

## CONSUMING AUTHENTICITY

Sharon Zukin

To cite this article: Sharon Zukin (2008) CONSUMING AUTHENTICITY, Cultural Studies, 22:5, 724-748, DOI: [10.1080/09502380802245985](https://doi.org/10.1080/09502380802245985)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09502380802245985>



Published online: 15 Sep 2008.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 6142



Citing articles: 144 View citing articles [↗](#)

---

## CONSUMING AUTHENTICITY

From outposts of difference to means  
of exclusion

*Alternative consumption practices often lead to the creation of entrepreneurial spaces like restaurants and bars, and to the resurgence of farmers' markets, offering urban consumers a safe and comfortable place to 'perform' difference from mainstream norms. These spaces fabricate an aura of authenticity based on the history of the area or the back story of their products, and capitalize on the tastes of their young, alternative clientele. This vision gradually attracts media attention and a broader consumer base, followed by larger stores and real estate developers, leading to hip neighborhoods with luxury housing, aka gentrification. Whether the specific discourse of consumption is based on distinction or inclusion, alternative consumers are not so innocent agents of change. Their desire for alternative foods, both gourmet and organic, and for 'middle class' shopping areas encourages a dynamic of urban redevelopment that displaces working-class and ethnic minority consumers.*

**Keywords** consumption; gentrification; shopping; authenticity; historic preservation; food

'Not Your Grandmother's L[ower] E[ast] S[ide]'

— advertisement for one-bedroom apartment in window of  
real estate agency, Lower Manhattan, 2006

*Saturday morning, mid July, Union Square Park, Manhattan.* I am staring at the strangest tomatoes I have ever seen — twisted bumps, misshapen splotches of pale red-orange and yellow-green — at my favorite organic vegetable stand in the farmers' market. 'Italian tomatoes,' the sign says, and when I carefully pick one up, I feel that it is soft, really soft, signaling ripeness timed so carefully to the point of sale that I want to rush right home, cut it open to reveal its pinky flesh, and savor its sweetly acid juices. The farmer, a man in his mid-thirties,

with muscular arms already deeply tanned, encourages me: 'They're the best tomatoes you've ever eaten,' he says. And although they are ugly, I believe him. I have been buying tomatoes from his father, and now from him, for years. And these are his first tomatoes of the season.

I think how the tomatoes will look, sliced into a patchwork of alternating stripes with creamy white slices of fresh mozzarella, and drizzled with thick, green olive oil. I carry my tomatoes home, drop them off in the kitchen, and walk over to the East Village, where the last remaining Italian dairy sells balls of fresh, wet mozzarella made daily in the basement of the store. For years, there was a small outcropping of Italian cafes, Jewish delicatessens, and Ukrainian soup restaurants in this neighborhood, which nourished the Beat poets and at least two generations of musicians and artists, but now the East Village is known for Japanese noodle bars, vintage clothing stores, and late-night, downtown bars.

Since the 1950s, this area – like many downtown districts from Portland, Maine, to Portland, Oregon, and circling the globe through London, Melbourne, and Shanghai – has gone through a process of being upgraded, revitalized, and re-imagined. Most of the buildings here are late nineteenth century tenements, a low landscape of brown stone, red brick, and gray cement, leading to more stately brownstone houses in Greenwich Village to the west, to the big windows and stolid cast-iron pillars of loft buildings in SoHo to the south, and, beyond those, to the office towers of Wall Street, the financial district at the southern tip of the island, in the oldest part of the city's historic core. Although the structures look pretty much the way they did a hundred years ago, in the past half-century the ways they are used and the people who use them have entirely changed.

Beginning with the gradual disappearance of traditional manufacturing and growth of financial services, moving through the residential conversion of lofts and office buildings, and promoted by media buzz about alternative sources of art, design, and cuisine, these neighborhoods have been re-imagined as the creative hub of a symbolic economy. Downtown farmers' markets and ethnic food stores underline their image as oases of authenticity in a Wal-Mart wasteland, encouraging real estate developers to reinvest and making urban living marketable. Often the same men and women are shopping for fresh goat cheese, supporting fair trade coffee, and restoring old brownstone houses in these socially 'marginal' areas. Just as they take pleasure in choosing alternatives to mass market products – 'pure,' original, ethnic, fresh – so they are willing to take risks in choosing where to live. But in the process of developing alternative consumption practices, they contribute to changes that make these spaces more desirable. Even in the most rundown neighborhoods, walk-up flats have been transformed into 'luxury' housing. 'Blight,' as urban

planning officials in the 1950s called dilapidated housing that they wanted to raze, has yielded to hip.

In the 1980s, everyone began to call the process of upgrading properties without tearing down buildings *gentrification*. This process had begun earlier, in the 1950s and 1960s, when the writer Jane Jacobs lived in the West Village, where she wrote the classic book *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* that celebrated the intricately crafted relations among neighbors that she called the ballet of the street. Jacobs also was an activist against large-scale urban renewal. She worked with her neighbors to defeat Robert Moses', and the New York City government's, plans to bulldoze the old warehouses, factories, and stores of Lower Manhattan and replace them with expressways and public housing projects, just as Moses had done in Brooklyn and the Bronx, and as most other US cities were also doing, using federal urban renewal funds to devour the working-class neighborhoods around their aging downtowns. If Robert Moses' plans had succeeded, Lower Manhattan would look just like any other US city. But, in the changed climate of opinion that followed the publication of Jacobs' book, a new appreciation grew of the cultural diversity of city life, especially an appreciation of architecture as a social, as well as a material, resource.

At that point, however, there were too few middle-class residents to change Lower Manhattan's seedy image. Men and women born in the city during the Great Depression and World War II were still moving in droves to the suburbs and starting families. Young professionals like Jacobs – often architects, journalists, and social workers without high-income jobs – who bought houses in neighborhoods that had seen better days, were exceptions to the trend. By the 1980s, however, when that generation's children grew up, many of them migrated to, or remained in, the city, for new college educated residents and artistic entrepreneurs had created a critical mass of edgy cultural venues and restored residential facades: *islands of renewal in seas of decay*, a social scientist called them, minimizing their effect on the city at large. If the old neighborhoods and their new residents were becoming more visible in the media's airy lifestyle reports, they were not always admired on the ground from which this lifestyle had sprung. *Die, yuppie scum*, read the graffiti stenciled on lampposts near the mozzarella store (see Berry 1985).<sup>1</sup>

During the past quarter-century, a new culture of cities has thrived on the 'renewable resource' of these neighborhoods' authenticity (Peterson 1997, p. 220). Where their parents' generation saw dirt and danger in the asphalt jungle, young city dwellers found beauty in the tumble down and excitement in the rough. Their assumptions contradicted the working strategies of modernizers who, since the 1930s, had tried to sanitize cities, making the streets less crowded, playing down ethnicity, and developing an impressive skyline of tall buildings to proclaim the city's standing at the center of the world (Berman 1982, pp. 298–348).

New city dwellers said that loft buildings are not decrepit hellholes, they are terrific space. Cobblestone streets are not inefficient for flows of automobiles, they are cool. No longer is seediness ugly, it is now a sign of authenticity. David Brooks captures this reversal of values in a different context, not specifically urban, when he recycles Thorstein Veblen's theory of the leisure class to caricature the 'bourgeois bohemians' who seek the rough and unadorned while not giving up their expensive cars and liberal values. They disdain

all the words that were used as lavish compliments by the old gentry: delicate, dainty, respectable, decorous, opulent, luxurious, elegant, splendid, dignified, magnificent, and extravagant. Instead, the new elite prefers a different set of words, which exemplify a different temper and spirit: *authentic*, natural, warm, rustic, simple, honest, organic, comfortable, craftsmanlike, unique, sensible, sincere.

