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ARTICLE

Muscles, Motorcycles and Tattoos

Gentrification in a new frontier

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Abstract. Elaborating on previous work on Poor Chic, this article opens new empirical terrain for gentrification theory by demonstrating how gentrification processes are applicable to 'symbolic neighborhoods' in popular culture. Challenging postmodernist-spirited lifestyle consumption theory that asserts the breakdown of stratification systems through consumer habits, the article delineates how three important 'symbolic neighborhoods of lower class masculinity' – muscles, motorcycles, and tattoos – have been transformed from lower- to middle-class distinction. Framing these recent changes as investment, invasion, transformation and displacement, the article illustrates how apparent tolerance and fluidity among consumer lifestyles is less reflective of the obliteration of stratification systems than a new strategic means of reconstructing them. Particular attention is focused on Bourdieu's multi-faceted conceptualization of 'cultural capital' and the victorious application of 'aesthetic disposition'.

Key words

aesthetics • cultural capital • gentrification • Poor Chic • popular culture • stratification

GENTRIFICATION IN A NEW FRONTIER

Gentrification is a process involving strategic invasion of and investment in lower-class neighborhoods, transforming them into middle-class ones, and ultimately displacing the pre-existing inhabitants (Anderson, 1990; Butler,

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2003; Ley, 1996; Nelson, 1988; Smith and Williams, 1986). British sociologist Ruth Glass first coined the term gentrification, and described the process as follows:

One by one, many of the working-class quarters of London have been invaded by the middle-classes – upper and lower. Shabby, modest mews and cottages – two rooms up and two down – have been taken over, when their leases have expired, and have become elegant, expensive residences . . . Once this process of ‘gentrification’ starts in a district it goes on rapidly until all or most of the original working-class occupiers are displaced and the whole social character of the district is changed. (Glass, 1964: xviii–xix)

More recent definitions of gentrification, such as Smith and Williams’ (1986: 1–2), describe ‘the rehabilitation of working-class and derelict housing and the consequent transformation of an area into a middle class neighborhood’. The common denominator of middle-class takeover of economically vulnerable lower-class neighborhoods amongst the gentrification literature is likewise emphasized in Anderson’s (1990) study of the transformation of the gentrification of an inner city area of Philadelphia, which he described as increasingly middle and upper middle-class. Classic examples of gentrification are Washington, D.C.’s Dupont Circle, Chicago’s Lincoln Park, New York’s SoHo and Greenwich Village, Boston’s South End, Philadelphia’s Society Hill, and South London’s Wandsworth Common.

While there is broad agreement that gentrification is a planned and often controversial transformation of lower-class neighborhoods into middle-class ones, and that gentrifiers gentrify as a strategic solution to the achievement of middle-class distinction, there is surprisingly little written on how *aesthetics* are pertinent to the gentrification process. However, Jager (1986: 81) argues that gentrification is a dynamic process producing social differentiation, or a ‘mechanism by which social differences are turned into social distinctions’. Basing his argument on a case study of the ‘class constitution and the conservation of a Victorian built environment’ in Melbourne, Australia, Jager (1986: 80) says that gentrification defends and demarcates with a ‘permanent tension on two fronts’:

On the one hand the middle classes must defend themselves against pressure from the dominant classes, retaining a certain independence and autonomy, and on the other hand they must continue to demarcate themselves from the lower orders.

What is original in Jager's work is his explanation of how 'artistic consecration' involves 'victorious' possession via the conspicuous expression of *middle class aesthetics*. Prefacing what is delineated herein, Jager (1986: 83, 85) explains how renovation and redefinition restores a 'historical purity and authenticity', and washes 'clean' all but a socially sanitized 'thumbprint' of lower class dereliction:

The effacing of an industrial past and a working-class presence, the whitewashing of a former social stain, was achieved through extensive remodeling. The return to a historical purity and authenticity is realized by stripping away external additions, by sandblasting, by internal gutting. The restoration of an anterior history was virtually the only manner in which the recent stigma of the inner areas could be removed or redefined . . . Inner worldly asceticism becomes public display; bare brick walls and exposed timbers come to signify cultural discernment, not the poverty of slums without plaster . . . In this way, the stigma of labour . . . is both removed and made other. Remnants of a past English colonial presence survive through the importance attributed to hand made bricks, preferably with convict thumbprints.

Zukin (1987) agrees with Jager's analysis of aesthetic transformation, but rejects his over-emphasis on Victoriana. She says that middle-class gentrifiers, who lack resources to ape upper-class consumer habits, rely on the revival and refurbishment of older, cheaper or unkempt properties prized for their aesthetic potential, but not of any particular housing style. Zukin (1987: 134) explains how supply and price, rather than specific architectural preference, are what condition gentrifiers' tastes.

Taking Jager's and Zukin's assertions further, we illustrate how gentrification is an aesthetic process that has applications much beyond the Victorian, the Georgian, the Edwardian or the manufacturing lot. Toward establishing new empirical terrain for gentrification theory, this article explains how gentrification processes are applicable to a new frontier: the 'symbolic neighborhoods' of the lower classes in popular culture. More specifically, we aim to show how muscles, motorcycles and tattoos (hereafter abbreviated as MMTs) have been objects of investment, invasion, transformation and displacement. This article suggests – at least implicitly – that what may be lost to gentrifiers with increasing suburbanization and the waning of the urban core as site for gentrification (Wyly et al., 1998), has been regained, in part, by a new 'frontier' in which the economically

fragile middle classes continue to distinguish themselves with the 'victorious' 'aesthetic' consumption of lower-class symbols in popular culture. We note that while our focus is on gentrification's economic/aesthetic aspects, class-distinguishing 'neighborhoods' may overlap with gender and sexuality. This is apparent, for example, in the growing popularity of tattooing and motorcycling among women, and the entry of gay men into bodybuilding and the gym, for reasons beyond the achievement of middle-class distinction; namely, as one of the few places where men could openly cruise one another (Pope et al., 2000).¹

