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The Eviction of Critical Perspectives from Gentrification Research

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Abstract

Recent years have seen an extraordinary resurgence of interest in the process of gentrification, accompanied by a surge of articles published on the topic. This article looks at some recent literature — both scholarly and popular — and considers the reasons why the often highly critical perspectives on gentrification that we saw in earlier decades have dwindled. Whilst a number of reasons could be put forward, three in particular are discussed. First, the resilience of theoretical and ideological squabbles over the causes of gentrification, at the expense of examining its effects; second, the demise of displacement as a defining feature of the process and as a research question; and third, the pervasive influence of neoliberal urban policies of 'social mix' in central city neighbourhoods. It is argued that the 'eviction' of critical perspectives from a field in which they were once plentiful has serious implications for those at risk from gentrification, and that reclaiming the term from those who have sugarcoated what was not so long ago a 'dirty word' (Smith, 1996) is essential if political challenges to the process can be effective.

> When President Bush insists that 'out of New Orleans is going to come that great city again,' it is difficult to believe that good quality, secure and affordable social housing is what this administration has in mind. Wholesale gentrification at a scale as yet unseen in the United States is the more likely outcome. After the Bush hurricane, the poor, African-American and working class people who evacuated will not be welcomed back to New Orleans, which will in all likelihood be rebuilt as a tourist magnet with a Disneyfied BigEasyVille oozing even more manufactured authenticity than the surviving French Quarter nearby. We can look back and identify any number of individual decisions taken and not taken that made this hurricane such a social disaster. But the larger picture is more than the sum of its parts. It is not a radical conclusion that the dimensions of the Katrina disaster owe in large part not just to the actions of this or that local or federal administration but the operation of a capitalist market more broadly, especially in its neo-liberal garb (Neil Smith, 2005).
>
> The city was moving in the right direction before Katrina struck. While residents felt the hangover from the historical heritage of political corruption (45 percent of residents say city government has low ethical standards), a large majority felt their leadership was moving New Orleans in the 'right direction'. On a visit to the city in August, I was struck by the large number of professional ex-pats who had been attracted back to New Orleans because of that

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> change of direction. Tremendous enthusiasm was being generated by the efforts of Greater New Orleans Inc., Lt. Gov. Mitch Landrieu, and others to spur the development of dynamic creative-industry clusters around the region's technology base, universities, tourism, and music and film industries . . . The people of New Orleans know what they want. More than just reconstructed levees, a refurbished downtown, or even rebuilt homes, they want the soul of the city back. Their insights — both angry and enthusiastic — remind us of the underlying source of resilience that really rebuilds fallen cities: the people. Let's hope that their leaders will understand this, and provide us all with a compelling model of a creative, prosperous and sustainable city (Richard Florida, 2006).

Lattes and lethargy

One of the more memorable comments to come my way since I began researching and writing about gentrification was from a German political scientist who had spent five years living in the gentrifying neighbourhood of Prenzlauer Berg, Berlin. At a workshop in Vancouver, when I explained my research interests, he replied 'Interesting. But surely gentrification research is just an excuse to hang out in cool neighbourhoods sipping lattes?' This comment, intended in jest, is actually rather astute, for it captures precisely the popular, and increasingly scholarly, image of gentrification. The perception is no longer about rent increases, landlord harassment and working-class displacement, but rather street-level spectacles, trendy bars and cafes, i-Pods, social diversity and funky clothing outlets. As David Ley (2003: 2527) put it, gentrification is 'not a sideshow in the city, but a major component of the urban imaginary'. As the municipal rush to endorse Richard Florida's celebration and promotion of a new 'creative class' in urban centres attests (see Peck, 2005, for a swashbuckling critique), gentrification — not so much the term itself, which is mercifully still something of a 'dirty word' (Smith, 1996), but the *image* of hip, bohemian, cool, arty tribes who occupy the cafes, galleries and cycle paths of formerly disinvested neighbourhoods once lacking in 'creativity', is increasingly seen as a sign of a healthy economic present and future for cities across the globe. In keeping with the discursive strategy of the neoliberal project, which deploys carefully selected language to fend off criticism and resistance, organized around a narrative of competitive progress (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 2001; Tickell and Peck, 2003), we have apparently arrived in the age of regeneration, revitalization and renaissance in the hearts of Richard Florida's (2002) cities of technology, talent and tolerance. Lost in the alliterative maze are the critical perspectives on gentrification upon which our understandings of the process and its effects were built. This article seeks to uncover how and why critical perspectives got evicted from gentrification research, and argues that they need to be reinstated in the context of distressing evidence of continuing evictions of low-income and working-class residents from neighbourhoods, and continuing embourgoisement of central city locations resulting in severe housing affordability problems. The apparent lethargy towards addressing the negative effects of gentrification (particularly in Britain) has been pointed out in a recent editorial on the subject (Slater *et al*., 2004), so this article takes up this issue in an attempt to throw critical light on what Peck (2005: 760) has called 'cappuccino urban politics, with plenty of froth'.