(Brooks 2000, p. 83, emphasis added)

The coherence of any group's cultural preferences – their *tastes* – is easily caricatured (Bourdieu 1984).

But unlike in Brooks' mean-spirited view, many of the new, college educated urban residents work in low-wage, often temporary jobs, and scramble to make a living as cultural producers. The number of art school graduates has expanded enormously since the 1960s, and they share an expectation with wealthier lifestyle mavens that they can participate in a consumer society without compromising their values. In contrast to Brooks' 'bobos,' the affluent residents of 'latte towns,' most urban gentrifiers lead both an aesthetic and ascetic life. They are patrons as well as staff at the restaurants, bars, and shops installed in tenement storefronts; they browse as well as make the art in the galleries sandblasted into former warehouses; they form squads of roommates to rent overpriced apartments (in Manhattan) or whitewashed lofts near the waterfront (in Brooklyn, Minneapolis, or Kansas City). Moreover, they claim to admire – some even say they make a fetish of – the ethnic diversity of their neighbors. But their relations with the old residents are more ambiguous than that. They may chat with a few street characters, whom they know from sitting out of doors and socializing or panhandling or both. Maybe they have bought drugs from local dealers. Or they recognize the faces of old residents at the few bars where members of both groups listen to music and drink beer. 'Sharing the streets with working-class and non-white residents, even if personal interaction remains superficial,' a sociologist who has studied the 'neo-bohemia' of Wicker Park, in Chicago, says, 'is part of their image of an *authentic* urban experience' (Lloyd 2006, pp. 77–78, emphasis added). Whether they are middle-class gentrifiers,

underpaid creative producers, or yuppie scum, new residents of old neighborhoods are consuming an idea of authenticity.

### **Authentic spaces**

We can only see spaces as authentic from outside them. Mobility gives us the distance to see a neighborhood in terms of the way it looks, enables us to hold it to an absolute standard of urbanity or cosmopolitanism, and encourages us to judge its character apart from any personal history or intimate social relationships we have there. The more connected we are to its social life, especially if we grew up there, the less likely we are to call a neighborhood *authentic*. Just thinking of it in this way suggests a ‘space of representation’ rather than a lived experience born of the conflicts and solidarities that develop when different social groups share space (Lefebvre 1991). In contrast to the subjectivity of lived experience, a space of representation allows us to think of a neighborhood’s value in apparently objective terms (Zukin 2004, p. 14). For real estate developers and urban planners, these are terms of profit and use: How much land can I assemble? At what price? What can I build to get the highest value from my investment? Artists, and those privileged among us who share an aesthetic view of urban detritus, conceive of space in different terms: Is it interesting? Is it gritty? Is it real? Like the criteria we use while shopping for consumer products, these standards objectify the characteristics artists desire (Ley 2003). But how we answer these questions also makes an ethical statement about the way we want to live. Are we Levis (East Village) or True Religion (Upper East Side) jeans? Are we organic farmers’ market or mass consumption Costco? Costco or Whole Foods? Which is the authentic space for our authentic self? (Douglas 1997, Miller 1997).

These are peculiarly modern questions. In Western culture, the idea of authenticity arose between the ages of Shakespeare and Rousseau, when men and women began to think about an authentic self as an honest or a true character, in contrast to personal duplicity, on the one hand, and to society’s false morality, on the other hand. As a social theorist, Rousseau developed a structural grounding for the authenticity of individual character. Men and women are authentic if they are closer to nature – or to the way intellectuals imagine a state of nature to be – than to the institutional disciplines of power. While this view has often inspired people to opt out of society and form a commune, it also offers psychic consolation to social groups who do not have a realistic chance of gaining rewards from powerful elites or of taking control of powerful institutions. German intellectuals, who in the eighteenth century were less integrated into courtly life than their French counterparts, conceived of the difference between themselves, rich in cultural capital, and the princes who controlled state power and patronage as a difference of authenticity.

Unlike the frivolous, Frenchified ‘civilization’ of the courts, the intellectuals’ ‘culture’ was serious, virtuous, *authentic* (Berman 1970, Trilling 1972, Elias 1939/1978, pp. 22–29, Bourdieu 1984, p. 74).

Identifying authenticity with the downwardly mobile gradually spread from Germany to France and from universities to cities, where major art collections, theaters, and publishers flourished, and artists and intellectuals could sell their work. Most artists who produced work for these markets were not well paid. They lived from contract to contract, earning money, like factory workers of the time, by the number of pieces they produced. These cultural producers were artisans of words and images; they lived in working-class quarters not just because they were rebelling against the conformity of the bourgeoisie, but because they could not afford better apartments. Like earlier German intellectuals, poets and novelists living *la vie de bohème* in mid-nineteenth century Paris contrasted the authenticity of lower-class urban life, especially the lives of the most marginalized groups – criminals and gypsies – with what they saw as the hypocrisy of the rich. Writers romanticized the shabby and sordid, often diseased, outcast lower class as more honest than the bourgeoisie, and this romantic image became a source of their artistic inspiration (Seigel 1986).

Despite broad social changes since that time, these attitudes endure in the new Bohemias of gentrified urban neighborhoods. From Baudelaire’s prose poems to the musical drama *Rent*, the slums so feared by the righteous middle classes continue to appeal to artists and intellectuals because of their reservoir of danger and decay as well as their tolerance of – or unwillingness to police – cultural diversity. More than using their neighbors as models, some artists take delight in finding a parallel between the involuntary marginalization of the poor and of ethnic minorities in their neighborhood and their own willed marginalization from mainstream consumer culture. Even while the payoff is mostly in psychic legitimacy and cultural credentials – street cred for recent art school graduates – rather than in money, these artists capitalize on their distance from material necessity (Bourdieu 1984).

Artists also derive satisfaction from *performing* a creative life in spaces that remain distant from both the popular commercial mainstream and high culture venues. ‘Bohemians were those for whom art meant living the life, not doing the work,’ the historian Jerrold Seigel says of the original bohemian artists and writers in nineteenth century Paris (1986, p. 58). The East Village artists of the early 1980s who inspired *Rent* likewise made a performance of creativity amid urban decay – a performance that was even more theatrical for those who played flamboyantly with subversive images of sexuality (Taylor 2006, pp. 24–25).<sup>2</sup>

Many of these performances took place in the neighborhood’s consumption spaces. Like the nineteenth century bohemians who frequented Parisian cabarets, the East Village artists needed places where they could spend all the

free time they had at their disposal without spending much money. Besides patronizing cheap Ukrainian restaurants and 24-hour *bodegas*, they tended to pass the time in art galleries, bars, and performance spaces that they themselves established. 'Unlike today,' a former East Village artist who still works in New York's art world recalls, 'the galleries were *social* spaces. People hung out in them *all day*' (personal communication, February 2006, original emphasis) Despite being open to all, these spaces were intended for a specific set of consumption practices: they offered a space for consumers to perform their difference. 'I probably came Downtown for the same reason everyone else did,' says Carlo McCormick, an East Village artist who later became an art writer and editor, 'because we were too different to be anywhere else' (Altveer & Sudul 2006).

In contrast to the high crime rates that made these areas dangerous, consumption spaces offered 'safe space' to be as different as possible. 'If you lived in SoHo, you couldn't go outside of the neighborhood,' the first East Village artist says, speaking of 'flamboyant queens': 'If you walked in Little Italy, you'd get beaten up.' When a critical mass of these spaces was established, it was publicized not only by word-of-mouth but also by an alternative press – or today, by websites. This buzz draws on a much larger market, some of whom come as consumers and remain as residents. 'I started living [in the East Village] at the end of 1979,' McCormick says, 'but I was hanging around in the '70s, more as an observer than a participant. I was a kid who picked up the *SoHo Weekly News* and checked out stuff. I'd end up at the Mudd Club, Tin Pan Alley, ABC No Rio, the *Times Square Show* [performance spaces, alternative art gallery, temporary art exhibit], just because it all seemed so much more interesting than official culture.'