This article elaborates on earlier work on Poor Chic, or on an array of fads and fashions in popular culture that make stylish, recreational, and often expensive 'fun' of lower-class statuses (Halnon, 2002). Among a plethora of possible examples are: pricey designer construction boots (Timberland); \$50,000 or so customized army vehicles (Hummers); expensive, function-stripped bowling shoes (Kenneth Cole), 'cracker house chic', and 'garage-couture' trucker hats and accessories (Von Dutch). Poor Chic intersects not only with gender and sexuality (as noted earlier), but also with race and ethnicity in sub-types such as White Trash Chic (e.g., designer pink flamingo accessories and branded 'wife beater' shirts) and Ghetto Chic (e.g., board game Ghettopoly and fake bullet holes [see Halnon, 2003, 2004]).

Earlier work on Poor Chic drew on Ritzer's (1993) 'McDonaldization' categories of efficiency, predictability, calculability and control, and Bauman's (2000) concept of 'tourists and vagabonds'. Poor Chic was explained as a rational activity that strategically addresses middle-class fears of downward mobility by objectifying lower-class symbols as so many short, safe, socially distanced and socially sanitized commodified travels through vagabondage. Additional interrelated micro-macro explanations for Poor Chic's consumer attractions, elaborated elsewhere (Halnon, in progress), include: 'de-civilizing' authenticity and enchantment in a 'society of the spectacle' and 'nothingness' (Debord, 1995 [1967]; Elias, 2000; Kellner, 2003; Ritzer, 1999, 2004); escape from white-collar alienation, or middle-class experiences of powerlessness, meaninglessness, isolation, and self-estrangement (Blauner, 1964; Fraser, 2001); and new and creative 'oppositional spaces' and 'authentic places' that provide middle classes with social and cultural distance from the everyday 'banalities and generic character', *not* of the suburbs (as Ley's gentrification study suggests), but of commercial culture (Ley, 1996: 211). Thus, what is novel about the kind of gentrification discussed herein is that it refers to relatively elusive symbolic terrain dispersed across popular consumer culture today, rather than specific geographical territory, as in gentrification proper.

While consumer-sided explanations are important, and briefly considered, the present work's focus is on the gentrification process itself, including consequences for the gentrified. Indeed, it is precisely our theoretical intention to correct, for the one-sided sympathies of the lifestyle consumption perspective, a politically troublesome postmodernist-spirited perspective that is unable or unwilling – in large part, because of its one-sidedness – to see reconstruction rather than deconstruction of identity categories in consumer culture.

The decision to grant analytical attention to MMTs was that they collectively represent a compelling (albeit stereotypical) symbolic triplet of lower-class masculinity, which is central to Poor Chic imagery. However, gentrification involves a much more detailed 'cultural consecration' than in the relatively simple consumption of Poor Chic commodities such as 'uptown' pink flamingo jewelry, Hummers or designer trucker hats. In what follows, we delineate how the cultural 'upgrading' of MMTs involves the complexities of experts, intellectuals and authorities, museum exhibits and conference proceedings, and more generally, a class-coded, nuanced application of aesthetics – or what Bourdieu calls 'cultural capital'.

In what follows we first state our objections to lifestyle consumption theory. Then we explain 'cultural and financial investments' in lower-class neighborhoods, and how the 'revitalizing' 'improvements' they bring are used to rationalize gentrification. Next, we focus on 'invasion' and the traditional symbolic significances of MMTs for lower-class men. In the central section, Bourdieu's (1984) work on 'distinction' frames a discussion of newly refurbished and renovated forms of MMT communities and how they are culturally 'consecrated' with middle-class 'distinction'. In the final section we conclude with a summary and illustrative emphasis on the importance of symbols for the disenfranchised and the extreme measures that may be taken to defend symbolic territory.

BEYOND LIFESTYLE CONSUMPTION THEORY

In *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, Thorstein Veblen (1899 [1925]) explained how the upper class displayed its greater social worth through the acquisition of property. At the time of Veblen's writing, the American upper class, lacking an aristocracy, distinguished itself from the lower classes through work abstention and 'conspicuous consumption', or wasteful spending. In the postmodern period where consumption has displaced production as the prominent feature of capitalism, where 'conspicuous consumption' pervades in its practice throughout the social classes, and where the upper classes are integrated into the occupational structure (e.g., even Bill Gates, who is

worth US\$60 billion or so, goes to work), it is increasingly difficult to use work abstention and conspicuous consumption as a means of distinguishing upper-class status (Gottdiener, 2000).

These changes, and other features of postmodern living, have led some scholars to question whether 'lifestyle consumption' – an individualistic, self-expressive and self-stylizing consumption – has displaced consumption as a means of constructing conventional social statuses. For example, Dunn (2000: 116) proposes that 'socially delineated statuses' have been replaced by 'a loose aggregate of personality traits' gleaned through 'lifestyle consumption'. He claims more elaborately,

[T]he collective identities of class, gender, sexuality, race, and ethnicity, along with conventionalized institutional social roles, are weakened or replaced by more 'individualized' and fluid 'lifestyle' identities constructed in relation both to consumer goods and media images . . . To the extent this occurs, the moorings of the self in socially delineated statuses, roles, and relationships are weakened, and processes of self-definition come to depend increasingly on an appropriation of the attributes of commodities. An integrated social conception of the self is thereby replaced by a loose aggregate of personality traits assembled through the consumption of goods and images.

