cask conditioned beer surviving not in its previous form as the common, accepted, and most widely consumed beer format in the UK but as a niche product. Indeed, a useful parallel can be made with showing how the near total replacement of vinyl records with the advent of digital media platforms such as CDs and Mp3 has, almost counterlogically, led to vinyl records *gaining* value and status by being recast as a niche practice infused with a sense of authenticity, nostalgia and the ability (Magaudda, 2011).

Another important feature of the practice, again framed as an essential opposition to the unthinking consumer of mass-produced beers, is the valorisation of choice, novelty and innovation. This is perhaps most evident in the steady increase of breweries in the UK across recent decades; CAMRA's *Good Beer Guide* listed 187 separate entries in its brewery listings in 1980, 304 in 1990, 515 in 2000 and 801 in 2010, while national media coverage has reported the '11,000 beer choices available in the UK, including one-off specials and seasonal beers' as irrefutable evidence that Real Ale and craft beer have 'become fashionable' (Anderson, 2015). Meeting the demand for diversity and choice, the number of cask ale selling pubs with more than four hand-pumps has risen from 2,530 in 2008 to 16,389 in 2012 (Brown, 2014). Similarly, the rise of beer festivals where offerings can run into several hundred are now commonplace. For instance, a programme describing over 100 beers being offered at the annual beer festival organised by the Student Ale Appreciation Society involved in the research was prefaced with an introduction offering 'tips for the new-comers' and 'some guidance to the uninitiated' which included the advice 'buy halves, not pints' so as to 'try a greater range of the fine beers available' as well as a crib sheet of beer styles urging attendees 'to sample the widest variety of beers and the widest range of different types of beer'. Similarly, Robbie, a member of the CAMRA National Executive committee, summed this up as a shift from a time in the 1970s when 'a beer was a beer' to the current situation where:

'People want to know about where that beer came from, what's the history behind it, and they also want to understand different styles, different concepts of beer because everybody, they love these new breweries that are trying lots of different things, its innovation!'

Perhaps the most striking developments in beer consumption practice has been the increasingly detailed division of styles and means of appraisal available to consumers. For instance, having evolved over a number of decades, CAMRA's National Beer Scoring Scheme now involves a 'Tasting Card' with 20 categories relating to matters such as beer style, methods of dispense, temperature, colour, clarity, head retention and 'mouthfeel' and with categories of Aroma, Taste and Aftertaste relating to flavour 'profile'. This expansion of the description and evaluation of beer has achieved a degree of complexity previously unheard of and might well be exemplified by *The Beer Academy*, an organisation set up to promote knowledge and accredited expertise in the beer industry, whose 'How To Judge A Beer' one-day course, attended during the course of the research, included sessions on 'The brewing process and materials', 'Beer presentation', 'A systematic approach to tasting' and

'Beer a food paring', the latter accompanied by a list of 39 beer styles with associated flavour guides and menus demonstrating appropriate food combinations.

This proliferation of choice and increasingly elaborate systems of designation means that, for many beer drinkers, working upon one's knowledge and competencies is an important feature of the practice of ale appreciation (Thurnell-Read, 2016). As with other practices where practitioners embark on 'careers' and develop competencies (Watson and Shove, 2008; Cairns et al, 2010; Gram-Hanssen, 2011; Shove et al., 2012), Real Ale appreciation and beer connoisseurship evidently involve knowledge and skill in order for the practice to be enacted in the 'right way'. Reflecting again on the earlier vignette observing how the beer loving father and son visibly perform their appreciation of Real Ale through their 'identical half steps backwards', a 'stoop of the head', 'a squint of the eyes' and their readiness to 'nod approvingly' following their first taste, we can observe that such competencies are necessarily embodied (Schwarz, 2013) and, further still, that such movements and gestures serve as demonstrations of status when they are 'discerned and subsequently associated with status by bystanders' (Daenekindt and Roose, 2014, 17). Embodied competencies are therefore an essential element visible in the practice-as-performance, where individual practitioners can either 'get it right' by demonstrating their ability to correctly follow the rules which come to govern a particular practice or 'get it wrong' as Peter, a member of the student ale society, clearly felt himself to have done at a beer festival attended during fieldwork when remarking 'Oh shit, I forgot to do the smell thing' having neglected to perform the ritualistic first appraisal by simply drinking his beer without first eyeing and sniffing.