Gentrification web

In early 2000, frustrated by the lack of public information on gentrification available online, I wrote and designed *Gentrification Web*.[1] As a brief visit to the website reveals, I knew (and still know) nothing about effective web design, but I did know enough about gentrification to summarize decades of debate in accessible terms, and spell out what

1 http://members.lycos.co.uk/gentrification. This reference to my website should not be treated as a form of advertising; I discuss it to point out the overwhelmingly critical reactions to gentrification that I have learned about since I launched the site.

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the process is and who it affects, accompanied by some photographs I snapped in London and a few relevant links. The tone of the website is largely critical, partly because two years previously I had been evicted from my flat in gentrifying Tooting, London, because of a rent increase, but mostly because the gentrification literature which informed it is predominantly critical. After I launched the site, I received little feedback and very few emails, and wondered why I had bothered. But around six months later, my inbox began receiving several emails a week from interested browsers, which has remained the case to this day. Aside from a marketing executive from the *Seagram* corporation, former owners of the trendy *Oddbins* wine stores in the UK, who asked me for a list of gentrifying neighbourhoods in British cities so he could advise the company board where to locate future stores,[2] the people who have contacted me over the years have one thing in common — they are against gentrification because of what they have seen, heard or experienced. Neighbourhood organizations, displaced tenants and political activists from Boston to Buenos Aires to Budapest have told me stories about gentrification in their part of the world; other browsers have sent attachments documenting local struggles over gentrification through photographs, flyers and protest art. Some stories of upheaval and landlord harassment have been quite distressing to read, whilst some accounts of resistance and fighting for affordable housing have been very uplifting. With the feedback from traffic to the website it became impossible to see gentrification as anything other than a serious issue — a major disturbance in the lives of urban residents who are not homeowners, gentrifiers or hipsters. Not only has the website proved to be a useful tool in combining scholarship with political commitment — its very existence counters the latte-soaked image of gentrification articulated by journalism and policy discourse.

Yet this is an image which, at precisely the same time as these emails have been arriving, has been additionally fuelled by some recent scholarship on gentrification, which is far removed from the radical, critical politics of gentrification research of previous decades. A process directly linked not just to the injustice of community upheaval and working-class displacement but also to the erosion of affordable housing in so many cities is now seen by increasing numbers of researchers as less of a problem than it used to be, or worse, as something positive. The next section of this article provides a taster of some of the published work that contributes to the now popularly held, yet ultimately incorrect, assumption that gentrification 'isn't so bad after all'.

The tragically hip?[3]

In a quite remarkable about-turn in her perspective on gentrification, Sharon Zukin recently co-authored an article focusing on the commercial activity taking place on one block in the East Village of Lower Manhattan (a neighbourhood which has seen more than its fair share of gentrification and displacement) and argued that 'far from destroying a community by commercial gentrification, East Ninth Street suggests that a retail concentration of designer stores may be a territory of innovation in the urban economy, producing both a marketable and a sociable neighbourhood node' (Zukin and Kosta, 2004: 101). Even more remarkably, Zukin appears persuaded by the arguments of Richard Florida (2002) on the aesthetic and economic benefits of bourgeois bohemia, as evidenced by passages such as 'the East Village illustrates how a cultural enclave that is stable, diverse and broad-minded can attract the "creative class"' (Zukin and Kosta, 2004: 102) and 'far from criticizing new consumer culture as evidence of gentrification, we think it is good to encourage consumption spaces that provide complementary kinds

2 I refused, though I must confess to being tempted to ask for a year's supply of wine in return.

3 The Tragically Hip is the name of a well known Canadian rock band from Kingston, Ontario — but it's an equally suitable name for a band of scholars promoting gentrification (even if this promotion is sometimes unintentional).