Featherstone, however, clearly poses the pertinent questions,

Are consumer goods used as cultural signs in a free-association manner by individuals to produce an expressive effect within a social field in which the old co-ordinates are rapidly disappearing, or can taste still be adequately 'read', socially recognized and mapped onto class structure? Does taste still 'classify the classifier'? (Featherstone, 2000: 93)

Featherstone then asserts in response to his own questions,

[T]he 'no rules by choice' view (celebrated by some as a significant movement towards the break-up of old hierarchies of fashion, style and taste in favour of an egalitarian and tolerant acceptance of differences, and the acknowledgement of the right of individuals to enjoy whatever popular pleasures they desire without encountering prudery or moral censure) does not signify anything as dramatic as the implosion of the social space but should be regarded as merely *a new move within it*. (Featherstone, 2000: 93, emphasis added)

What follows is written in the spirit of Featherstone's work – and as a more detailed application of Bourdieu's, it illustrates how distinct consumption practices of dominant members of society reproduce inequality. To illustrate this point is to challenge lifestyle consumption theory – as well as widespread media claims – that tattooing and motorcycling, in particular, are new, fluid, and egalitarian terrains that transcend class statuses.

CULTURAL AND FINANCIAL INVESTMENTS

Gentrifiers seldom, if ever, label themselves as such. To do so would be to self-criticize, since the term itself suggests critique. To self-label as gentrifier would be to critically examine collective consequences. However, while gentrifiers invest, invade, transform, and ultimately displace members of lower-class neighborhoods, consequences are typically minimized, ignored or neutralized as incidental to pursuing personal needs and desires. For example, gentrifiers are often motivated by: 'the demand for inexpensive inner city housing' close to urban centers (Beauregard in Smith and Williams, 1986: 41), the opportunity for a good investment (Mills, 1988), a means of pursuing 'difference, diversity, and distinction' (Smith, 1987: 168), a way of expressing a 'new urban ideology' (Mills, 1988: 176), a means of 'escap[ing] routine', resisting the dominant ideals of suburban life, or 'pursu[ing] practices' that constitute 'new conditions for experience' (Caulfield, 1989: 624).

In a similar way, gentrifiers of MMTs are motivated by individualistic and 'higher' purposes. For 'body sculptors', it is an artistic and professionally guided 'mind-sculpting' for health and fitness and the 'physical perfection' of the body (Villepigue and Rivera, 2001). For those who indulge in the 'art of motorcycling', it is a personal experience of freedom, adventure, rebellion, control and independence; a means of escaping everyday restrictions and repressions; and an opportunity to experience something more real and exciting (Yates, 1999). For new tattoo wearers, 'getting inked' is 'body art' and 'etching identity on the body' (Hewitt, 1997). It is also an individual expression of self-stylization, rebellion and non-conformity, and/or ornamentation and eroticism (Sanders, 1989). For many others, it is a spiritual or religious ritual that connects new tattoo wearers to an ancient or ephemeral past (Camphausen, 1997).

Gentrifiers may also justify their actions by pointing to visible changes for the better in newly revitalized communities. Refurbished properties are said to be more attractive (even beautiful, in some cases). Streets are cleaner, neighborhood schools are higher quality, and 'delinquents', delinquency, and other objectionable behaviors of the pre-existing inhabitants have largely

disappeared (although not entirely without struggle). Moreover, the commercial gentrification of neighborhoods, that includes dramatic cultural and economic ‘improvements’, may provide further visible evidence of the worthiness of investments. Newly commercialized areas may include small boutiques, picture galleries, delicatessens, cafes, wine bars, and restaurants with names such as Vintage, Vynl Diner, or Renaissance Diner, as in 9th Avenue, Clinton, New York (Gwertzman, 1997: 2). Areas, for example as in U Street of NW Washington, D.C., may include other aesthetically pleasing particulars such as:

a new Bohemian Caverns jazz club and a restaurant that offers a dinner entrée called the Duke Ellington . . . [or] Prima Kansas City Bone-In Strip with Black Pepper Merlot Sauce topped with Crispy Shallots . . . [that] goes for \$31 a plate. (Fisher, 2001: 2)

In an analogous way, the traditional lower class ‘habitus’ (Bourdieu, 1984) of muscle-building men – the gym, the garage, a few barbells, and modest exercise equipment – has been transformed, at the outpost of gentrification in a new frontier, into the epitome of removal from lower-class pumping iron. For example, Reed describes the daily fitness ritual of a Xerox Corporation manager:

On his daily jog, White is surrounded by a \$61,000 mechanical sculpture garden of chrome, leather and cable; stationary bicycles, cross-country skiing simulators, rowing machines, Nautilus weight stations and racks of dumbbells positioned around the spacious, brown-carpeted gym. Down a hallway hung with modern paintings are whirlpool baths and a sun-tanning room studded with ultraviolet and infra-red lamps. Near by: offices for a physician and full-time exercise physiologist. (Reed, 1981: 94)

A final introductory point is that gentrifiers may also defend their actions by citing significant improvements to the economic infrastructure of previously economically depressed areas. Most exemplary in this regard is the ‘motorcycling neighborhood’. Rebounded from near-bankruptcy when the lower classes still occupied most of it in the early 1980s, Yates (1999: 167) tells us that on 1 July 1987 Harley was anointed with ‘great fanfare’, amid ‘hundreds of razor-cut Armani-suited, gold-Rolaxed, wing-tipped, hot-shot traders’ – for its elevated listing on the New York Stock Exchange. By 1992, Harley’s earnings were up to US\$54 million (Slutsker,

1993: 45). Today, Harley has emerged as a multi-billion dollar business, with growing annual revenue of US\$4.192 billion in 2002; of US\$4.766 billion in 2003; and US\$5.095 billion in 2004 (moneycentral.msn.com, 2005). Similar, but somewhat less spectacular growth can be seen in the case of tattoo shops. By the late 1990s they were ranked among the six fastest growing industries in the nation (Levins, 1999: 1). Among the most successful businesses in the health and fitness industry are Bally's with 400 clubs and 4 million members in 70 US cities, and Toronto (with recent openings in South Korea, China and the Bahamas), and Gold's Gym with over 600 gyms in 27 countries and 2.5 million members (ballyfitness.com, 2005 and goldsgym.com, 2005). In 2004 the health club industry took in US\$14.8 billion in revenue, with each club earning between US\$500,000 and US\$550,000 (telephone communication with Katie Rollauer, Senior Manager of Research at the International Health, Racquet and Sportsclub Association, Boston, MA, 8 November 2005).