In the East Village, consumption spaces swung dialectically between the populist culture of the commercial mainstream and the neighborhood's cheap restaurants, bars, and photocopy shops, before developing entrepreneurial outposts of difference. So, too, in Wicker Park, Chicago, new residents at first liked the atmosphere of Sophie's Busy Bee, a greasy spoon café whose 'ambiance screamed authenticity.' But old and new patrons harbored different expectations of the consumption experience. Waitresses at the Busy Bee grew impatient with young artists and musicians who wanted to linger all day over a single cup of coffee, and to these new patrons – that coffee really was not very good. After a new arrival in the neighborhood opened the Urbis Orbis Café in a converted warehouse, new residents flocked to it. Just a few years later, the Busy Bee shut down, while Urbis Orbis earned praise from *Rolling Stone* as 'the coolest place [in Chicago] to suck down a cappuccino.' When housing in the neighborhood grew more expensive, the space above the café turned into a futon and furniture store, 'an interesting contrast to the discount furniture outlets that . . . lined the commercial strip a block away on Milwaukee Avenue for decades.'<sup>3</sup>



Yet, as in New York, not all consumption spaces in Wicker Park were 'safe' for hipsters. 'There were some bars, but not the kind of bars you want to hang out at except for maybe the brave few that would go to Phyllis' or the Gold Star or the Rainbo,' a local performer says. According to a local entrepreneur, Phyllis' Musical Inn 'and the Gold Star [a bar located across the street . . .] were the only places where non-ethnic white people could go without being in serious jeopardy of [losing] their lives.' Yet some places were open to a different clientele, changing the way they did business to suit their consumption practices. 'Even then,' the performer says, one bar 'was full of hipsters, and I went to a lot of cool art openings and shows' (Lloyd 2006, p. 102).

Although owners of consumption spaces that cater to old residents may want to attract the hipsters, or less eccentric but steadily employed gentrifiers, they often can not bridge the cultural gap between clienteles. 'We couldn't reach [new residents] because we're neighborhood girls,' says the owner of an Italian pork store in Carroll Gardens, a gentrified neighborhood in Brooklyn. 'I always tried to make everybody feel comfortable . . . . But that 20-something, 30-something crowd, I couldn't grab that crowd.' For many new residents, the cultural gap created by differences of social class and gender is a formidable barrier, especially in working-class bars, with their predominantly male clientele: "When you went inside and actually tried to sit at the bar, it was clear that you were on their turf, and they'd rather you wouldn't be there," recalled Erin Behan, a 29-year-old Carroll Gardens resident who wrote about the bar late last year for her blog, *A Brooklyn Life*. "It was really like you walked in, and all of a sudden it was perfectly silent" (Mooney 2006).

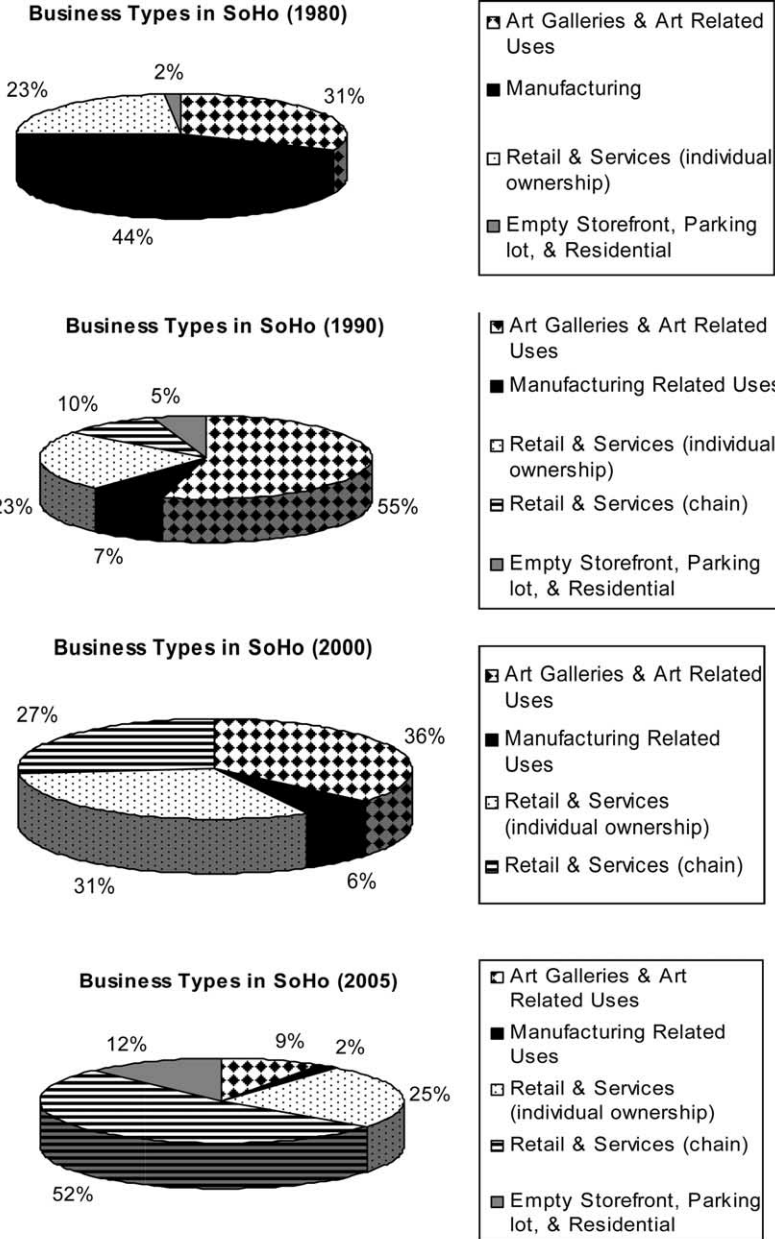
Entrepreneurs who cater to the new residents create consumption spaces that, to old residents, are just as unwelcoming. Monkeytown is a restaurant, bar, and video art gallery that recently opened in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, a working-class, predominantly Polish neighborhood that became hip around 1990, when the East Village art scene waned. Monkeytown offers the 'restaurant as total art experience.' The front room is organized in standard loft décor, with high ceilings and exposed pipes. Walk into the back room, and you're surrounded by large screens for projecting videos, one screen on each of the four walls. Tables and couches are arranged in a lounge-like square in the center, so diners can view videos while they eat. A video curator who recently graduated from New York University selects the program, which is accompanied by a soundtrack played by a live DJ. While the waitstaff, clad in matching gray overalls, bring food and wine, the curator introduces the video program. If you visit the rest room, you hear another soundtrack played on a separate speaker, and you can check the titles of the pieces posted on the bathroom wall. This is no working class bar.<sup>4</sup>

The media buzz that soon surrounds these spaces brings a larger number of visitors. At some point, experimental outposts of difference like Monkeytown and Urbis Orbis café are replaced by more standardized promoters of style from Brooklyn Industries and Built by Wendy jeans to Urban Apparel and H&M, chain stores with a more moderate array of products that can pay higher rents (Ley 1996). Waves of changes in consumption spaces parallel successive waves of residential gentrification, with wealthy cultural consumers and home buyers – the ‘supergentrifiers’ – replacing the poorer artists and middle class professionals who first discover a neighborhood’s authentic aura (Lees 2003). The shop at 194 Bedford Avenue, in Williamsburg, is a bricks-and-mortar slideshow of these changes. Until 1975, the storefront was occupied by Jack’s Quality Meats. For the next eight years, while the neighborhood suffered from severe cuts to police and fire services and crime rates rose, it stood empty. In the mid-1980s, when artists began to move in, the shop became the ‘Anti-Crowbar Locksmith.’ Since 1999, with Williamsburg enjoying media attention as a hip place to live, a smart black awning over the glass door has announced the ‘John Gabriel Hair Salon.’