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of distinction' (2004: 102). The entire article treats East Ninth Street as a block utterly independent from the rest of the neighbourhood and all its history of class struggle and political turbulence: 'the block does not exactly conform to this wild history' (2004: 106). This is a conclusion drawn from unsubstantiated comments of storeowners on the block, some with a hazy grasp of history,[4] and from an observational research project that feels more like a series of shopping excursions. In its theoretical redundancy,[5] rather tedious street-level detail[6] and obvious affection for Eileen Fisher's clothing store,[7] this article is particularly disappointing, not least because it comes from the pen of an eminent urban sociologist whose landmark book *Loft living* (1982) had the dual impact of first, critically exposing the 'artistic mode of production'[8] behind rampant gentrification and industrial displacement in New York's SoHo district, and second, convincing gentrification researchers that culture and capital could be understood as complementary forces in driving the reinvestment and resultant middle-class conquest of urban neighbourhoods. On the basis of this article, opponents of gentrification, it seems, may have seen the defection to the creative class of one of their best and most critical voices.

Up until the late 1980s, very few, if any, scholarly articles celebrating gentrification existed. The academic literature was characterized by increasing theoretical sophistication as researchers tried to understand the causes of the process, and this was often in response to the clear injustice of the displacement of working-class residents, and the far from innocent role of both public and private institutions (see Wyly and Hammel, 2001, for an excellent discussion). Celebrations of gentrification were confined to media and popular discourse, especially surrounding the yuppie-boom years of the 1980s, and most memorably on the pages of the *New York Times*, when the Real Estate Board of New York felt it needed to defend the process in the face of major resistance by taking out an advert trumpeting how 'neighbourhoods and lives blossom' under gentrification (see Smith, 1996: 31; Newman and Wyly, 2006: 23–4). The gentrifiers themselves were seldom a topic of investigation; when they were, influential statements on class constitution vis-à-vis gentrification were published that never entertained the prospect of gentrification being the true *saviour* of central city neighbourhoods, even if these statements were guided by contrasting political ideologies and theoretical

4 For example, one interviewee 'discusses racial diversity and mentions that Charlie Parker, the jazz musician, lived in the East Village for years with his white wife; he speculates that they felt comfortable here. At this point in the early 1980s, despite low-key racial integration, fears about disorder, and low rents, an astute observer could feel a new wave of change' (Zukin and Kosta, 2004: 108). These sentences would be fine, were it not for the fact that Charlie Parker died in 1955!

5 Both the title of the paper and the mention of 'distinction' suggest that Zukin was guided by Pierre Bourdieu in making these arguments, but his significant theoretical framework for the interpretation of middle-class constitution and practices is never fully explored nor deployed. There are in fact subsections entitled 'The anatomy of the block' and 'The synergies of diversity', which seem more of a nod to the rhetoric of Richard Florida.

6 'Because many of the stores stay open until 7 or 8 at night, seven days a week, there are always men and women strolling the block. This evening time is almost a rush hour, with some residents returning home from work and visitors who have come to eat or drink in the East Village pausing to do a little window-shopping. The Ukrainian restaurant, moreover, is open 24 hours a day, and since it spills around the corner, it adds to the block's vitality. The other restaurant, Ninth Street Café, is located in the middle of the block. It attracts a large number of young people, who wait outside for a table for brunch on the weekend. Especially in summer, when Ukrainia's sidewalk tables are crowded and the stores leave their doors open, there is an attractive, sociable, and ultimately safe feeling to the block – all of which is accomplished without a uniform design code or the visible presence of security guards' (Zukin and Kosta, 2004: 106).

7 'Like The Gap, which underwent a full-fledged corporate makeover in the 1980s, these small shops installed large plate-glass windows, used bright lighting, and painted the walls white; their clean lines and illumination accentuated the subtle colors [at Eileen Fisher]' (Zukin and Kosta, 2004: 109).