These developments in beer consumption parallel developments in the consumption practices of coffee (Roseberry, 1996), wine (Charters, 2006; Howland, 2013), and even tequila (Gaytán, 2014) and mean that, for many consumers, the consumption of these products involves the acquisition of knowledge and skill in the performance of a knowing and educated consumer role. Further still, as has been well analysed in the field of gastronomy (Warde, 1997; Gronow, 2002) and wine (Charters, 2006), the proliferation of guidebooks, instruction manuals, tasting notes, magazines, reviews and commentaries indicate the increased desire for competencies within beer consumption (Flack, 1997), whilst awards guide consumer choice and establishing hierarchies of prestige in the minds of consumers (Charters and Pettigrew, 2003). Indeed, an apparent highlight for many attendees of CAMRA's Great British Beer Festival, held each August in London and attended both as customer and staff member as part of field work, is the at times hundred or more person deep queue to sample the newly crowned 'Champion Beer of Britain' as soon as it is announced.

Similar to Warde's (2009: 155) analysis of the *Good Food Guide* 'as a chronicle of changing representations of good taste and gastronomic standards in Britain over half a century', CAMRA's annual flagship publication *The Good Beer Guide* is of considerable use in identifying continuity and change in beer consumer practices. Thus, editorials defining the term 'Real Ale' and outlining the technical processes of brewing and cellarmanship (e.g. 'The Gentle Art of Brewing' and 'Service with a Spile' in the 1982 edition) are a frequent occurrence while contributions reflecting concerns about 'adjuncts', low quality ingredients such as rice and maize added to the brew in part replacement of malted barley, the revival of at the time defunct beer styles and the growth in demand for organic ale ('Thirst Additions', 'Tall, Dark and Handsome: Stout and Porter Bounce Back' and 'Organic Floodgates May

Open' in the 1987, 1992 and 2001 guides respectively) appear to be more specific to the given period in which they appear. Throughout the years of its publication, the guide represents one of CAMRA's main initiatives to define the 'good' beer consumer as knowledgeable, competent and discerning (as, for instance, a text box in the 2010 guide titled 'Only accept perfect pints' makes clear).

Beyond this proliferation of textual guidance and expertise through which individual consumers can acquire and refine their practice-specific competencies, individual experts appear to have played a key role in the development of the practice of beer appreciation. During interviews, many research participants could cite particular figures who spurred their interest in beer. One of the CAMRA founders, for example, identified Richard Boston, the journalist and beer columnist for *The Guardian* during the 1970s, as 'doubling CAMRA's membership in those days and bringing in a whole new social group of people, new middle-class, *Guardian* readers, he gentrified it a bit'. Further still, Geoff was one of many interviewees to refer specifically to the 1990 television series *The Beer Hunter*, made by the late beer journalists Michael Jackson, as prompting him to see beer appreciation as 'almost fashionable' and 'something of interest and quite in vogue'. Interestingly, Jackson is also credited with popularising beer appreciation in the USA with his *World Guide to Beer* being described as 'providing beer drinkers and journalists alike with a vocabulary for thinking about and analysing beer', as well as inspiring the likes of Association of Brewers and the Great American Beer Festival founder Charlie Papazian and *Brooklyn Brewery's* Garrett Oliver (Ogle, 2006: 318).

Some individuals therefore gain more authority and have a greater potential than others to contribute to the development and success of a practice (Warde, 2005: 138; Sahakian and Wilhite, 2014: 38). In comparable practices, examples of such include Jim Murray in whisky (Spracklen, 2011) and Robert Parker in wine (Demossier, 2010). Such cultural intermediaries shape key discourses within a particular cultural field, and by offering guidance on the techniques of selection, appraisal and appreciation, give the wary and anxious consumer reassurances as to what cultural products to consume and how to consume them (Doane, 2009). Bourdieu also placed an emphasis on the significance of the *symbolic labour* done by *symbolic producers* such as artists, writers and journalists (Swartz, 1997: 93) and spoke of 'a capital of consecration implying a power to consecrate objects' and to 'give value' (Bourdieu, 1980: 262). Accordingly, such experts are 'critics mandated by the group to produce legitimate classifications and the discourse necessarily accompanying any artistic enjoyment worth its name' (Bourdieu and Nice, 1980: 233). Figures such as Boston, Jackson and CAMRA stalwart writer Roger Protz can therefore be seen to act as 'gatekeepers', in that they establish and uphold standards of taste and conduct particular to the practice (Charters, 2006), and also as 'carriers' of a practice in the part they play an evident role in propagating and maintaining the practice across time and space (Reckwitz, 2002).