SoHo, Lower Manhattan’s flagship loft neighborhood, presents a more dramatic pattern of storefront change. First there were factories, then art galleries, and now chain stores. In the early 1970s, the cast iron facades of loft buildings on Greene Street, in the center of SoHo, won legal designation as a historic district, which prevented any developer from tearing them down. At the same time, the entire area – about one square kilometer – was legally certified for artists’ residences and live-work spaces, effectively re-zoning all floors above street level from manufacturing to residence. Changes gradually crept into the neighborhood, but they were delayed by requiring building owners to find manufacturing tenants for the ground floor space, limiting legal residence to people who could prove they were artists, and reducing the quality of public services in the wake of New York City’s late-1970s fiscal crisis. As a result, in 1980, almost half of the storefronts in SoHo were still in manufacturing use – as either factories or hardware stores, shipping services, and other businesses catering to the remaining small industries. Only one-third of the storefronts were art galleries or in art-related uses, and about a quarter were small, individually owned stores (see figure 1).

The pace of retail change sped up in the luxury housing market of the 1980s. By 1990, less than 10 percent of the storefronts remained in manufacturing use, and more than half had been converted to galleries or art-related uses. The same 23 percent of the storefronts were still small, individually owned retail stores. Already, however, 10 percent were occupied by chain stores.

By 2000, 10 years later, SoHo had become a good place to shop, although not necessarily for art, since there were fewer galleries and more retailers and services. Most important, the percentage of chain stores had doubled.



**FIGURE 1** SoHo storefronts by year. Sources: 1980: Helene Zucker Seeman and Alanna Siegfried (1978); 1990–2005: *Cole's Cross Reference Directory for Manhattan*. Sample of three buildings in different parts of SoHo whose ground-floor stores were offered for rent in 2005.

Within the next five years, manufacturing just about disappeared, and art galleries were down to nine percent of the storefronts (many of them having moved uptown to Chelsea). A quarter of the street-level spaces were still occupied by individually owned stores. By this point, however, transnational chain stores like French Connection and H&M dominated the streetscape, occupying more than half of the storefronts. SoHo, the once gritty industrial district that firefighters called ‘Hell’s Hundred Acres,’ had transcended art to become an urban shopping mall (Zukin 1982).

When consumption spaces manipulate authenticity for new residents’ needs, they enable them – not so innocently – to stake their own claim to the neighborhood. But as SoHo shows, alternative consumption sites legitimize the area as a commercial attraction. The neighborhood becomes a target of wealthy consumers, chain stores, and real estate developers – an emporium for tourists and shoppers. When commercial rents rise above what experimental outposts of difference can afford to pay, they shut down or migrate to less expensive areas. (Unlike some small, specialized retail stores, they depend on face-to-face experience, so they cannot just move their business to the Internet.) Artists and hipsters are well aware of the significant role their tastes play in this process. But it is not the presence of artists that sets the process of displacement in motion: it is the presence of their taste for authenticity in the product mix, store design, and intangible ambiance of restaurants, boutiques, and gourmet stores.

‘I’m not even going to start playing the authenticity game,’ the novelist Hari Kunzru writes in a polemic about the imminent redevelopment of Broadway Market, a shopping street that became a foodie’s paradise in Hackney, a partially gentrified neighborhood in the East End of London. Like SoHo, Broadway Market went through the transition from a working-class shopping street to a high-price location for niche market stores, which are often branches of ‘designer’ chains. ‘I came to Hackney,’ Kunzru says,

for reasons that I guess are not dissimilar to a lot of the bike-riders, creative slackers, live-workers and thrift-store princesses I nod to on the street: because it is full of weird places and eccentric people and has a grubby glamour to it that has not yet been stamped out and flattened into the same cloned corporate hell-hole as the rest of Britain.

But the thing is, I am partial to a nice piece of raclette.

(Kunzru 2005)

Basic as it may be, the need to shop for food – or to socialize over a nice cup of latte – becomes a means of manipulating authenticity. Consumption spaces promote different kinds of authenticity for different communities of experience, while even consumers of alternative spaces participate in working out the details of this fabrication. Ordinarily, modern discourses of

consumption are based on inclusion, from the 'Everyday low prices' of supermarkets and discount chains to the logo-laden snobbery of aspirational brands, and this promise of inclusion supports the legitimacy of government from the welfare to the entrepreneurial state (Zukin 2004, Cohen 2003). Specific discourses, although they may aim at niche markets like gourmet foods, do not speak of divisive groupings by social class, income level, or race; they speak of tastes. But when we look closely at how a discourse of authenticity works in an urban setting – a set of stores and restaurants on a shopping street, in a shopping center, or in the city as a whole – we find that the consumption practices it caters to often produce exclusion. At least as much as it reflects economic factors like price, exclusion from urban space depends on cultural factors like aesthetics, comfort level, and the tendency to use, and understand, consumption practices as expressions of difference. Whether the specific discourse of consumption is based on distinctiveness – as with special foods or architectural styles – or inclusion – as with the mass appeal of discount shopping, it becomes a means of keeping others out.

### **Food shopping and the discourse of distinctiveness**

Like Hari Kunzru's taste for raclette and my habit of scouring old neighborhoods for authentic foods – ethnic, organic, or locally produced – food stores and restaurants anchor many of today's urban transformations. Like all shopping, food shopping can be both a means of acquiring cultural capital and a form of socialization, and whether bohemians and gentrifiers cook at home or eat out, the number and variety of consumption spaces dedicated to good food increase dramatically with gentrification.<sup>5</sup> At first, it is fair to say, gentrifiers are unhappy with the lack of supermarkets and other local services in the gritty, typically underserved low-income neighborhood to which they have moved. There is a cultural mismatch between their desire for raclette and lattes and the bodegas and take-out Chinese restaurants in neighborhoods where property values are low enough for them to rent or buy a home. To some degree, the existing stores and services confirm their self-image as not conforming to mainstream culture. If the *churros* are greasy and the coffee tastes lousy, these working class, ethnic spaces are still the anti-Starbucks – and for this reason, they are valued for what they contribute to a discourse of distinctiveness (Lyons 2005).

Ethnic groceries and diners speak to gentrifiers' hybrid subjectivity as consumers. First expressed in the late 1960s, in the 'Passionate Shopper' columns of early issues of *New York* magazine, this subjectivity commands the high culture of a fine Bordeaux wine as well as the low culture of a kosher pickle. An aesthetic appreciation of traditional ethnic products blends with nostalgia for 'authentic' neighborhoods – traditional social spaces outside the

standardized realm of mass consumption. Looking for these spaces engages gentrifiers in a voyage of discovery. They lack the producer's knowledge to change a cucumber into a pickle, but they have a consumer's knowledge of how a good pickle tastes. To be a smart shopper for food demands a sensory appreciation of its character, a modest understanding of its place in the status chain, and the imagination to construct its 'back story' – a social narrative of the cultural tradition from which it comes. Offering their products' back story helps consumption spaces to fabricate an aura of authenticity (Zukin 2004, pp. 184–185).