8 A cultural consumption strategy for the urban middle classes, rooted in public–private historic preservation, setting in motion a capital accumulation strategy.

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frameworks (e.g. Rose, 1984 for a socialist feminist perspective; Smith, 1987a for a Marxist perspective; and Ley, 1980 for a liberal humanist perspective).

In 1989, a very different assessment was offered by the Canadian sociologist Jon Caulfield, in an article entitled 'Gentrification and desire' (Caulfield, 1989). In a deliberate riposte to the dominance of Marxist/structuralist interpretations of gentrification, he argued that 1970s and 1980s gentrification in Toronto was a collective middle-class rejection of the oppressive conformity of suburbia, modernist planning and market principles — all part of what became known (and now often romanticized) as the 'reform era' of Canadian urban politics. Gentrification was pitched as a 'critical social practice' (see Caulfield, 1994) — a concerted effort by Toronto's expanding middle-class intelligentsia to create an 'alternative urban future' to the city's post-war modernist development. Heavily influenced by Walter Benjamin, Roland Barthes, Jonathan Raban and Marcel Rioux, he argued the following:

> Old city places offer difference and freedom, privacy and fantasy, possibilities for carnival . . . These are not just matters of philosophical abstraction but, in a carnival sense . . . the force that Benjamin believed was among the most vital stimuli to resistance to domination. 'A big city is an encyclopaedia of sexual possibility,' a characterization to be grasped in its wider sense; the city is 'the place of our meeting with the other' (Caulfield, 1989: 625).

Caulfield concluded his article by commending Toronto's middle-class gentrifiers for attempting to 'meet with the other' in their resistance to faceless suburbia: 'resettlement of old city neighbourhoods is not reducible to bourgeois politics but rather is an effort by people, together with their neighbors, to seek some control over their lives' (1989: 627). In his important book on Toronto's gentrification, Caulfield (1994: 201–11) does acknowledge that these early gentrifiers became increasingly concerned about what was happening to their neighbourhoods (and working-class neighbours) as gentrification accelerated and matured, but his closing argument that early gentrification in Toronto amounted to a Castells-like urban social movement (*ibid*.: 228–9) played a key role in producing the *emancipatory discourse* on gentrification in Canada that has been documented elsewhere (Slater 2002; 2004a; 2005). In its focus on the desiderata for middle-class residence in 'old city' places, this discourse tends to sugarcoat the process with a sort of romantic glaze that has the (often unintended) consequence of steering the understanding of gentrification away from the negative effects it produces.

This romanticism has been taken to an extreme form in two pieces of recent writing on gentrification in American cities, one by an architect/journalist, another by a legal scholar, with more or less the same title — 'Three cheers for gentrification' and 'Two cheers for gentrification', respectively. In the former, Andres Duany promoted gentrification as follows:

> For every San Francisco and Manhattan where real estate has become uniformly too expensive, there are many more cities like Detroit, Trenton, Syracuse, Milwaukee, Houston, and Philadelphia that could use all the gentrification they can get (2001: 36).

The emancipatory discourse was then taken to new levels in the following sentence:

> Gentrification rebalances a concentration of poverty by providing the tax base, rub-off work ethic, and political effectiveness of a middle-class, and in the process improves the quality of life for all a community's residents. It is the rising tide that lifts all boats (*ibid.*: 36).

The conclusion, in particular, shows the dismissive, almost vitriolic way in which Duany treated critics of gentrification:

> So what is the fuss over gentrification about? Many times it's just the squawking of old neighbourhood bosses who can't bear the self-reliance of the incoming middle-class, and can't accept the dilution of their political base. But theirs is a swan song. Middle-class Americans are choosing to live in many inner-city neighbourhoods because these places possess urbane attributes not found in newer residential areas, and this flow cannot be regulated away . . . And

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> finally, people should not be prevented from profiting on the natural appreciation of their neighbourhoods. Not in America (*ibid.*: 39).

