



Habitus of the Hood. Edited by *Chris Richardson & Hans A. Skott-Myhre*. Chicago, IL: Intellect, 2012, 325 pp. ISBN 9781841504797 (pkb).

I'm so hood, I can't help it
I'm so hood, I can't help it
Love me for being me
Cause I can't change it, can't rearrange it
I am what I am
So love me for being me

I'm So Hood (50 Cent, 2003)

In their compendium *Habitus of the Hood*, Chris Richardson and Han Skott-Myhre embark on an ambitious project that seeks to rethink the experiential qualities of life at the social margins. Their focus is on urban sites and their inhabitants, who are often defined as violent and “carceral,” corroded by pervasive “weariness and distrust” and, most agonizingly, prone to reproduction across generations.

Working explicitly within French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of *habitus*¹, the editors present a clear and theoretically appropriate frame, adopting Bourdieu’s definition as “‘a system of durable, transposable dispositions’ that form ‘principles which generate and organize practices and representations’” (p. 9). They seek to reinforce the hood’s mobile, expansive character that is simultaneously physical, psychological, and symbolic, explaining, “as the saying goes, ‘you can take me out of the hood but you can’t take the hood out of me.’ This internalizing of one’s environment, its implications, and its representations are what we seek to interrogate” (p. 9). The 14 chapters employ varying methodological approaches and are organized into two sections, adopting Bourdieu’s dual emphases: “the hood as lived practice” and “representing the hood in music, film, and art.”

Bourdieu was no homeboy, yet *habitus* is entirely applicable to the study of localized experiences and practices within everyday urban life in the hood. For instance, there is no sharp discontinuity between Bourdieu’s attention to the dispositional characteristics of situated life and the ways of being that are articulated in the rapper B.A.M.’s reference to “hoodness,” a term that speaks to a deep affective alignment with one’s proximate locale, its people, and its particular rhythms (B.A.M., 2011). Hoodness is but a contemporary, vernacular word, however in the context of this book it may warrant status as a neologism that captures the internalized sense of *habitus*; it has the potential to encompass the perceptual and action-oriented engagement with what Bourdieu calls “structuring structures” and the exchanges within and across generations that sustain and reinforce attitudes and responses to one’s social locus.

While the hood is a frequent and resonant term in the hip-hop lexicon and hip-hop is laced into several chapters, this book is not solely about hip-hop. Explaining that the concept of “the hood” has expanded beyond its associations with “the young, predominantly black subculture in North America” (p. 9), the editors acknowledge its global scope and the multiple expressions of self-awareness and community presence that emerge at the nexus of the global and the local. Indeed, the chapters display

an impressive global perspective with analyses of hood life in the U.S., Canada, Australia, and Serbia, as well as references to the regional permutations—banlieus, barrios, favelas, ghettos, and periferias—that emerge and proliferate worldwide. Scholars and rap artists alike may thus find inspiration in the spatial contours of the hood and the disposition of hoodness, yet Ice Cube’s suggestion that “every hood’s the same” (Ice Cube, 2006) is contested by contributor Tamari Kitossa who reminds us that hoods are “institutionalized in ways that are unique to the development of the state and society in which they exist” (p. 127).

The essays introduce a variety of institutional settings and sites of power that are situated in tension or dialogue with the sphere of the hood, including political and policy domains, real estate sectors, music and film industries, museums and gallery spaces, and schools. This tension is important within the book’s specific contexts, since the hood exists in dialectical relation to other places and spaces or, as the essays frequently assert, as a place and space of Otherness. The tensions of difference also take the shape of resistance in several chapters, a theme that is emphasized by the book’s cover, with its American flag imagery and the symbolic antagonism suggested by a close-up photo of a boy’s dirt-encrusted hand with a prominently extended middle finger.

The diversity of studies reveals the richness of the theory of habitus; this is evident when, for instance, Sarah Baker, Andy Bennett, and Patricia Wise delve into the conflict between longstanding (and skeptical) inhabitants of Australia’s Gold Coast region, opportunistic real estate vultures, and the optimistic buyers who seek a piece of a well-packaged dream. The hood is embraced and reviled depending on whose perspectives are privileged or whose interests are deemed to be most urgent. The malleability of the hood emerges when it is conceived both as an anchoring component in place-based historical narratives of habitus and as an element to be managed (or squashed) in urban development initiatives. Erin Morton and Sarah Smith open their chapter with an account of the 2002 destruction of a six-year Tent City settlement erected along Toronto’s desirable waterfront region, a site that was eventually reclaimed by the U.S. Home Depot corporation. Their chapter covers the slippages between space, politics, and artistic appropriation and the habitus that can evolve in occupied or land “squat” conditions. While the book’s production schedule almost surely disallowed inclusion of the 2011 Occupy movement, this chapter—and several others too—raises interesting points that are particularly salient in its aftermath. *Habitus* offers a means of analyzing Occupy’s spontaneous communities and instant hoods that were forged in retaliation against the vagaries of corporate and government power that permeate the world’s cities and extend through caustic neoliberal agendas. Indeed, if time had been kinder, a chapter on the subgroup Occupy the Hood would have been most welcome.

While only two chapters in the tome seem slightly misplaced (Pamela and Justin Hollander’s essay on activist literature and urban education and Katie Scierba’s piece on the hood, hip-hop, and urban school curricula), two other chapters that stand out are those employing autoethnography. While I admit to a general indifference to the methodology, I found here that the chapters by Stephen Muzzatti and by Donna Nicol and Jennifer Yee provided the most grounded sense of life in the hood, with the au-

thors employing their own habitus/hoodness in the analysis of spaces and places that inform their very being.

Nicol and Yee, professors from the hyper-represented hood culture of Los Angeles, interview one another in what they refer to as “counter-stories as reflections of our outsider-within status” (p. 161). They do so as a means of exploring “how the experience of growing up in Compton, California, has shaped our worldviews and life trajectories” (p. 161), providing a lucid corrective to the habitus portrayed on movie screens or in rap tracks such as DJ Quik’s “Born and Raised in Compton” (1991). Muzzatti’s “retrospective autoethnography” (p. 49) amplifies a sense of place and habitus in a manner that enunciates the flow, cadence, and language of his upbringing in Toronto’s “Little Italy.” His dual emphasis on memory and coming of age (described through his accounts of interaction with young peers, neighboring adults, parents, and grandparents) reinforces the fact that the hood is not just a spatial construct; rather, it harbours important temporal elements that inflect dispositional qualities of the self and of wider communities.

The book is prone to some repetition—this is understandable in a collection organized around a single orienting theoretical concept. For instance, several of the chapters isolate Bourdieu’s definitions about the dispositional characteristics associated with “habitus” and the theme of marginal, subordinate, and often-resistant subjects emerges in most chapters. There are also two unfortunate omissions; missing is an index and a list of contributors. This is a shame as these are each relatively simple additions that would enhance this otherwise fine book that Richardson and Skott-Myhre have assembled.

Note

1. Bourdieu (2002) describes structuring structures as: “principles of the generation and structuring of practices and representations which can be objectively ‘regulated’ and ‘regular’ without in any way being the product of obedience to rules, objectively adapted to their goals without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary to attain them, being all this, collectively orchestrated without being the product of the orchestrating action of a conductor” (p. 72).

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Murray Forman, Northeastern University