The success of the farmers' market at Union Square is intertwined with the desire to consume a special kind of authenticity: real food, locally grown. Founded as the flagship of a citywide, not-for-profit network of open-air markets that provide retail outlets for small family farms in the five-state metropolitan region, this Greenmarket is the largest, and most varied, of the 53 open-air markets in the system. When it began, with 10 growers, in 1976, it was 'loose and informal,' even 'ramshackle,' according to one of the market managers. But just as the look of the tented stands has become cleaner and more uniform, so the organization has grown more professional over the years. More than a hundred growers now bring their products to Union Square on the four days each week the market is open. On Saturday, the busiest day, as many as 70 growers sell products from organic vegetables to goat cheese, house plants, and maple syrup. The park itself, notorious at the outset for drug deals, was taken in hand by a public-private Business Improvement District, redesigned for genteel public use, and, with waves of residents moving into converted loft buildings and new college dorms nearby, turned into a major attraction. Tourists as well as local residents and foodies began to visit the Greenmarket when well known restaurant chefs praised the market in interviews with the press, publicizing how to shop at the farm stands to create seasonal specialties. The Greenmarket's image was also burnished by the discourse of distinctiveness promoted by new American cuisine, where the provenance of sugar snap peas and poultry is an important label on a restaurant's menu. Since the Greenmarket's goal is to preserve regional farmland, each vendor must grow, raise, bake, preserve, or churn all the products sold at the stand. What could be more authentic than local origins?

Yet most Greenmarket shoppers to whom I have spoken praise the products' quality and variety rather than their local roots. Some like the social atmosphere of the space – 'the whole feeling of community' that they see in the space on market days. 'Just look around, there are 10,000 protesters, and people get together,' a woman walking her dog told me. 'You can stand back and enjoy the pageant of city life,' said a man shopping alone. Most mention the products' freshness, which partly makes up for the absence of fresh vegetables during the winter and early spring months outside the regional

growing season. Customers enjoy choosing the specialized vendor who sells the freshest fish, or special bread, or eggs from free-range chickens.

But the farmers' market has taken a hit since Whole Foods Market, a three-story branch of a national supermarket chain specializing in 'healthy' food, opened across the street in 2005. The free-range egg seller lost one-third of his business right away, while Whole Foods is nearly always mobbed with shoppers. Young people fill the store, especially from lunchtime through the late afternoon; on Sundays, the queue waiting for the 32 cash registers in the front of the store snakes back through the baked goods department and nearly out the big glass doors to the sidewalk. On the day before Thanksgiving, the store closed its doors four times because it could not handle the crowds. When the 'alternative' corporate ethos of Whole Foods – in the words of Whole Foods co-founder and chief executive officer (CEO) John Mackey – challenges the anti-corporate format of the farmers' market, many food shoppers find it easier to consume the supermarket's more familiar form of authenticity.

Whole Foods' appeal is based on its representation of abundance, the convenience of prepared meals, and piles of photogenic fresh fruits and veggies in cleanly swept, wide aisles. It is definitely more glamorous than the generic brown rice and beans sold in bulk in traditional health food stores with sawdust-covered floors. In contrast to the Greenmarket's individual farm stands, Whole Foods is almost all self-service. Instead of working to cultivate a relationship with a seller by making a personal connection, at Whole Foods you never see the same employee twice. Finding the apple farmer or the baker at the farmers' market whose products you really like is a process of trial and error and requires shopping for different products at different stands, even shopping for different products on different days of the week. (The bakery stand with eight-grain bread is only there on Saturday; the trout farmer is only there on Wednesday because he prefers to spend the weekend with his children.) Whole Foods is different. Like Wal-Mart, the chain is a big importer. And it is open long hours almost every day of the year. Unlike the discipline of time and space that shopping at the farmers' market requires, Whole Foods Market offers all the products, all the time.

Why limit yourself to the brief growing seasons of local products when you can buy asparagus from Mexico in January and Chilean strawberries all year? Why wait for eggs till Wednesday or Saturday when you can buy eggs at Whole Foods any day of the week until 10 p.m.? Thinking beyond the specific suppliers' labels on packages and cans, Whole Foods features just two meta-brands: 'organic,' meaning healthy, and the Whole Foods name itself.

Despite their competition for customers, a synergy unites Whole Foods and the farmers' market. The high rent and high volume of the organic superstore are legitimized by the farmers' market's lower rent and artisanal quality, and it is this synergy that creates the meaning of the space as a whole as a site of authentic cultural consumption.<sup>6</sup> But both the Greenmarket and

Whole Foods work to create their authenticity. Like country music or the blues, farm stands and supermarkets take foods from specific local conditions, products ‘bred by years of living and feeling a situation,’ in order to sell them to consumers (Peterson 1997, pp. 210, 223). Whether the consumption space is a blues club, a farmers’ market, or the produce aisles of Whole Foods, it attracts consumers to the degree that it mobilizes the distinctiveness of the original source. At the Greenmarket, individual farmers sell apples they have grown and chickens they have killed, while at Whole Foods, large photos of grazing cows and chickens on the walls present visual narratives about family farms that grow the foods the store sells. Despite the huge scale and nationwide distribution such a system requires, embedding it in the corporate agri-business economy, the consumption space performs sincerity so well we feel we are in the presence of ‘authentic’ food (Grazian 2003, pp. 10–12). When Whole Foods Market’s plan to open a store so close to the Greenmarket sparked criticism in the New York press, the chain decided to emphasize how many products they buy from local suppliers – farmers, bakers, dairies – by displaying small signs that say ‘Made in New York’ on the shelves. Needless to say, these represent only a tiny portion of the large array of items sold (Pollan 2006).<sup>7</sup>

Both Whole Foods and the Greenmarket attract a socially diverse group of consumers. But the sense of authenticity that each works to evoke – local, healthy, organic, fresh – is related to a self-consciousness of distinctiveness that sets these consumers apart. I would call their ethos ‘middle class,’ but it issues more from a common experience of ‘living healthy’ and the ability to articulate the aesthetics of ‘fresh food.’ These practices, while certainly expensive to maintain, are not based on the usual components of social class – income, education, and occupation. Instead, they are based on alternative consumption practices that challenge the mainstream institutions of mass consumption. With the Greenmarket, these practices are encouraged by small subsidies from non-profit organizations and the city government. With Whole Foods Market, alternative consumption practices are the base of profit-based corporate expansion. In either case – or really, with the combined effect of both cases – shopping around Union Square becomes a more exclusive taste.

### **Race and the universalizing discourse of discount shopping**

Many years before Whole Foods arrived, Union Square was known as a center of discount and bargain stores. In the 1920s, S. Klein ‘on the Square’ attracted hordes of pushing and shoving women shoppers, mainly immigrants and factory workers, eager to grab a \$9 dress or a \$3 blouse from the sales tables. The building that houses Whole Foods used to be Bradlee’s, and was formerly May’s, each a branch of a national, low-price, department store chain that



went out of business by the 1990s. Even now, Whole Foods shares this building with two popular, low-price specialty chains that are usually found in malls – Forever 21 for young women’s clothing and DSW for shoes. With its historic accretion of discount stores, 14th Street offers a variation on ‘ghetto’ shopping streets in the outer boroughs, where African American, Caribbean, and Latino shoppers stretch their paychecks by looking for bargains.

Fulton Street, in downtown Brooklyn, is one of those shopping streets. Adjacent to federal and local courthouses, the offices of the citywide Board of Education and of many social service agencies, and the Borough (formerly City) Hall, built before Brooklyn was joined to Manhattan in the New York we know now, the five or six blocks of Fulton Street are filled with more than 200 stores offering a wide array of bargains. Most of these stores – and especially the subdivided spaces within them – are still individually owned, often by new immigrants. Seven days a week shoppers come, attracted by low prices on ‘urbanwear’ styles, household goods, children’s clothes, and jewelry. Before the 1950s, like many American downtowns, Fulton Street had gradually declined from a genteel past, done in by interstate highways, federal mortgage guarantees, and developers like the Levitts, all of which sped the middle class to ranch homes and shopping centers in the suburbs. The only reminders of a more affluent time are Macy’s, the sole department store on the street, which supplanted the Brooklyn-based, local department store chain, Abraham & Strauss, in 1995, and the white marble pillars of the Dime Savings Bank, a late nineteenth century temple of finance.