An interesting observation in this regard was made by Howard, who had previously collaborated with a prominent beer writer and the landlord of a famed West London ale pub in staging beer and food pairing events. Recalling how they would 'have a microphone and push it around the table and ask people what they thought about different beers', Howard reflected that '*at the time*, it was a step too far, people still thought we were slightly mad idiots. But in the last few years it has suddenly started to come good, why? Partly because

so many of the wine writers now believe that beer is a really interesting subject as well'. These recollections are of considerable interest as they indicate that although individual actors may come to influence a particular consumer practice, the 'practice-as-entity' evolves in its own accord above and beyond individual participants and, evidently, is responsive to change at some moments but not others. The efforts of Howard and his collaborators, who might be retrospectively valued as trend-setters, to develop the practice in a particular direction were only partially successful and met resistance (being seen as 'mad idiots' for taking beer as seriously as wine) before other practitioners and elements of the practice-as-entity became better aligned to their particular innovations.

In bringing these observations together, and returning to the core question of how consumer practices change and, in doing so, lose or gain status, it is important to reflect on the circulation and co-evaluation of practice elements. Thus, connections between various meanings, materialities and competencies are broken and recast as a consumer practice evolves. This can happen in unpredictable ways. For instance, following the period of sweeping corporate rationalisation that plagued the British brewing industry during the 1970s and 1980s and led to the closure of numerous local and regional breweries following their acquisition by larger national and international organisations, the resulting abandonment of experienced brewers and serviceable brewery equipment led to a significant number of successful microbreweries being established in the 1980s and 1990s. The recirculation of materials and competencies involved in this period would prove critical to the expansion of small-scale focused production which, as already discussed, helped re-establish Real Ale as a desirable product aligned to emerging interests in quality, locality and authenticity.

### **'Everybody knows how to drink beer, but few know how to really taste it': Changing Practices and the Embourgeoisement of Beer**

The previous section has explored how the materials, meanings and competencies which constitute the practice of Real Ale appreciation have become reconfigured and more complex over time. Specifically, the competencies needed to perform the part of knowledgeable beer connoisseur have come to involve acquiring knowledge and experience of specific breweries, beer styles, ingredients and processes have arisen (Thurnell-Read, 2016). Thus, the 1990 edition of *Good Beer Guide* urged readers to 'start tasting beer, as opposed to just drinking it' but warned 'it's a tough job, but somebody's got to do it!' and the cover blurb of a 2009 book titled *Tasting Beer: An Insider's Guide to the World's Greatest Drink*, quoted in the subtitle for this section, implies that beer appreciation has become an identifiable practice of a discerning few who really 'know how to really taste it'.

This notion that serious beer consumption has become a middle class pursuit was directly addressed by numerous research participants. For example, reflecting on his years of experience in brewing and his current role as a publican, Gordon observed that 'beer drinking has gone from being a working class way of life to a middle-class hobby'. Likewise, Henry, an unpaid director sitting on CAMRA's National Executive, observed that 'in the past Real Ale was the drink of the worker, I suppose, whereas now you'd feel that if you went to any decent restaurant they should have a decent beer on that compliments the food'. Here, the contrast of 'worker' and 'decent' is only the thinnest veil for class distinction. Returning to the comment made by Pete in the interview extract which opened the article, suggesting that 'you can be a bit of a geek about it, you can impress your friends by knowing about a very

rare beer', we see how beer consumption can be spoken of in a way that demonstrates a clear awareness of it being a means to assert status and reproduce social distinction. Indeed, the centrality of experiencing a very broad range of beer styles and breweries to successful Real Ale appreciation aligns well with Dwyer's (2009) observation that the consumption of novelty might in and of itself be seen as a habitual part of the middle class consumer habitus.

This development is one where the elements of the practice of beer consumption have all been subject to increasing elaboration and 'intellectualisation' (Corrigan, 1997: 30). In this regard, Real Ale typifies the dynamic identified by Ulver-Sneistrup et al. (2011) whereby consumers attributed greater prestige to commodities and practices that require greater levels of care and effort both in their production and consumption. Thus, consumption of cultural products which are 'common', 'easy' and 'immediately accessible' are seen to confer little in the way of status and cultural capital (Bourdieu and Nice, 1980: 236) while consumption that requires 'time and dispositions acquired over time' to consume 'correctly' are likely to confer status (Bourdieu, 1984:100). Further, as cultural capital can be said to exist in incorporated, objectivated and institutional states (Swartz, 1997; Robbins, 2000), the status of these new formations of beer consumption can be observed in the bodily gestures of those selecting and sampling beers, the various accoutrements of connoisseurship like branded drinking vessels, guidebooks and tasting notes, and the pronouncements of organisations such as CAMRA as to what makes an award-winning beer 'great'.