A couple of years later, Peter Byrne, an American legal scholar, provided a more comprehensive, scholarly round of applause for gentrification, contending that the process is 'good on balance for the poor and ethnic minorities' (Byrne, 2003: 406). Byrne argued that gentrification benefits low-income residents economically, by 'expanding more employment opportunities in providing locally the goods and services that more affluent residents can afford' (*ibid.*: 419), politically, by creating 'urban political fora in which affluent and poor citizens must deal with each other's priorities in a democratic process' (*ibid.*: 421), and socially, as 'new more affluent residents will rub shoulders with poorer existing residents on the streets, in shops, and within local institutions, such as public schools' (*ibid.*: 422). In his conclusion, Byrne, a self-confessed gentrifier living in Washington DC, provides a telling illustration of bourgeois emancipatory romanticism vis-à-vis gentrification:

> On a recent Saturday, I attended a multi-family yard sale at the nearby Townhomes on Capitol Hill with my wife and teenage daughter. The member co-op that manages the project had organized the sale as a 'community day.' We strolled along the sidewalks chatting with the residents about how they enjoyed living there and examining their modest wares. We bought a number paperbacks, many of which were by black authors. My daughter bought a remarkable pink suitcase, rather beat up, which perfectly met her sense of cool. My wife, being who she is, reorganized several residents' display of goods to show them off to better effect, to the delight of the sellers. I bought and devoured a fried fish sandwich that Mrs. Jones was selling from her apartment. Such a modest event hardly makes news and certainly does not cancel the injustices of our metropolitan areas. No public officials attended nor made claims for what it promised for the future. Yet it was a time of neighbourly intercourse, money circulation and mutual learning. If multiplied many times, it promises a better future for our communities (*ibid.*: 431).

Together, paperbacks, pink suitcases and fried fish sandwiches blend into a startlingly upbeat and perhaps tragically hip representation of a neighbourhood which has been documented by others as having severe housing affordability problems — in fact, as Wyly and Hammel (2001: 240) point out, it is 'one of the most intensely gentrified neighbourhoods in the country', so much so that the adjacent Ellen Wilson Dwellings public housing complex was subjected to HOPE VI demolition and then gentrification in the form of 'a complete [mixed-income] redevelopment of the site with 153 townhouse units designed to resemble mews typical of the historic district of which the complex is part' (*ibid.*: 240). No doubt Byrne would be delighted.

Two striking recent research trends in the gentrification literature, particularly in British contexts, have shifted attention away from the negative effects of the process. The first, and perhaps most prevalent, is research which investigates the constitution and practices of middle-class gentrifiers.[9] The basis for this work was a feeling that the only way to gain a complete understanding of the causes of gentrification is to trace the movements and aspirations of the gentry. For some time now, there has been wide agreement that class should be the undercurrent in the study of gentrification (Hamnett, 1991; Smith, 1992; Wyly and Hammel, 1999), and the research response has been to find out about the behaviour of the *middle* classes, particularly why they are seeking to locate in previously disinvested neighbourhoods. In Britain, and especially London, the middle-class dilemma of having to live in a certain 'catchment area' to send your child to a rare 'good school' (a parental strategy of social reproduction deployed to ensure that children will also be middle class) has been captured by work explaining how gentrification is anchored around the intersection of housing and education markets (e.g.

9 For example, see Caulfield (1994), Podmore (1998), Bondi (1999a), Bridge (2001; 2003), Butler and Robson (2001; 2003), Robson and Butler (2001), Hamnett (2003), Karsten (2003), Rofe (2003).

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Butler and Robson, 2003; Hamnett, 2003). Absent from this work is any careful qualitative consideration of working-class people and how the gentrification–education connection affects them. It seems that there is something of an obsession with the formation of middle-class metropolitan 'habituses', using Bourdieu's *Distinction* as a theoretical guide, and if the working class are mentioned at all, it is usually in the form of how the middle classes feel about 'others', or neighbours not like them. These feelings are often rather depressing, as evidenced by Tim Butler's investigation of gentrification in Barnsbury, London:

> Gentrification in Barnsbury (and probably London) is therefore apparently playing a rather dangerous game. It values the presence of others — that much has been seen from the quotations from respondents — but chooses not to interact with them. They are, as it were, much valued as a kind of social wallpaper, but no more (Butler, 2003: 2484).