Besides A&S’s flagship store, Fulton Street in the 1950s offered shoppers two movie theaters, two five-and-dime stores (Woolworth’s and McCrory’s), and six low-price or discount department stores, including Wal-Mart’s predecessor, Korvette’s. During the next decade, two of the low-price, locally owned department stores and one of the movie theaters went out of business, leaving large gaps in the streetscape. Despite the efforts of a merchants’ association, which banned automobiles to create a bus-and-pedestrian mall, Fulton Street’s fortunes steadily slid downhill (Zukin 1995, pp. 213–230). African American organizations updated the ‘don’t shop where you can’t work’ boycotts of the 1940s for the civil rights movement of the 1960s, demanding jobs in local retail stores and construction crews. In the 1970s, between riots in both black and white neighborhoods and the city’s fiscal crisis, more stores closed, creating more vacancies.<sup>8</sup> In the 1980s, while the borough’s population became ever poorer and blacker, a national crisis in the retail sector shuttered branches of Korvette’s and May’s, and emptied two more blocks. Articles in local newspapers complained about Fulton Street’s shoddy merchandise, loud noise and tawdry atmosphere: ‘It’s Schlock Mall right now,’ a shopper says about the wig parlors, disco music blaring out of doors, and discount electronics stores (Zukin 1995, p. 223).

The problem was not cheap merchandise, however; it was the sense of concentrated poverty and blackness in what should have been seen – and could once again be seen – as valuable downtown property. After all, these were the years when ‘brownstone Brooklyn’ experienced a great revival of interest and investment. West of Borough Hall, Brooklyn Heights had been gentrified since the 1960s, its stately homes and peerless views of Manhattan across the East River attracting writers, lawyers, and investment bankers. A spillover of new residents of somewhat lesser means had already begun to trickle into the Italian American neighborhoods of Cobble Hill and Carroll Gardens to the southwest, where the owners of the pork store, ‘neighborhood girls,’ complained they could not attract the new residents. South of Fulton Street, near the Brooklyn House of Detention and public housing projects, artists, teachers, and writers were buying smaller houses in Boerum Hill, slowly replacing the area’s black and Latino residents in a process familiar to readers of Jonathan Lethem’s novel *Fortress of Solitude*. A bit farther on, Park Slope climbed a continual wave of gentrification radiating out from Prospect Park that brought many new, college educated residents to live in Brooklyn and commute to jobs in Manhattan. Each of these neighborhoods offered nineteenth century houses, on tree-lined streets, a good investment – despite graffiti, panhandlers in the streets, and the crack epidemic – in the midst of the city’s social diversity.

But these were also the years of the great wave of new immigration. Caribbean immigrants flocked to Brooklyn, replacing secular Jews in East Flatbush, living alongside Hasidim and Latinos in Crown Heights, and opening restaurants, grocery stores, and sidewalk stalls. A new Chinatown – New York City’s third – arose in Sunset Park. Emigres from the former Soviet Union settled in neighborhoods from Flatbush to Coney Island, as did Indians and Pakistanis. Caribbean merchants set up shop on Fulton Street, with other new immigrants from former Soviet Central Asian republics. The new store owners often bought their merchandise on consignment from co-ethnic distributors, and, in the same waves of immigration, they found plenty of customers.

Today, few gated or barred shop windows disrupt the air of bustling commerce on Fulton Mall; there are no apparent vacancies. The absence of neon suggests daytime rather than nighttime activity, but giant signs proclaim the names of stores in plastic letters three feet high: BATH, BED & LINENS, HYPERACTIVE, YOUNG WORLD, FULTON EYES. A children’s clothing store draws shoppers in with bins of plastic sandals at 99¢, dolls for \$2.99, fashion slippers at \$6.99, and girls’ dresses – \$9.99. Bedding, beach towels, lingerie, and music CDs are piled in the plate glass windows of other, less modern storefronts. It is not unusual to see these stores subdivided into smaller spaces called indoor marts that sell cell phones, video games, DVDs, gold jewelry, and wigs, some in bins, some on counters or hanging on walls, and some piled on top of cartons. With branches of Dr Jay’s, Beat Street, and Jimmy Jazz, the street is a recognized center of urbanwear. Branches of

national chains like Foot Locker, along with a large number of individually owned shoe stores, sell the ever popular, humongous sneakers. Franchise stores maintain the presence of all the big cell phone companies, while an occasional shop offers specialty products like gold caps to decorate teeth, a form of niche market bling. It need not be spelled out beyond these details: Fulton Mall attracts so many shoppers ‘of color,’ it is literally a black public sphere – one of the most popular in the metropolitan area. This point is not unacknowledged by local officials. Beneath the green-and-white street sign ‘Fulton Mall’ hangs another, honorific sign: ‘Harriet Ross Tubman Avenue,’ referring to the brave woman who led many slaves to freedom on the Underground Railroad.

Interviews with black shoppers reveal a high level of *comfort* with Fulton Mall as a space of distinctively black consumption.<sup>9</sup> ‘The working class and working poor shops here,’ says a recent Guyanese immigrant of African origin. ‘This is their place, they feel comfortable here . . . . Take the average person who shops here and put them on Fifth Avenue [in Manhattan]; they’re going to feel out of place.’ A middle aged, African American woman, now unemployed, confirms this view: ‘Even if it is just a public place to go and sit and pass the time, where they know they will be accepted and safe and not kicked out because they are hanging out or dressed a certain way. You don’t have to dress up to come down here.’ A small business owner, also African American, praises the specifically black attraction of the merchandise: ‘14th Street and 34th Street in Manhattan is fashion for white people, but people made this [Fulton Mall] a fashion district for the hip-hop community.’

This has long been seen as a disadvantage for encouraging investment. ‘You would bring investors over the Brooklyn Bridge,’ the area’s former city council representative says, ‘and they would only see the color of people’s skin on Fulton Street, and they didn’t see the color of their American Express cards’ (Cardwell 2004). Despite the current boom in real estate development, helped by public subsidies, in majority black areas of the city – notably Harlem, in Manhattan, and Fort Greene-Clinton Hill, near downtown Brooklyn – the cheap stores patronized by low-income blacks in Fulton Mall continue to resist gentrification. One point in their favor is that store owners do a good business and pay the rent, giving building owners little incentive to throw them out and risk collecting lower rents from the small boutiques and eccentric restaurants that attract a richer, whiter clientele. But there is a current of reform that dreams about upgrading the street to attract the mainly white, more affluent residents of the surrounding brownstone communities who avoid Fulton Mall. It is not that these shoppers do not like bargains, and some of them – at least up to the thirty-somethings – may even like hiphop. It is that the visible blackness of the consumption space drives them away.

'It's unattractive,' says a woman who looks about 70 years old, whom I saw at a recent public meeting about upgrading the shopping district.<sup>10</sup> 'You don't see a single white person.' She unwittingly utters aloud the unspoken taboo: In the face of this city's pride in ethnic diversity and its reliance on new immigrants for demographic growth, consumption spaces that cater to people of color are not wanted. They have trouble being seen as middle class.

Up on the dais, the speakers look pained. 'If you're talking about race-based marketing,' an architect tersely says, 'it's not going to happen.' But if there is any change that urban planners, public officials, and real estate developers all desire, it is to insert into Fulton Mall 'the appropriate retailers,' big-name discount stores like H&M that would attract 'area residents' – the brownstone owners, who usually shop online or in Manhattan – as well as downtown Brooklyn office workers, mainly Caribbean, African American, and Latino, who live farther out in the borough. These would be the 'universal stores' that do not discriminate by race or class, where low prices allow everyone to shop, and where the transparency of the display – every item tagged by price, expensive merchandise standing shoulder-to-shoulder with cheaper goods – represents equality (Zukin 2004, pp. 63–88). But these are also stores where consumption practices move to the rhythms of transnational capital. The woman rises again to revise her complaint. She would like to see 'a more upscale, middle class clientele.'