MIDDLE CLASS INVASION

For the sociologist, at least, it nearly goes without saying that lower-class men have and have had a disproportionate share of social power and respect when compared with their middle- and upper-class counterparts. In a success-driven, materialistic and individualistic society, men who have less education, do manual labor, exercise less control and autonomy in their work, earn lower wages, or fail to sustain regular employment or a livable wage, fall short of cultural expectations (regardless of realistic impediments to achievement). Consequently, lower-class men have sought alternative means of status enhancement, such as patriarchal gender roles and strategic abandonment of conventional gender role expectations (Anderson, 1999; Liebow, 1967; Rubin, 1976). Moreover, tough guise via muscular strength, the ability to inflict and endure pain, or to engage in the morally and physically adventurous or daring have served as alternative forms of status enhancement. If lacking recognition, respect, autonomy and control in the ordinary round of life, pumping iron, getting inked, or mastering a wild, screaming motorcycle were at least a few important compensatory sources of them. In *Outlaw Machine*, Yates describes how socially and economically marginalized men who hung out in 1950s motorcycle shops found solace, strength, power and equality on their bikes:

The men who hung around the little motorcycle shop were for the most part lost souls: disoriented and disillusioned WWII veterans, functioning alcoholics, unemployed factory workers,

and a few rebellious teenagers, all of whom found solace in the radiated strength of the big bikes. Power was available at the kick of the leg and the flick of the wrist. Equality came at the end of an exhaust pipe, and every Buick-driving Babbitt better know it. (Yates, 1999: 7)

Yates goes on to say that 1950s bikers were, for the most part, 'nameless outsiders', or:

[F]ringe players in the grand American scheme whose sullen expressions of independence seemed harmless and irrelevant. Beyond the noise and bluster of their blowsy motorcycles, who cared about them, save for a few addled teenagers who retained a fearful fascination for their monster machines? (Yates, 1999: 7–8)

The most stigmatized and marginalized bikers were the 'bad-biker' 1 percent, also known as the Hell's Angels, who wore that label as badge, proudly and defiantly distinguishing themselves from the remaining 99 percent. At worst, Hell's Angels were the Filthy Few, those who killed for the Club.

Like motorcycling, tattooing was, at least in the USA, the rather exclusive (class-distinguishing) symbolic terrain of the socially and economically disenfranchised. DeMello (2000: 134–135), whose work comes closest to the gentrification thesis in the literature, says, 'Tattooing has, until very recently, been the privileged form of the working classes in this country and particularly of the marginalized members of the working class.' For lower-class men, tattoos were a valued means of expressing cultural values and personal sentiments. DeMello (2000: 51) says further that tattoos done by working-class tattooists with no artistic training were, from the Civil War through the Korean War, a way by which sailors (drawn primarily from the lower classes) could 'establish their patriotism (military insignias, battle commemorations)' and could 'remind them of loved ones back home' (with vow tattoos such as 'Mom' or the name of one's 'girl').

Similar to the traditional function of the motorcycle shop, the subculture of tattoo shops also provided social supports for marginalized lower class men, and were typically 'located alongside barber shops, in dirty corners of arcades, under circus tents, or on carnival midways'. DeMello explains:

Although hidden away at the margins of society, the shops were nevertheless a home away from home for many men: sailors, carnies, drunks, laborers, as well as young boys who hoped to

learn the trade. Inside the tattoo shop was a unique world where ex-sailors swapped sea stories, young servicemen attempted to outdo each other with the grandeur of their tattoos, and others told stories about their travels and experiences. (DeMello, 2000: 59–60)

Like tattoos and motorcycles, muscles were strong distinguishing markers of lower-class men such as construction workers, mechanics, sailors and soldiers who developed muscles by doing strenuous physical labor. Not only did muscles symbolize working men, they were also strong symbolic indicators of more marginalized men such as criminals, outlaws, convicts, gang members, boxers and wrestlers. Emphasizing the negative class connotations of muscles, Bourdieu (1991: 369) tells us that weightlifting was only grudgingly granted official recognition by Olympic authorities because ‘in the eyes of the aristocratic founders of modern sport’, it ‘symbolized by mere strength, brutality and intellectual poverty, in short the working classes’.

While it is recognized that MMTs have elaborate histories far beyond the scope of this article, what is at issue at present is an analysis of their more recent reconstruction, from lower-class distinction to middle-class distinction. This includes, importantly, a critical interrogation of how historicization relates to the aestheticization of each of those activities. As explained further on, the application of aesthetics to tattooing, at least, has relied on an ‘anterior’ history – much like Jager’s Victoriana discussed above – that strategically omits or bypasses its American working-class connotations.