Yet Butler quickly moves away from portraying gentrification as a dangerous game, and offers this interpretation in the final sentences of his paper:

> This is an inseparable element of the metropolitan habitus — of feelings, attitudes and beliefs — which transforms the inner city into the natural habitat for a section of the new (urban-seeking) middle classes. At the same time, the imperatives of everyday life (work and consumption) and intergenerational social reproduction (schooling and socialisation) give rise to a group of embattled settlers. Thus, a group that has transformed an inner-city working-class district into one of the iconic sites of middle-class living nevertheless still often attributes 'authenticity' to a largely non-existent native working class. Gentrification has not so much displaced the working class as simply blanked out those who are not like themselves: they do not socialise with them, eat with them or send their children to school with them (2003: 2484).

Might it be an equally dangerous game, first, to portray the inner city as a 'natural habitat' for the new middle classes; second, to portray this same group as 'embattled settlers' when the structural constraints on their own lifestyle preferences is a far less worrying problem than being priced out of a city altogether, as has happened to so many worse-off Londoners in the last 20 years; and third, to argue from a study which did not set out to study displacement in London that gentrification 'has not so much displaced the working class'? On that last point, it is worth noting that a decade earlier, Loretta Lees published a paper on the same neighbourhood and pointed out this:

> Creeping [vacancy] decontrol enabled the 'winkling' of tenants and the sale of buildings to developers and/or individuals who would then gentrify the property. 'Winkling' refers to the process of tenants being forced to leave their homes by bribery and harassment. In Barnsbury when vacant possession value became higher than tenanted investment value 'winkling' occurred and the vacated property was sold. When one of Knight's [an unscrupulous Barnsbury landlord] tenants reported him to the rent tribunal, he turned off the electricity, locked her out, threw out her belongings, bolted the door, libelled her and threatened to shoot her (Lees, 1994: 208).

My purpose here is *not* to criticize research (or researchers) that seeks to understand the urban experiences of more advantaged social groups, and certainly not to demonize gentrifiers, whose identities are multiple and whose ambivalent politics often contradict assumptions of a group intent on booting out extant low-income groups from their neighbourhoods (Ley, 2004), but rather to point out that there is next to nothing published on the experiences of non-gentrifying groups living in the neighbourhoods into which the much-researched cosmopolitan middle classes are arriving en masse. A dozen years ago now Jan van Weesep argued that we need to focus on the effects — not the causes — of gentrification, and that one way to do this is through the lens of urban policy, or in his words, 'to put the gentrification debate into policy perspective' (van Weesep, 1994: 74). His call drew numerous responses, and it could be argued that he changed the course of the gentrification debate, as exemplified by the emphasis on

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the role of policy in so much recent and current research.[10] One wonders what might have been the outcome if van Weesep had said that we need 'to put the gentrification debate into working-class perspective'. Instead, academic inquiry into gentrification has looked at either the role of urban policy in harnessing the aspirations of middle-class professionals, or provided a closer view of the issues that they are confronting when choosing where to live. It is as if the middle classes are the only characters occupying the stage of the gentrification, with the working-class backstage, both perennial understudies and perennially understudied. This is particularly disappointing, for middle-class gentrifiers are, of course, only one part of a much larger story (Slater *et al*., 2004).

The second research trend serving as a screen that obfuscates the reality of working-class upheaval and displacement via gentrification is the infatuation with how to define the process, and whether we should remain faithful to Ruth Glass's (1964) coinage. While Peter Marcuse (1999) is right to argue that how gentrification is evaluated depends a great deal on how it is defined, it is baffling to see entire articles deliberating the definition of the term (e.g. Redfern, 2003), given the extraordinary depth and progression of so much gentrification scholarship since 1964. Hackworth and Smith (2001) helpfully set out the ways in which gentrification has mutated since the 1960s, using New York City as an analytical lens, but thankfully stopped short of ruminating at length over what gentrification actually *is*. Hackworth (2002: 815) later succinctly defined gentrification as 'the production of space for progressively more affluent users', the justification being:

> in light of several decades of research and debate that shows that the concept is usefully applied to non-residential urban change and that there is frequently a substantial time lag between when the subordinate class group gives way to more affluent users. That is, the displacement or replacement is often neither direct nor immediate, but the process remains 'gentrification' because the space is being transformed for more affluent users (*ibid*.: 839).

