# A Multidimensional Analysis of Adele's *Someone Like You*: Culture, Society, and Emotion

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**Abstract.** This paper discusses the importance of "punctum", cultural capital and aspectual hearing in the study of popular music by analyzing the popular music *Someone Like You*. The study shows that pop music not only resonates with listeners through emotional impact points but also demonstrates its cultural symbols and social functions through cultural capital and auditory hearing; punctum stimulates listeners' deeper emotional responses, cultural capital helps to understand the social class and cultural values behind the music, and aspectual hearing provides new perspectives on multidimensional interpretations of the music. This paper enriches the research on popular music, cultural sociology and auditory perception theory, and provides directions for future cross-cultural comparative studies and exploration of audiovisual integration.

**Keywords:** Popular music, Punctum, Culture capital, Aspectual hearing.

## 1 Introduction

Today, popular music as one of the main carriers of cultural communication conveys a wide range of social emotions and cultural identities. Especially in the process of globalization, music is not only a tool for entertainment but also a window to reflect social changes and individual emotions. Adele's *Someone Like You* has triggered a wide range of emotional resonance since its release and has become a cultural phenomenon hotly debated around the world. Society is generally concerned about emotional expression, cultural identity, and the interaction between individuals and society, and *Someone Like You* touches on these core topics.

The existing studiy mainly focus on the emotional expression,musical structure and lyrics of this song [1]. There has been relatively little exploration from the perspectives of cultural sociology and aspectual hearing. There is still a certain gap in the multidimensional analyses of such phenomena in the academic world,especially in the lack of systematic research on how to interpret the socio-cultural meanings behind the songs through the theoretical framework.

This article aims to fill this research gap by combining Roland Barthes' theory of "Punctum", Pierre Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital and habitus, and the concept of aspectual hearing to analyze the multiple cultural and social meanings of *Someone Like*

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*You* [2-4]. By analyzing the song's musical structure,lyrics and Adele's background,we explore the deep-seated reasons why the song has struck a chord worldwide.

## 2 Elaboration of Concepts in the Context of the Song

### 2.1 The "Punctum"

In Roland Barthes's *The Bright Room: Notes on Photography*, the concept of "Punctum" is introduced, which refers to those unspeakable punctures in a work of art that can deeply touch the audience [2]. "Punctum" is centered on "feelings", i.e. details that are not comprehensible only through rational analysis,but that touch the viewer's heart through their emotional impact. Such details bring one back to memory, to "presence", and Barthes chose a very large number of photographs and texts to narrate his experience of these events.

Barthes has chosen a very large number of photographs and texts to describe his "punctum" in these photographs, and what we can feel is that this "puncture of the heart" brings people into the scene of the time, as if they were present to "see". These details are usually insignificant, even "out of the ordinary", but can trigger strong emotional resonance. This theory of Barthes emphasizes the emotional power of details in works of art, which are often not easily perceived directly, but rather resonate through personal feelings [5].

More specifically, another characteristic of "punctum" is its indeterminacy, which can manifest itself as a word in the lyrics, a subtle change in a melodic passage, or even a subtle shift in the expression of the singer. In *Someone Like You*, certain personal pronouns (e.g., "I", "you") or time indications (e.g., "yesterday") may be used as a P.S. to touch the listener's emotions. Serve as a "punctum" that touches the listener's emotions, which not only reflects the emotional depth of the song but also reveals how the song touches the listener's inner world on a cultural level through these details. Adele brings this "sudden" emotional impact to the listener through her emotive interpretive skills. Her emotionally rich vocals are closely intertwined with the changes in the music,making each detail a "punctum" moment that touches the listener's heart and creates a strong emotional resonance [6]. Analysed through this perspective, *Someone Like You* is not only a rational listening experience but also an emotional impact, which perfectly illustrates the deep understanding of the emotional power of details of artworks in "punctum" theory.