It is essential to point out, before turning to a more concrete discussion of the processes by which MMTs have been consecrated with cultural capital, their implied state of ‘dereliction’. Concerning ‘dereliction’, certainly it is nowhere the case that gentrifiers find their objects of gentrification acceptable in their original state, or for that matter, the style of living of the original inhabitants. Thus, whether gentrifying a dilapidated Victorian or ‘derelict’ MMT communities, the goal is to renovate, refurbish and revitalize, to bring forth refinement and aesthetic sensibility. For example, in the case of muscles, what is of general importance is the class upgrading of a strong, toiling, (perhaps also smoking and dirty) *working class body* into an economically and culturally *invested body*: an expensive, recreational, healthy, and sculpted artistic creation. The cultural and economic capital that makes this transformation possible, and from the gentrifier’s perspective, necessary, is itself a general demarcation of class difference.

However, the transformation from lower-class distinction to middle-class distinction is a much more detailed process of cultural consecration, the general contours of which, as they pertain to MMTs, are described below.

CULTURAL CONSECRATION

According to Bourdieu, the most effective marker of class status is 'cultural capital'. Cultural capital is possession of and facility with esoteric knowledge – of manners, of taste, of linguistic precision, of art, of literature, of history – unavailable to or otherwise lacking in the lower classes. To command 'aesthetic disposition', or to apply it to objects, persons, or situations, is to engage in a transformative process of 'cultural consecration', which Bourdieu describes as a 'sort of ontological promotion akin to transubstantiation'.

Bourdieu says that an essential element of cultural consecration, or a Eucharistic-like change to superior class status, is *denial of the profane*, or 'denial of lower, coarse, vulgar, venal, servile, in a word natural enjoyment' (Bourdieu, 1984: 7). The aesthetic disposition requires satisfaction 'with the sublimated, refined, disinterested, gratuitous, distinguished pleasures forever closed to the profane' (Bourdieu, 1984: 7). Bourdieu (1984: 54) elaborates, 'aesthetic disposition' is 'a generalized capacity to neutralize ordinary urgencies and to bracket off practical ends' and 'a durable inclination and aptitude for practice without a practical function'.

Falling short of aesthetic disposition, lower-class men have used MMTs as socially necessary forms of compensatory masculinity. Using a vow tattoo to convey a simple and direct message, developing muscles from strenuous physical labor, practicing weight-lifting to develop muscles and body mass, or even using a motorcycle jacket for the practical ends of protection and warmth, are further examples of how lower-class men fall short of aesthetic disposition. By the measure of cultural capital, these simple, necessary, and direct functions are not aesthetics or art. They are strong symbolic markers of lower-class status. In contrast, aesthetic disposition 'means a refusal to recognize any necessity other than that inscribed in the specific tradition of the artistic discipline in question' (Bourdieu, 1984: 3). Bourdieu explains the applicability of this concept to middle-class health and fitness (or the gentrified form of pumping iron, as we explain further on):

There is a tendency of the privileged classes to treat the body as an end in itself, with variants according to whether the emphasis is placed on the intrinsic functioning of the body as organism, which leads to the macrobiotic cult of health, or on the

appearance of the body as a perceptible configuration, the 'physique', i.e., the body-for-others. Everything seems to suggest that the concern to cultivate the body appears, in its most elementary form, i.e., as the cult of health, often implying an ascetic exaltation of sobriety and dietetic rigour, among the lower middle classes . . . who indulge in particularly intensively in gymnastics, the ascetic sport par excellence since it amounts to a sort of training (askesis) for training's sake. (Bourdieu, 1991: 371)

Departing from Bourdieu's emphasis on health, Pope et al. (2000) argue that the increasing contemporary male obsession with body building (and steroid use) is not so much for health (or sports performance), but for a body-for-others that can aesthetically match the ones featured on magazines such as *Health & Fitness*.

Another important element of the application of cultural capital is *consecrating the common*. Bourdieu (1984: 5) explains, 'nothing is more distinctive, more distinguished, than the capacity to confer aesthetic status on objects that are banal or even common.' Exemplary is the recent nuanced intellectual attention given to the motorcycle jacket. For example, the Phoenix Museum of Art's February 2004 exhibit 'Motorcycle Jacket' featured a fashion show highlighting 'the garment's evolution from protective equipment to haute couture'. It sponsored a lecture, 'Motorcycle as Icon', by Motorcycle Hall of Fame Museum Board Member Charles Falco, which explored 'the interrelationship of technological, cultural, sociological, aesthetic, and gender-related factors in motorcycle design, and discuss[ed] how the resultant popular image of these machines has evolved from an icon of rebellion, to freedom, to fashion' (Milwaukeeharley.com, 2004).

In a similar way Irwin (2003: 9) elaborates, 'elite collectors and tattooists demonstrate their cultural capital and use it to construct themselves as superior to those with less cultural capital':

Fine art trained and influenced tattooists rely on fine art aesthetic convention in their tattoo work. Tattooists suggest that such techniques have become an essential part of tattooing. In addition to aesthetic conventions, tattooists also bring organizational features from the fine art world to tattooing. Intellectual discussions about 'good' and 'bad' tattoo work as well as the use of 'critique' abound within the tattoo community. Many believe that opening their work to peer review, and

especially to critique of those considered 'masters', will help them achieve their artistic goals. (Irwin, 2003: 9)

These quoted passages reveal the use of class-coded discourse, or what Bourdieu describes as the class-distinguishing difference between the 'primary stratum' of meaning – the motorcycle jacket understood merely for the crude and profane functions of warmth and protection, or the lower-class vow tattoo understood for its simple and direct message – versus more nuanced, complexified forms, appreciated for their 'secondary stratum' of meaning. Thus, what separates classes is *cultural competence, or understanding the cultural code*. When lacking in it, one 'feels lost in a chaos of sounds and rhythms, colours and lines, without rhyme or reason' (Bourdieu, 1984: 2). Bourdieu elaborates this important point:

Not having learnt to adopt the adequate disposition, he stops short at what Erwin Panofsky calls the 'sensible properties' . . . He cannot move from the 'primary stratum of the meaning we grasp on the basis of our ordinary experience' to the 'the stratum of secondary meanings', i.e., the level of the meaning of what is signified', unless he possesses the concepts which go beyond the sensible properties of the work. (Bourdieu: 1984: 2)

Nearly needless to say, these kind of intellectual discourses are surely beyond the interest or inclination of most lower-class men with MMTs.