The distinction between 'engagement' and 'disengagement' proposed by Bennet et al (2009) as being a significant marker of class distinction in British consumption habits is of use here. Whilst mass-produced globally branded beer largely retain their numerical dominance of the field, the presence of beers identified as local, 'craft' or specialist means that those consumers wishing to do so can adopt beer appreciation as a complicated, time consuming and knowledge intensive practice. This distinction was implicit in many accounts offered by interviewees. For instance, Emily, a member of the National Executive, said:

'I still believe that we should be educating people who drink lager, fizzy cider, WKD and that can be done inviting them to tasting sessions, taster trainings, focus groups or meetings and socials, "here's a voucher to try a free pint", those sort of things'.

Contemporary beer consumption practices might therefore be understood in light of varying degrees of the intensity of participation, with committed ale connoisseurs embracing the emergent complexities of the recently intellectualised practice (Thurnell-Read, 2016), whilst other 'less discerning' beer consumers continue to be easily satisfied with easy to acquire and simple to consume mass brands. The latter were, tellingly, frequently cast as errant consumers who could be convinced to appreciate Real Ale only through a process of education and intervention.

A further interesting aspect of this process to emerge during research was the evident cross-fertilisation between the practice of ale consumption and other proximate practices such as wine connoisseurship and 'foodie' culture (Cairns et al., 2010). This was evident in choice of title for *The Good Beer Guide*, intentionally made to imitate the success of *The Good Food Guide* which one of the two CAMRA founders interviewed described as 'the bible at the time for restaurants'. Others named celebrity chefs as cultivating a growing fascination with tastes and flavours which, in local branch member Roger's words, 'simply spilled over into the pub

and gave people the idea that, yes, you could really care about what you eat [and] about what you drink'. Pete spoke of CAMRA's concerted efforts to appeal to 'people who enjoy beer and enjoy pubs in the same way they maybe enjoy organic food, they enjoy their farmers markets and it's just about saying look its part of a really interesting vibrant lifestyle, Real Ale is part of that, if you enjoy going to farmers markets you also enjoy going to a pub and ordering from a range of fantastic beers'. Bridget, another member of the National Executive, praised a London restaurant 'because they have a beer menu as well as a wine menu and try to encourage people to look at the menu where they list the beer to go with the food' before going on to elaborate that a significant task has been 'the education of the people behind the bar, being actually able to talk knowledgably about the beer, in the same way that you'd expect those in a wine bar really to be knowledgeable about the wine'. In all these insights there is an unspoken understanding that wine drinking, farmers market shopping, consumers are implicitly middle class.

These observations are all indicative of the competition and collaboration between practices which have been identified as being important drivers of change (Gram-Hanssen, 2011; Bellotti and Mora, 2014). That CAMRA and other organisations have sought to utilise a pre-existing terminology of wine tasting and food localism demonstrates empirically what might be seen as 'cross referencing' between practices (Shove et al., 2012). Similarly, we can see how the evident moves to legitimate beer consumption by appropriating some of the characteristics of middle class consumer practices such as wine connoisseurship and farmers markets reflect the Bourdieusian understanding of homology between and across fields of taste. Thus, as Bourdieu proposed that 'those who aspire to 'intellectual' positions with respect to (say) music might take up similar positions with respect to (say) the visual arts' (Bennet et al, 2009: 13), there is a clear sense that consumers who value the codified, competence-heavy, field of wine consumption can be drawn into the practice of beer consumption as long as the practice shares similar characteristics.

However, this development has not been uncontested. In the 1980s when CAMRA called for 'a common vocabulary of beer tasting' and looked to wine tasting notes and wine promotions such as the BBC's *Food and Drink Programme* for inspiration, sections of the organisation were vocal in resisting what was seen by some as 'flowery language' which bore the 'hallmarks of Southern middle-class beer snobs' (Cole, 2011: 63). While the ever more complex and elaborate elements of wine connoisseurship are not immune from criticism for being 'pretentious' (Howland, 2013), the entry into beer consumption practices of tasting terminology and verbose stylistic flourishes typical of wine consumption has, evidently, provided a rallying point for some within the field to voice their resistance. The intellectualisation of the practice can prove disconcerting both for potential new entrants and established practitioners who feel unease at the direction of development (Halkier, 2009).