In contrast to the universalizing discourse of shopping, Fulton Mall presents a set of consumption practices that are seen as distinctly black. It's like Times Square was, before being reshaped in the 1990s by entertainment chains – before Times Square was Disneyfied. From the few brand names in the product mix to the 'souk mentality' of bargaining in the indoor marts, most of Fulton Mall keeps its distance from mainstream America. Not all, but many of the faces on music CDs in window displays are black, like the faces of most of the shoppers. For all the shoppers who told researchers that they often run into friends here,<sup>11</sup> as well as for those who just hang out all day, there is a comfort level that makes the mall both 'uniquely Brooklyn and hip-hop.'<sup>12</sup> Unlike on Fifth or Madison Avenue, where dark-skinned shoppers set off invisible alarms, are ignored by the salespeople, and are trailed by security guards, here blackness is not the exception, it is the rule.<sup>13</sup>

But like Times Square, Fulton Mall can be re-imagined. After decades of benign neglect, in 2005 the City Planning Commission 'upzoned' the area for the development of new, taller, denser towers to attract the back offices of financial corporations. There is an economic logic here. These corporations have been moving for years to office parks in northern New Jersey, where costs of doing business are lower and suburban workers are plentiful. Yet these back office jobs could provide jobs for city residents – the same residents of Brooklyn who now shop on Fulton Mall. Fifty or sixty years ago, the dictatorial czar of public infrastructure Robert Moses envisioned downtown

Brooklyn as an office hub, but, in all this time, private investors did not leap at the opportunity. Since the 1990s, however, new development projects, as well as rapidly rising property values in the brownstone neighborhoods, including the mainly black Fort Greene and Clinton Hill, have gradually set up pressure points around Fulton Street. Metrotech, where J. P. Morgan Chase has occupied back offices since the mid-1990s, has slowly become a viable business location. The Brooklyn Academy of Music sponsored a local development corporation that has built studio space for dancers and musicians. Just next to it, Forest City Ratner, a development firm, is building a very large, mixed-use set of apartment houses and office buildings centered on a professional basketball arena designed by Frank Gehry.

Brownstone residents – gentifiers, if you will – are not entirely pleased by the scale of these developments. The Brooklyn Nets Arena threatens to bring congestion and traffic through Park Slope and nearby neighborhoods. Tall office buildings along Fulton Street may likewise overwhelm the relatively small and cohesive business district of the present downtown. Yet, like artists who protest the rising rents that price them out of living lofts, gentifiers have few legal means at their disposal to prevent these changes. Caught between their apparent distaste for Fulton Mall as it is now, and their fear of the rather different space it will become, they are trying to use historic preservation or ‘landmark’ laws, which have helped to legitimize their claim to the residential space of their own neighborhoods, as a legal strategy to control change on Fulton Mall.

Historic preservation is taken seriously in downtown Brooklyn. Brooklyn Heights was the first neighborhood in the city to win a historic district designation in 1965. According to the law, this designation prevents property owners from making any change to a building’s exterior – and, sometimes, to the interior as well – without getting approval from the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission. Proposed changes must be documented by architectural plans and photos, and the local community board reviews the plans before making its own recommendation to the Landmarks Commission. The approval process for changes is lengthy and complex; the designation process for a new district is even more cumbersome and certainly more political. Community groups are zealous advocates, however, and regard a historic district designation as the surest means of protecting their home both aesthetically, in terms of the neighborhood’s architectural coherence, and financially, since the monopoly value of aesthetic coherence keeps property values high. Homeowners in a historic district cannot sell their houses to a developer who will tear them down and build a taller, denser structure. But whatever they may lose financially as individuals, they gain from the collective appreciation of the neighborhood as a whole. Historic district designations give the consumption practices of gentifiers the force of law.

The Brooklyn Heights Association, a community group that began in 1910, lobbied hard to get the city’s first historic preservation law passed in 1965.

Called 'the most powerful community group in the city' by the *New York Times*, this organization had already defeated Robert Moses' plans, in 1945, to run a highway through the neighborhood. 'We plant the trees, protect the views, preserve the brownstones and safeguard the streets,' their website proclaims.<sup>14</sup> 'And we organize the community's response when there is a threat.' Since the city government began to discuss upzoning the commercial district downtown, this group has considered it a threat and argued against it. With the Municipal Art Society (MAS), the Association sponsored a study of the 'landmark qualities' of the buildings on Fulton Mall.<sup>15</sup> Looking above the plastic signs and metal-and-glass storefronts that cover the original facades, and certainly looking beyond the merchandise piled in the windows of the indoor marts, architectural scholars found 28 buildings 'worth of [legal] designation as New York City landmarks.' They documented the distinctive architectural qualities, citing building features, styles, and designs by famous architects spanning the classicism of the early Gilded Age in the 1880s and the Art Deco design of the Great Depression in the 1930s. Looking above the empty storefront of Baker's Shoes, they say that a narrow, five-story structure built around 1870 is 'a fine example of cast iron commercial construction capped by its original mansard roof.' A larger, more imposing building, from the 1920s, is 'neo-gothic limestone' and 'still retains iron shop fronts emblazoned with the Schrafft's name'; for those who do not remember Schrafft's MAS explains that it was 'a popular mid-priced restaurant chain favored, in particular, by [genteel] women shoppers.' Their efforts have succeeded in getting a landmark designation for four buildings, including the old Namm's department store and the Macy's that was formerly A&S.

Black consumers do not have a distinctive place in either planning Brooklyn's new downtown or lobbying against it. Neither a corporate, back office district nor a historic district designation speaks to their consumption practices. Yet, although they themselves do not shop on Fulton Mall, gentrifiers from the brownstone neighborhoods believe that their quality of life – mainly, their alternative consumption practices – are endangered by the planned scale of new office construction. Unlike black consumers – and unlike most shoppers, in general – these gentrifiers have the organizational means – the neighborhood association – and the aesthetic ideology – historic preservation, codified in law – to oppose this change. They will not triumph completely. Some, or maybe even all, of the offices will be built. But just as advocates for historic preservation earlier mobilized to keep the cast iron loft buildings of SoHo from being razed, so they may now make it impossible to tear down all the old buildings in downtown Brooklyn and totally change its sense of scale. What subsequently happened in SoHo may well happen on Fulton Mall: Cheap stores will be replaced by more expensive shops, and the stalls and shops of individual owners will be replaced by national, or transnational, chain stores. Ironically, then, in light of most gentrifiers' ideological support for social and cultural diversity – and their continued

commitment to living in the city – their consumption practices will become a means of excluding poorer, ‘ethnic’ shoppers.

## Shopping for authenticity

Authenticity is a resilient concept in consumer society. Spaces that attract bohemian cultural producers or middle-class homebuyers because they are *authentic* do not always meet their needs as consumers. While prices may be low, the product mix and décor are not aesthetically right. Owners and other patrons do not welcome them and either threaten them with harm or treat them as outsiders. Fairly quickly, new residents are attracted to – or establish their own – outposts of difference, that is, spaces where they can freely perform their own consumption practices. Freedom to be gay instead of hetero, or just to buy raclette instead of American cheese, is ‘emplaced,’ then, in these spaces. Although keeping a defiant distance from mainstream consumer culture creates a safe zone for non-conformity, it also develops new means of commodifying the spaces themselves. Innovative consumption spaces suggest new products, ‘looks,’ and aesthetic codes that become grist for the mass consumption mill; the cutting edge becomes ‘the next new thing’ and soon enough, ‘the next neighborhood’ of gentrification.