As indicated above, aesthetic triumph is not only consecrating the mundane, but also the profane. In other words, the victorious application of aesthetics in gentrification involves *upgrading the culturally tenuous*. This is evident in the recent aesthetic attention given to the new 'chopper'. For example, the coffee table book *Art of the Chopper* clarifies defensively on the very first page that it is a book 'not about [profane] biker culture, but about how these bikes *are* culture'. The 256-page book 'profiles twenty of today's top chopper builders . . . [t]hrough an extensive color photo gallery of each builder's creations', and 'provides an in-depth analysis of each builder's design philosophies and unique style'. Further expressing the tenuous but ultimately triumphant class relations that characterize gentrification, Zimmerhoff (2003: 12–13) says that choppers are 'the sacramental objects of a culture that worships profanity. They are vulgar and ostentatious, and yet achingly beautiful.' Correcting any misconception that these 'coffee table' choppers fall short of aesthetics, the book jacket explains, loud and clear:

A GREAT CHOPPER IS NOT BUILT. IT IS CREATED. It begins as the seed of an idea germinating in the mind of its

creator. Bit by bit, the builder brings the machine to life, raking and stretching the frame, fabricating fenders and a gas tank, applying exquisite paint, sculpting something that lives and breathes on its own.

What Zimmerhoff describes in words, is visually dramatized on the 'revitalizing' reality show *American Chopper*, the most popular 2004 show on the educational media-oriented *Discovery Channel*. The show, that now features what are deemed the top 12 best motorcycle 'artists' in the USA, raised ratings by 25 percent (fbaa.us, 2005). *American Chopper* chronicles the artistic creation of uniquely customized low riders built from beginning to finish. In each episode (or two), the motorcycle is 'chopped' down to its bare essentials, and then every piece of the bike (the seat, the frame, the gas tank) and exterior design is meticulously and painstakingly created. A specific palate of colors and a personalized, special theme are selected that bring uniqueness to the bike. Of many examples, that often have a class-distinguishing philanthropic or public service function associated with them, are the Firebike, honoring New York's greatest heroes; and the Santa chopper, for children of fallen firefighters. A stunning POW/MIA custom chopper was created to honor America's missing and prisoners of war. The names of about 50 of the missing were spot-welded with chrome-plated wire to the frame and MIA was etched in the fender.

What we see in *American Chopper* is an empirical example of what Bourdieu (1984: 3) describes as the 'autonomy of production', which he says is an essential element of an artist:

The pure intention of the artist is that of a producer who aims to be . . . entirely the master of his product . . . To assert the autonomy of production is to give primacy to that of which the artist is master, i.e., form, manner, style, rather than the 'subject', the external referent, which involves subordination to functions.

Similar artistic imagery can be seen on *The Learning Channel's* more recent 2005 and instantly popular show, *Miami Ink*, featuring various tattoo artists, and chronicling the personal stories of tattoo wearers and their customized tattoos.

Bourdieu (1984: 4) goes on to say that 'aesthetic perception is necessarily historical.' To grasp the meaning of 'works of art' one must appreciate their 'relation to the specific history of an artistic tradition'. As explained at length below, the *historicization-aestheticization* of MMTs – with its corollary sponsorship by intellectuals, experts and authorities, and culturally

powerful institutions and organizations – has further consecrated them with middle-class distinction.

The historicization of motorcycling is evident, to begin with, in numerous electronic media such as CycleTownUSA, an Indian Motorcycle page that provides literature, memorabilia, a modest museum, and a history of the Company after 1953 (<http://www.cycletownusa.com/>). Another website, 'Virginia Wind', provides an elaborate three-part history, tracing motorcycling to Michelangelo's 14th century conception of the bicycle (<http://www.virginiawind.com>). Perhaps more impressive is an October 2002 announcement that the Motorcycle Hall of Fame (with website-noted famous contributors, Jay Leno and the late Malcolm Forbes) was awarded a Partnership Grant from the National Film Preservation Foundation for the purpose of preserving a 1920 promotional Indian motorcycle-racing film, 'Beverly Hills Board Track Racing' (americanmotor.com, 2005).

The most prestigious and dedicated artistic sponsor of motorcycling history is New York's Guggenheim Museum, which held a 1998 BMW-funded exhibit entitled 'The Art of the Motorcycle', showcasing motorcycle design from the 1860s to the present. Following the exhibit, the Guggenheim published a 'must-have' coffee table book, *The Art of the Motorcycle*, which is marketed as 'an exquisite chronological arrangement of stunningly artistic and nuanced photographs of 95 seminal motorcycles'. The book explains 'how the motorcycle has richly contributed to our collective intellect, art, industry and culture' (store.motolit.com, 2005). A few years later, in 2002, Hotel Venetian's 63,700 square foot Guggenheim Las Vegas space showcased more than 150 motorcycles, an exhibit that also included the first motorcycle – the 1868 Michaux-Perreux steam Velocipede and the legendary custom-built Harley blue chopper Peter Fonda rode alongside Dennis Hopper in *Easy Rider*. Patrons watched excerpts from motorcycling's best cinematic moments, such as *Rebel Without a Cause* and *Purple Rain* (Yates, 1999).