As well as trying to capture recent changes to the gentrification process that were impossible to predict in 1964, Hackworth is tuned in to another part of the Ruth Glass definition which, it seems, many authors cannot find — the critical emphasis on class transformation. This strikes me as the central problem in the work of Martin Boddy and Christine Lambert (Boddy and Lambert, 2002; see also Boddy, forthcoming), insisting that the 'new-build' developments in central Bristol and elsewhere (and the mixed-use consumption landscapes that accompany them) are not gentrification:

> We would question whether the sort of new housing development and conversion described in Bristol and other second tier UK cities, or indeed the development of London's Docklands can, in fact, still be characterised as 'gentrification' . . . '[G]entrification', as originally coined, referred primarily to a rather different type of 'new middle class', buying up older, often 'historic' individual housing units and renovating and restoring them for their own use — and in the process driving up property values and driving out former, typically lower income working class residents . . . We would conclude that to describe these processes as gentrification is stretching the term and what it set out to describe too far (Boddy and Lambert, 2002: 20).

In reaction, it is worth reminding ourselves that we are *over forty years* beyond Ruth Glass' coinage! So much has happened to city economies (especially labour and housing markets), cultures and landscapes since then that it makes no sense to focus on this narrow version of the process anymore, and to insist that gentrification must remain faithful to the fine empirical details of her geographically and historically contingent definition. Furthermore, in Boddy and Lambert's work there is no sense that they have considered what *is* still relevant from Glass' classic statement — the political importance of capturing a process of *class transformation*. In Bristol, it is hard to get beyond the

10 For example, Smith and DeFilippis (1999), Wyly and Hammel (1999; 2001), Badcock (2001), Hackworth and Smith (2001), Hackworth (2002), Lees (2003a; 2003b), Slater (2004b), plus many of the papers in the special issue of Urban *Studies* (2003).

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bare fact that the new developments described are appearing both in reaction to and to stimulate further demand from a specific class of resident — the middle-class consumer. The middle classes are the *gentri-* part of the word, and they are moving into new-build residential developments — built on formerly working-class industrial space — which are off limits to the working classes. Furthermore, as Davidson and Lees (2005: 1186) have explained in a study of new-build developments of London, such developments 'have acted like beachheads from which the tentacles of gentrification have slowly stretched into the adjacent neighbourhoods'.

The trendy developments taking place adjacent to the waterfront in Bristol's city centre have also been the focus of some more policy-oriented (and funded) research (Tallon and Bromley, 2004; Bromley *et al*., 2005). In contrast to some highly critical work on the gentrifying intentions behind the British government's 'urban renaissance' strategy (Smith, 2002; Lees, 2003a), these authors argue that what we are seeing is actually an emerging *residentialization*,[11] not gentrification. The basis for this argument is drawn from a household survey where respondents emphasized the 'mundane' attractions of city living such as the convenience of being close to points of employment and consumption, with middle-class 'lifestyle concerns' less prevalent. The authors conclude as follows:

> Armed with a knowledge of the different appeals of city centre living, policy should continue to promote further housing and residential development and social mix in the city centre, creating further opportunities for public and private developers to invest in the city centre and for more people to move to the area (Tallon and Bromley, 2004: 785).

In a later paper, environmental arguments are brought in to bolster this conclusion:

> Residential development can contribute to sustainability through the recycling of derelict land and buildings. This can reduce demand for peripheral development and assist the development of more compact cities . . . All these points emphasise the contributions of city centre regeneration to sustainability and the importance of encouraging housing in a location which can appear high-cost in the short-term (Bromley *et al*., 2005: 2423).

Particularly telling here is how these authors account for 'residentialization' — a 'response to the new spaces and opportunities created by deindustrialisation, decentralisation and suburbanisation' (*ibid*.: 2423). These are precisely the same conditions — systematic disinvestment in inner-city locations — that many theorists explain as fundamental to the gentrification process (e.g. Smith, 1986; Beauregard, 1990; Wyly and Hammel, 1999; Curran, 2004). The Bristol study under discussion thus exemplifies something captured by Smith:

> Precisely because the language of gentrification tells the truth about the class shift involved in the 'regeneration' of the city, it has become a dirty word to developers, politicians and financiers; we find ourselves in the ironic position that in the US, where the ideology of classlessness is so prevalent, the language of gentrification is quite generalized, whereas in Europe it is suppressed (Smith, 2002: 445).