### 2.2 The Cultural Capital and Habitus in Bourdieu's Sociology

In The Logic of Practice: Rethinking Sociological Methods, Pierre Bourdieu refers to the theory of habitus [3]. In Distinction: A Social Critique of Judgement, Pierre Bourdieu refers to the theory of cultural capital [4]. Habitus refers to the tendency to think and behave that individuals internalize during the socialization process. Cultural capital refers to the various resources accumulated by individuals in their cultural, educational and family backgrounds, while habitus is the internalised manifestation of these resources in an individual's life, reflected in behavioral patterns, beliefs and preferences.

This provides a unique sociological perspective for us to analyze Adele's *Someone Like You*. In Adele's music creation, her cultural capital not only influences her artistic style but also profoundly shapes her emotional expression.

Adele's upbringing and education provided the basis for the accumulation of her cultural capital. Coming from a middle-class,single-parent family in London, she was deeply influenced by the city's culture, especially the multicultural atmosphere of this area of Tottenham, which encompassed a wide range of ethnicities and social classes. Her mother was an artist and she was exposed to a wealth of artistic resources at an early age. These experiences allowed her to incorporate a variety of musical elements from blues, soul and jazz into her musical compositions,giving her work a unique cultural depth.

From Bourdieu's perspective, Adele's music is not only an expression of her emotions but also a reflection of her cultural capital. Her artistic style and emotional expression stem from both her social background and her fit with broad cultural expectations. Adele's music can resonate with a global audience through its deep emotional expression and rationalization. This emotional expression not only conforms to Western culture's social expectations of women's emotions but also helps her to establish an image of a sincere and mature artist in the mass media, further consolidating her cultural capital [7].

In addition, Adele's habitus - i.e., the behavioral patterns she has developed in her socio-cultural environment - has also profoundly influenced her music creation. In Western society, female emotional expression is often expected to be characterized by rationality and self-control. Adele's music and public persona fit this expectation. Although *Someone Like You* is full of emotional outbursts, these outbursts take place within a framework of rationality and self-control, which not only makes her work easy to accept but also makes her a cultural symbol, demonstrating a deep connection between her music-making and social and cultural structures.

Musical taste is not only a tool for class differentiation but is also closely related to people's "evaluative practices". *Someone Like You* has been evaluated by different groups of listeners around the world. The song's emotional themes of lost love, nostalgia and hope resonate with listeners from different cultures and classes, suggesting that people evaluate music differently in different contexts. "Practices of valuing" (POV) can be interpreted through the lyrics and emotions, and people evaluate *Someone Like You* according to their personal cultural background and social experience [8].

According to Bourdieu's theory, individuals with high cultural capital usually tend to have narrower and more exclusive cultural tastes,and especially tend to appreciate high cultural forms that are considered "sacred". Those in the relative middle class, on the other hand, display "all-encompassing tastes", i.e. accepting a wider variety of music and art forms [9]. Through Adele's *Someone Like You* as a pop song, it crosses these social class boundaries and resonates in different cultural contexts, especially in modern society where pop music challenges and redefines the boundaries between 'high culture' and 'low culture'. In particular, in modern society, popular music challenges and redefines the boundaries between "high culture" and "low culture".

Through Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital and habitus, we are able to gain a deeper understanding of how Adele's music, through the process of cultural capital accumulation and habitus formation, has become a cultural product with a wide range of social influence. This analysis not only reveals the social and cultural significance of Adele's musical creation but also highlights her social identity and cultural value as an artist.

### 2.3 The Aspectual Hearing

The concept of photographic "aspectual seeing" was initially mentioned in philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations [10]. Later it was applied to acoustics as a precursor to the concept of aspectual hearing. The aspectual hearing is a theoretical perspective that focuses on auditory perception, emphasizing the multiple meanings of music in different cultural and personal contexts. The theory focuses on how listeners' cultural backgrounds, social experiences, and personal emotional states influence their interpretations and responses to music [10]. In the case of Adele's song *Someone Like You*, this perspective provides a framework to help us understand how listeners assign different meanings to the song depending on their respective cultural and emotional backgrounds.