Giving additional historical-aesthetic credence to the 'art' of motorcycling, in January 2004 the Harley-Davidson company announced its plan to build a world-class museum in its Milwaukee, Wisconsin home, which is, according to Harley-Davidson officials, expected to bring 350,000 international annual visitors, US\$78 million in total annual spending, and more than US\$12 million in local and state revenue. They are expecting to break ground in 2006 and open to the public in 2008 (h-dmuseum.com, 2003).

Differing from motorcycling history, with its openly acknowledged lower-class past, the cultural consecration of tattooing, as modern primitive,

involves a kind of sandblasting, internal gutting, or reliance on an 'anterior history' similar to Jager's earlier description of the transformation of Victoriana. For example, in *Return of the Tribal* (Camphausen, 1997), which is a popular book among 'modern primitives' (or new tattoo wearers and other body modifiers who view body modification as spiritual and religious celebrations of the body), the author delves deep in 'anterior' history. He traces the 'celebration of body adornment' across a vast cultural-historical plain including: Australian Aborigines, circa 60,000 BCE.; and Dordogne, France (15–10,000 BCE); The Vedas, India's earliest sacred scriptures; Neolithic Jericho; Nubian, pre-dynastic, and 11th dynasty Egypt; 15,000 BCE; Mesoamerican Olmec culture; 450 BCE Japan; Thracian Greek aristocracy; 400 BCE Mayan culture; Chinese and Korean literary records circa 250 BCE; and fifth century Roman Gallic warriors. As DeMello (2000: 179) points out, the significance of historicizing tattooing so deep in history is that it imbues the practice with the idea, 'if all primitive societies do it, then it *must* be natural.'

The notable 'sandblasting', or erasure in Camphausen's history, is that he nowhere at all in the chronology (or in the wide range of pictorial representation throughout) explicitly or specifically depicts tattooing as a practice among lower-class men. DeMello further explains how modern primitives bypass the western working-class connotations of tattooing:

Through the discourse of modern primitives, the working-class history of tattooing in the United States has essentially been denied and a new history has been created. This history is based on the histories of non-Western, non-industrialized people who practice tattooing [as] . . . a spiritual and social ideal. (DeMello, 2000: 182)

Tattooing has also depended on sponsorship by prestigious organizations, institutions and their officials. For example, setting the artistic stage for the West Coast, in 1982 the Governor's Office of California issued an official statement, defining tattooing as 'one of the most ancient arts', asserting that the 'tattoo is the primal parent of the visual arts', and celebrating its re-emergence 'as a fine art attracting highly trained and skilled practitioners' (tattooartist.com, 2003).

By the late 1990s prestigious East Coast institutions and their officials were also granting tattooing specialized historic-artistic recognition. For example, in 1995, tattoo art exhibits were held at the Drawing Center and the South Street Seaport Museum in New York City. In 1996, the National Museum of American Art, a part of the Smithsonian Institute, added tattoo

design work to part of its permanent art collection. In 1997, Hallways Contemporary Art Center in Buffalo, New York, hosted a more specialized exhibit, 'Needlework: A Festival of Women Tattoo Artists', and the Detroit Institute of the Arts held a 'Getting Inked: The Art of the Tattoo Conference', which explored the tattoo as an art form. In November 1999, New York City's The American Museum of Natural History opened a six month exhibit, 'BODY ART: Marks of Identity'. The exhibit displayed body art artifacts dating back to 3000 BC, demonstrating that body art has been an important factor throughout history. The exhibit offered paintings, wooden sculptures, and carved furniture depicting body art, and traced body art to Ancient Egypt, Ancient Greece, and pre-colonial Native America.

While the historical-artistic consecration of body-building is presently less developed than those of tattooing and motorcycling, there are strong indications of its nascent emergence. For example, American Body Building's Library of Articles (getbig.com, 2004) provides a variety of history articles delineating how body-building gained Olympic recognition. The article, 'How Joe & Ben Weider Became the Founding Fathers of Body-Building' (getbig.com, 2005) explains how body-building moved from the 'margins' and a 'cult' to the 'mainstream'. What was most crucial to that transformation, the authors say, was the Weiders hiring Arnold Schwarzenegger in 1969 and paying him US\$100 a week to write about his training and diet in *Muscle Builder*, while offering him skills in economic, social and cultural capital, or training him in real estate investments, media relations, and the arts. The article elaborates,

Joe even loaned Schwarzenegger his favorite three paintings to decorate a new apartment . . . In return, Schwarzenegger told readers about the benefits of using Weider supplements and equipment. Soon, Schwarzenegger[']s personable manner, wit and charm captivated audiences and helped dispel the notion that big muscles equated with little brains.

Finally, the article explains that the motion picture *Pumping Iron* (1977) further popularized body-building and established Schwarzenegger as a household name. 'By the early 1980s,' the authors conclude triumphantly, 'bodybuilding and the healthy lifestyle associated with it were ingrained in the public consciousness . . .' Surely the world class body-builder who once posed as live museum exhibit being elected Governor of California has imbued body-building with additional cultural (and social) capital. Another American cultural icon, Sylvester Stallone (of *Rocky* fame), has further aided this process with the 2004 introduction of his healthy living/body-building

magazine, *Sly*, and line of nutritional supplements, promoted on CNN's *Larry King Live* (on 14 May 2005).

What has contributed more generally to the cultural elevation of body-building is the fitness revolution, initiated with Weider's development of the 'Weider Triangle of Peak Performance', a set of more holistic activities focused on performance, exercise technique, and nutrition (Getbig.com, 2005). A getbig.com article explains further, 'Total fitness' programs focus not simply [or crudely] on the body, but 'the education of the whole person: body, mind, and spirit'. Weider summarizes the cultural consecration of body-building turned health and fitness, 'Ours is not simply a sport, it is a lifestyle.'