This conflict was raised by a senior member of the CAMRA staff, Oliver, who reflected on how 'that tension runs through the entire beer sector really. Is it a mass product, a national product? Or is the future to develop it as a connoisseur's product, as a small niche?'. This tension between elitism and inclusion is one that runs through other cases of emerging consumer practices which resist mass-production (Donald and Blay-Palmer, 2006). Oliver's comment surmises a similar dilemma as that faced by the Slow Food movement, which has had to cope with 'the tensions between refinement and democratization of taste' and the associated criticism of 'its implicit or latent elitism' (Sassatelli and Davolio, 2010: 225). Thus,

while the Slow Food movement experienced criticism for being perceived as an exclusive club for 'snobbish gourmets' (van Bommel and Spicer, 2011: 1728), CAMRA has at times been lampooned as a collective of boorish, obsessive beer snobs (see Thurnell-Read, 2013).

Another interesting development illustrative of the tensions arising out of the changes to the practice is the manner in which, in recent years, 'craft beer' has frequently been used as journalistic shorthand for various tensions arising from processes of urban gentrification. One London publication has even perceived a strong enough association as to proclaim 'Gentrification? Then there must be craft beer here!' (Meltzer, 2016; Time Out, 2015). Such articles link specialist pubs and craft beer bars, where connoisseurs can congregate to appreciate what others might well perceive to be pretentiously named and ostentatiously priced beer, with wider class conflicts relating to urban redevelopment and social change. As noted at the outset, Bourdieu has been criticised for producing an overly reified hierarchy of tastes poorly attuned to the analysis of change. However, as Robbins (2000: 35) is keen to remind us, 'Bourdieu was anxious to make it clear that he had not been positing necessary, or static and fixed, relationships between specific tastes and specific class positions'. He did, for instance, make reference to the roles played by both 'zealots' and 'newcomers' in contesting and at times redefining the norms of the field (Bourdieu, 1980: 268) and was concerned with the struggle for position, and the power to define and oversee the distribution of prestige, between the established agents and the new arrivals in the field (Swartz, 1997: 124). As such, the rise of Real Ale appreciation and beer connoisseurship is a good example of the ability of certain groups 'to gentrify elements of popular culture and incorporate them into the dominant status-group culture' (Peterson and Kern, 1996: 906). Thus, while to a large extent the canon of 'consecrated tastes' of fine wine and cuisine, art, opera and classical music hold firm (Bourdieu, 1984; Warde et al., 2007) new additions are made as previously 'common' and low status tastes, such as beer consumption, become reworked as symbols of status.

## **Conclusion**

Through exploring the case of beer appreciation and Real Ale connoisseurship, this article has sought to apply consumer practice theory (Shove et al., 2012; Warde, 2005; 2014) to the analysis of the emergence of beer consumption as an intellectualised and competence-heavy practice. Noting again the importance of 'co-production' to consumer practice theory (Shrove and Pantzar, 2005:62), the article has shown the multifaceted nature of changes to beer consumption as a field of practice. Beer consumption has undergone a notable shift meaning one group of consumers, those who successfully engage with reconfigurations in the meaning, materiality and competencies involved in the practice, have been elevated in the hierarchy of cultural prestige and legitimacy identified by Bourdieu (1984).

The salience of practice theoretical accounts of changing consumer tastes and habits becomes evident. Importantly, change is not located solely within the individual consumer but requires a constellation of other practitioners as well as textual guides and material objects in order to bring that taste to life through the performance of consumption. Likewise, the impetus for change does not derive solely from influential agents, be they individual actors who successfully position themselves as authoritative experts or associations and bodies such as CAMRA which bring to bear their significant communicative and agenda setting resources to define and defend the field of practice.

The analysis presented has utilised both practice theories of consumption and Boudieusian concepts of the reproduction of social class based cultural taste to show how changes in beer consumption have taken place not solely as normative semiotic perceptions of beer have changed but as materialities and competencies have circulated and dispersed (Shove et al., 2012). A trend, however, has been identified in which beer appreciation and connoisseurship appear to thrive as the practice becomes more complex and intellectualised and are, as such, now widely recognised as a field of consumption dominated by the middle class struggle for status and cultural capital.

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