Sometimes the consumption practices of an existing community repel new residents, who are turned off by old timers’ social class or race, or by the way their bodies consume public space. Authenticity, then, becomes an effective means for new residents to cleanse and claim space; since it is they and the media for which many of them work who define the term, it reflects their own self-interest. To get the legal leverage of zoning changes or a historic district designation, a new community mobilizes around their own consumption practices. In neighborhoods like Brooklyn Heights, these practices work to the new community’s advantage – but housing prices have risen so high that new home buyers are now ‘super-rich.’ In SoHo, the initial beneficiaries of zoning changes were artists and art galleries, but many of them have been replaced by rich residents and chain stores. It is interesting that the city’s new communities form on the basis of consumption practices rather than on the old divisions of social class, ethnicity, or race. New residents do not always share the same social status or ethnic background, but they do share an appreciation of urban grittiness, a desire to seek out aesthetic evidence of cultural diversity, and an occupational motivation to use the city streets for artistic inspiration. They are united by their consumption of authenticity. And, over time, this norm of alternative consumption becomes a means of excluding others from their space.

## Notes

- 1 On the transformation of the East Village from the 1960s to the 1980s, with the complicity of real estate developers and the city government, see Christopher Mele (2000). Some of this graffiti was stenciled by young artists who moved to the East Village during the 1970s, set up collectives, galleries, and performance spaces, and achieved a remarkable amount of fame in a very short time.
- 2 Mele finds the Lower East Side/East Village is 'a preferred *site* for subcultures and avant-garde movements . . . primarily because the struggles between insiders (ethnic and racial working class) and outsiders (white, middle and upper classes) become a *source* of inspiration' (2000, p. 18).
- 3 As Lloyd points out, the volume of sales is not enough to keep the newer coffeehouse in business (2006, p. 112). Praised by *Rolling Stone* in 1994, the café was shut down in 1998.
- 4 Thanks to my research assistant Peter Frase for visiting Monkeytown.
- 5 There are not many empirical studies of this, but, according to Australian researchers, food stores and restaurants occupy between 20 and 30 percent of retail space in gentrified neighborhoods of Sydney. 'Good food,' in Sydney as in New York, includes exotic foreign, 'new' domestic, and 'fusion' cuisines, as well as cafes and stores selling specialty products (Bridge & Dowling 2001).
- 6 Thanks to Peter Marcuse for suggesting this complementary relationship to me.
- 7 In recent years, demands on farmers' time, including selling at multiple markets in the region, have caused them to hire day workers from both the city and the countryside to sell at the markets. This has occurred not only in New York but all over the U.S. as the number of farmers' markets has increased. Less direct contact with farmers reduces the sense of authenticity.
- 8 White residents of Canarsie rioted against busing of African American schoolchildren into the district in 1971–1974; African Americans in Bushwick looted stores during an all-night electricity blackout in 1977.
- 9 Thanks to Allison Dean, who carried out an ethnographic study of Fulton Mall in 2005, for sharing these interviews with me.
- 10 Municipal Art Society public forum on Fulton Mall, February 9, 2006.
- 11 About half the survey respondents say that they run into friends here (Allison Dean, Fulton Mall Ethnographic Study, 2005).
- 12 Architect's comments, Municipal Art Society public forum on Fulton Mall, February 9, 2006.
- 13 For a typical story, see Zukin, 'Artemio Goes to Tiffany's,' (2004, pp. 145–167).
- 14 Brooklyn Heights Association: see <http://www.brooklynheightsassociation.org>.



- 15 Lisa Kersavage, 'MAS Works to Preserve Buildings in Downtown Brooklyn,' <http://www.mas.org/Advocacy/preservation.cfm>; upzoning report: <http://www.nyc.gov/html/dwnbklyn2/dwnbklynproj1.shtml>.

## References

- Altveer, I. & Sudul, J. (2006) 'An interview with Carlo McCormick', *The Downtown Show: The New York Art Scene, 1974–1984*, *Grey Gazette*, vol. 9, no. 1, pp. 11–13.
- Berman, M. (1970) *The Politics of Authenticity: Radical Individualism and the Emergence of Modern Society*, New York, Atheneum.
- (1982) *All That is Solid Melts Into Air*, New York, Simon and Schuster.
- Berry, B. J. L. (1985) 'Islands of renewal in seas of decay', in *The New Urban Reality*, ed. P. E. Peterson, Washington, DC, Brookings Institution, pp. 69–98.
- Bourdieu, P. (1984) *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press.
- Bridge, G. & Dowling, R. (2001) 'Micro-geographies of retail and gentrification', *Australian Geographer*, vol. 32, no. 1, pp. 93–107.
- Brooks, D. (2000) *Bobos in Paradise*, New York, Simon and Schuster.
- Cardwell, D. (2004) 'Rethinking Atlantic Center with the customer in mind', *New York Times*, 26 May.
- Cohen, L. (2003) *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America*, New York, Knopf.
- Douglas, M. (1997) 'In defense of shopping', in *The Shopping Experience*, eds P. Falk & C. Campbell, London, Sage, pp. 15–30.
- Elias, N. (1978) *The Civilizing Process: The History of Manners*, trans. Edmond Jephcott, New York, Urizen. (Originally published 1939).
- Grazian, D. (2003) *Blue Chicago*, Chicago, IL, University of Chicago Press.
- Kunzru, H. (2005) 'Market forces', *The Guardian*, 7 December. Available online at: <http://shopping.guardian.co.uk/food/story/0,,1660557,00.html>
- Lees, L. (2003) 'Super-gentrification: the case of Brooklyn Heights, New York City', *Urban Studies*, vol. 40, no. 12, pp. 2487–2509.
- Lefebvre, H. (1991) *The Production of Space*, Oxford, Blackwell.
- Ley, D. (1996) *The New Middle Class and the Remaking of the Inner City*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- (2003) 'Artists, aestheticization and the field of gentrification', *Urban Studies*, vol. 40, no. 12, pp. 2527–2544.
- Lloyd, R. (2006) *Neo-Bohemia: Art and Commerce in the Post-Industrial City*, New York, Routledge.
- Lyons, J. (2005) 'Think Seattle, act globally: specialty coffee, commodity biographies, and the promotion of place', *Cultural Studies*, vol. 19, no. 1, pp. 14–34.
- Mele, C. (2000) *Selling the Lower East Side: Culture, Real Estate, and Resistance in New York City*, Minneapolis, MN, University of Minnesota Press.

- Miller, D. (1997) 'Could shopping ever really matter?', in *The Shopping Experience*, eds P. Falk & C. Campbell, Sage, London, pp. 31–55.
- Mooney, J. (2006) 'A bar of stiff drinks shakes up a cocktail mix', *New York Times*, 1 January.
- Peterson, R. A. (1997) *Creating Country Music: Fabricating Authenticity*, Chicago, IL, University of Chicago Press.
- Pollan, M. (2006) *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, New York, Penguin.
- Seigel, J. (1986) *Bohemian Paris*, New York, Viking.
- Taylor, M. J. (2006) 'Playing the field: the downtown scene and cultural production, an introduction', in *The Downtown Book: The New York Art Scene, 1974–1984*, ed. M. J. Taylor, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, pp. 17–39.
- Trilling, L. (1972) *Sincerity and Authenticity*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press.
- Zucker Seeman, H. & Siegfried, A. (1978) *SoHo*, New York, Neal-Schuman Publishers.
- Zukin, S. (1982) *Loft Living: Culture and Capital in Urban Change*, Baltimore, MD, Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Zukin, S. (1995) *The Cultures of Cities*, Oxford, Blackwell.
- Zukin, S. (2004) *Point of Purchase: How Shopping Changed American Culture*, New York, Routledge.