Firstly, cultural context has an important influence on listeners' listening experience. In Western cultures,the loss, pain, and emotional outbursts expressed in songs may be more likely to resonate because these emotional symbols match Western society's perceptions and expectations of personal emotional expression. In the West, emotional catharsis is often seen as a form of mature emotional reflection, especially in the face of lost love, and the emotions conveyed in the songs can be interpreted as a deep understanding and release of past relationships. However, in Eastern cultures, especially in some cultures that emphasize collectivism and family responsibilities, the emotional loss in the song may be interpreted more as a reflection on the impact of changing social roles and family responsibilities than as a mere expression of personal feelings. This cultural difference results in a multiplicity of emotional understandings of *Someone Like You* in different cultural contexts.

Secondly, listeners' personal experiences play an important role in the perception of the music. For example,for listeners who have just gone through a breakup, the loss and pain in the song may touch their hearts more and make them resonate with it, while for listeners in a stable relationship, the song may become a reflection on love, or just a beautiful experience of appreciating the song's melody and Adele's voice. Such differences in personal emotional backgrounds lead to different interpretations and emotional responses to the same song in different individuals.

Aspectual hearing emphasizes the interpretation and perception of emotions through the auditory experience, and certain adjustments in the translation process, especially in the expression of emotions, help to ensure that the emotions of a song are conveyed in a "natural" way to different audiences. "natural" way to culturally diverse listeners, enabling them to understand and feel the emotions of the song in their way [11].

Through the lens of aspectual hearing, we can gain a deeper understanding of how *Someone Like You* acquires multiple meanings in different cultural and personal contexts. Whether it is the rational expression of emotion in Western culture or the introspection and transformation of emotion in Eastern culture, the song is able to touch the emotional depths of the listeners and form a wide range of resonance. At the same time, the differences in personal experiences make each listener understand and react to the songs differently, which further enriches the cultural connotation and social influence of the songs.

## 3 An Integrated Analysis of Three Perspectives

### 3.1 The Interweaving of Emotion and Society

In *Someone Like You*, the expression of emotion is not only a reflection of Adele's personal heart but also deeply influenced by the social and cultural environment. From the perspective of Roland Barthes' "punctum" theory, the emotion in this song presents a very personal touch. In Adele's song *Someone Like You*, "punctum" is particularly prominent. The climax of the song, especially the vocal outburst at 3:51 of the song, combines with the elevation of the music and the twist of the lyrics to show the ultimate in emotional catharsis. The lyrics "Never mind, I'll find someone like you" are notable for Adele's voice fluctuating and her tempo is notably off at one point, due to the fact that she was operated on after having a nodule in her throat. Every note here seems to speak of unspeakable pain, and this musical detail is the embodiment of the "punctum" concept. Through Adele's emotionally charged vocals, the music changes frequently and intertwines, causing the listener to feel a profound emotional impact, and this line is repeated throughout the song, demonstrating a strong sense of emotional repetition and heartbreaking pain. This repetition not only deepens the emotional level of the song, but is also the very point of emotional impact that "punctum" refers to, which prevents the listener from understanding the meaning of the song through reason alone, but rather, through emotional resonance, deeply experiences the pain and release of the song.

On the other hand, from Bourdieu's sociological point of view, the interaction between emotional expression in songs and socio-cultural capital is particularly evident. Bourdieu argues that cultural capital and habitus determine how individuals perceive, express and receive emotions in society. Adele's songs present the emotional experience of lost love, but the way they are expressed and the empathy they evoke are also deeply influenced by the socio-cultural context. Western society emphasizes the free expression of individual emotions, but at the same time demands a certain "rationality" and "control" of emotions. This is also reflected in Adele's music. The lyrics "I wish nothing but the best for you, too" in the song *Someone Like You* (1:19) demonstrate a mature way of managing emotions, and in this context Adele's song meets the modern society's demands for emotional "vulnerability" and "control".In this context, Adele's songs are in line with modern society's tolerance of emotional "vulnerability" and also

reflect society's acceptance of emotional catharsis. While the songs give vent to individual emotions, they also expose social norms and restrictions on emotional expression.