While the health and fitness revolution stresses movement away from what began as vulgar and profane body-building, it is stylized in some settings with socially sanitized 'thumbprints' of lower-class exotica (again, akin to Jager's description of Victoriana renovation). For example, Nautilus Health Spa calls its 10-week training session, taught by 'two certified 'Drill Sergeants', 'BOOTCAMP'. The US\$45 member or US\$75 non-member session includes body composition, fitness evaluation, and a BOOTCAMP T-shirt (nautilusgf.com, 2003). Catching on up the socioeconomic ladder, in January 2003 Hyatt Regency Maui Resort & Spa offered its guests a 'Beach Boot Camp' when they booked accommodations ranging from US\$275 to US\$850 per night. In this case, Boot Camp gentrifiers worked out amid 'a three mile stretch of beach, towering coconut trees, and a sparkling blue ocean' (Streisand, 2003: 54). Another 'Boot Camp' sponsored 'Yoga Booty Ballet', a 90-minute workout that included high velocity aerobics, ballet for strength and toning, and yoga for flexibility and 'inner peace' (Streisand, 2003: 54).

The more usual setting for the newly transformed health and fitness community is at private sports clubs, where memberships 'jumped from 20.7 million in 1990 to 30.6 million in 1999, an increase of 48%' (americansportsdata.com, 2000). By 2004, health club memberships in America were up to 41.3 million, with the average member attending 91 days a year (*The Health Club Trend Report*, 2004)

At large club chains such as LA Fitness, Gold's Gym, or Bally's, members work out with a 'conspicuous' and distinguishing array of personal trainers and diet nutritionists, individualized program designs, massage, weight-training with graduated beginner, intermediate and advanced programs, nutritional counseling, training videos, aerobics classes, cardio and dance programs, juice bars, and numerous comfort accessories. Thus, the new health and fitness communities are mediums for expressing 'the bourgeois',

or one who 'treats his body as an end, makes his body a sign of its own ease' (Bourdieu, 1984: 218). Even the YMCA – once a relatively open-access facility for the socioeconomically disadvantaged – has been transformed into a middle-class 'neighborhood', as indicated by the escalation of membership fees, state-of-the-art amenities, and tax challenges by private health clubs. A Houston newspaper editorial explained,

. . . private fitness clubs want YMCA to stop getting tax breaks because they now cater to middle and upper-income adults who can afford to pay for the same kind of state of the art services and amenities offered by private health clubs. Traditionally the YMCA catered to members of the community with special needs such as inner city youths, the elderly, the handicapped, and the indigent. (Houston.bizjournals.com, 2000)

DISPLACEMENT

As the previous pages have briefly illustrated, while gentrification proper is declining, the process is re-emerging in a 'new frontier': the 'symbolic neighborhoods' of the lower classes in popular culture. Using examples of MMTs, we showed how what were once symbolic neighborhoods of lower-class men (and compensatory sources of status enhancement, recognition, respect, autonomy, and control) have been transformed into symbols of middle-class distinction. Drawing on gentrification literature and Bourdieu's writings, we illustrated processes of cultural and financial investments, middle-class invasion, and the multi-faceted complexities of cultural consecration (e.g., denial of the profane, consecration of the common, cultural competence, upgrading the culturally tenuous, the autonomy of production, and historicization-aestheticization). By emphasizing how gentrified forms are achieved rather than why consumers are attracted to them, we have demonstrated the spuriousness of postmodernist lifestyle consumption theory (as well as mainstream media claims) that the widespread adoption of MMTs are instances of egalitarian sharing and status fluidity. Indeed, like virtually all studies of gentrification, the ultimate effect of gentrifying MMTs is displacing the pre-existing community inhabitants (Zukin, 1987). Given the economy of writing space that prioritized aesthetic displacement, we hope to have along the way sufficiently indicated the price out effect of newly gentrified forms of MMTs.

Finally, while our study did not focus in any empirical way on the ultimate disposition of the displaced, we must end by emphasizing the value of renegade symbols for the disenfranchised, and the possible effects of

expropriating 'their' symbols. Perhaps this (non-essentialist, symbolic interactionist) point, which acknowledges the emotionally laden value of symbols for identity and group maintenance (see Collins, 2004), can be at least strongly suggested with a single concluding example.

In Wooden and Blazak's (2001: 87) *Renegade Kids, Suburban Outlaws: From Youth Culture to Delinquency*, the authors explain how homeless San Francisco gutter-punks have taken drastic measures to defend against 'frat boys and pro athletes' who invaded their symbolic territory by appropriating body piercing as a style. The authors explain succinctly and disturbingly,

Partially out of frustration with the cultural diffusion of their styles, punks have gone to greater extremes to prove their loyalty to the values and to express their alienation from society. One group of gutter-punks in San Francisco, angry that body piercing had become a fad, cut off their little fingers[!]

The extremity of such action may be understood as measure of the extreme (practical, necessary, functional, profane) value of symbolic territory for the socially and economically disenfranchised. It is hoped that what is written here and throughout might add a dose of serious reflection to otherwise playful, individualistic and deceptively egalitarian understandings of the consumption of lower-class statuses in popular culture today.

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Note

1. We would like to call attention to the fact that this class aesthetics-focused article does not discuss sexuality as a factor in the gentrification process, but that a number of classical cases of gentrification listed in our introduction have entailed the entry of gay men into gentrified communities. To link aesthetic transformation with the influx of gay men is beyond our present narrow focus and academic competencies. While we (presently) aim to avoid proposing superficial and or stereotypical connections between aesthetics and gay communities, it is important to emphasize that the omission of considering the ways gentrified communities are sometimes at the same time gay communities is standard practice in gentrification literature. This is a topic that needs to be thoughtfully acknowledged and addressed in our own and other subsequent work.

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