### 3.2 Individual-Collective Interaction

From perspective of "punctum", the emotion in *Someone Like You* is not only Adele's personal monologue but also carries universal emotional symbols with the power to "sting" the listener. The expression of individual emotion through details (such as tone, lyrics, rhythm) resonates with the listener's empathy to produce a strong emotional resonance. Adele's expression of the helplessness and pain of lost love is not only personal, but a collective, shared emotion across time and space.

Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital and habitus can also explain the formation of individual and collective emotional interaction. Adele's emotional expression is not only her private experience but also the product of a particular cultural and social habitus. Her music not only reflects her personal emotional experience but also conforms to the "rules" of emotional catharsis in a particular society and culture. Listeners' emotional responses are influenced by their cultural capital - their social experience, educational background, and habits of emotional expression. Adele's songs resonate with her listeners through the "codes" of these cultural capitals.

The emotional details of the songs are not just a display of personal feelings, but also reflect the general expectations of the society and culture. Each listener will have different empathy and feelings based on his or her own personal experience and emotional background when listening to a song. This emotional resonance makes the song not only stay at the level of sensory enjoyment, but become a work of art with cultural depth and social significance. This emotional catharsis is not only personal, but becomes an expression of collective emotion through the spread of music.

### 3.3 The Multiple Symbolic Nature of Music

The multi-symbolism of music can be deeply analysed through Barthes's "punctum" theory, which focuses on the subtle yet profoundly moving emotional details of music, and "aspectual hearing", which explores how these emotional details are given different meanings in different cultures and individual contexts. "Punctum" theory focuses on the subtle yet deeply moving emotional details of music, while aspectual hearing explores how these emotional details are given different meanings in different cultural and individual contexts. Combining these two theories, we can have a more comprehensive understanding of how Adele's *Someone Like You* demonstrates the multiple symbolism of music through emotional expression and cultural intertwining.

In this song, Adele conveys profound loss and pain through the emotional details of the piano melody and lyrics. These points of emotional impact, according to "punctum" theory, can be regarded as emotional focal points in music that touch the listener's heart. However, these emotional impacts are given different interpretations in different cultural and individual contexts. For example, in some cultures, lost love may be seen as an emotion that needs to be repressed and restrained, whereas in other cultures the overt

expression of emotions is more common. Listeners' emotional responses are thus deeply influenced by personal experience, social norms and cultural context. Through this analysis, we are able to see that the multiple symbolic interactions of *Someone Like You* make the song transcend mere personal catharsis and become a work of art with global emotional resonance.

In addition, from the perspective of aspectual hearing, the emotional details in the music are not a single emotional response, but rather symbols that are closely linked to socio-cultural contexts and personal experiences. These symbols are given different meanings in different cultures and societies, creating a wide range of emotional resonance and cultural exchange. Through Adele's emotional expression, we see how a pop song, through its multiple symbolism, breaks down cultural and social boundaries and becomes a work of art with profound socio-cultural impact.

## 4 Conclusion

This paper highlights the importance of "punctum", cultural capital and aspectual hearing in the study by analyzing popular music. The study shows that popular music not only resonates with listeners through emotional impact points but also demonstrates its cultural symbolic and social functions through Cultural Capital and aspectual hearing. Specifically, "punctum" triggers listeners' deep emotional responses, Cultural Capital helps us understand the social class and cultural values behind the music, and aspectual hearing provides us with a new perspective to interpret the music from a multi-dimensional perspective, revealing the close relationship between music and listening experience.

This study contributes to the development of cultural studies of popular music, cultural sociology, and theories of auditory perception. Through this multi-level analytical framework, this paper not only enriches the theoretical perspectives of popular music research but also broadens the association between auditory perception and social culture. Future research can further extend the framework by exploring more cases of popular songs, conducting cross-cultural comparative studies, or conducting empirical studies. In addition, as the combination of music and visual elements deepens,future research can incorporate the perspective of audiovisual integration to reveal more comprehensively the cultural significance and social functions of popular music in contemporary society.

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