How did we arrive at a time when gentrification, in the country where it was first observed and coined, has now become a dirty word to some academics in their published research?

11 'The introduction of more housing and therefore more residents within the city centre can be defined as a process of *residentialisation*, whereby housing replaces other land uses. The integration of residentialisation within city centre regeneration policy was seen as enhancing the vitality and viability of city centres' (Bromley *et al*., 2005: 2408)

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Three reasons for the eviction of critical perspectives

It is possible to identify not one but *three* key reasons why discussions of rent increases, affordable housing crises, class conflict, displacement, and community upheavals have morphed into, *inter alia*, 'cheering' gentrification, middle-class 'natural habitats' and 'residentialization'. There may indeed be more reasons, but the following are particularly noticeable from a close reading of the literature.

The resilience of theoretical and ideological squabbles

> Ley's conceptualisation of the rent-gap is too clumsy for the question of differential national experiences [of gentrification] even to be asked . . . Whatever the shortcomings of his analysis . . . it should now be evident that the relationship between consumption and production is crucial to explaining gentrification (Smith, 1987b: 464).

> For some years the necessity to unite theories around production and consumption in understanding gentrification . . . has been apparent . . . While critical to strive for, such an integration will not be easily accomplished, and it will require a more careful reading of the literature, together with less adversarial patrolling of one's own territory than appears in this [Smith's] commentary (Ley, 1987: 468).

With boisterous exchanges like those above, it is not difficult to see how these two leading experts on gentrification are often portrayed as exact opposites, utterly divided on the explanation of gentrification, and guided by completely contrasting conceptual frameworks, methodologies and ideologies. Furthermore, the influence and volume of their work was such that both Neil Smith and David Ley became treated by almost every researcher as the de facto representatives of the 'economic' and 'cultural' explanations of the process, respectively, something which many writers insist on re-emphasizing time and time again. But if we take a closer look at these quotations, published in 1987, we can see that both analysts were committed to searching for an explanation of gentrification that took into account both economic (production) and cultural (consumption) factors. Indeed, their books on gentrification, published in the same year (1996) are not nearly as one-sided in the explanation of gentrification as many newcomers to the topic might think. To argue that David Ley ignored economic transformation in Canadian cities in his work is nothing short of preposterous, and the same can be said for any writing which gives the impression that Neil Smith ignored the cultural aspects of gentrification in the Lower East Side during his research there in the late 1980s. As Atkinson (2003: 2344) explained, 'the implied economic and cultural imperatives central to each theory have often been interpreted as a sign of mutual exclusivity, although this is perhaps something of an "overdistinction" '. In short, while their explanations of gentrification did differ significantly, the *divisions* between these two scholars became, in the hands of other writers, the most overdrawn contest in the history of urban studies, and they become misrepresented on numerous occasions, with the serious effect of making gentrification a subject where many researchers ended up taking sides and 'throwing rocks from behind barricades' (Clark, 1992: 359), rather than finding ways to work with and through competing explanations and theoretical tensions.

A survey of more recent scholarship on post-recession gentrification shows that gentrification discourse is to some extent *still* locked within the zeitgeist of the 1980s, rehashing the tiresome debates of old — precisely the reason why Bondi (1999b) suggested we let gentrification research 'disintegrate'. Take for example a recent paper by Chris Hamnett, where the recent calls to move away from this exhausted debate appear to have gone unnoticed:

> The argument made here is that the basis of an effective explanation has to rest on the demand side as much or more than the supply side of the equation . . . Smith's objection to demand-led explanations is that they are overly individualistic, place too much stress on shifts in

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> consumer choice and preference, and fail to provide an adequate explanation of underlying changes in the land and property markets. He also argues that they are insufficiently materialist in their theoretical approach in that they fail to deal with underlying economic changes. But demand-based arguments are not just based on consumer taste and preference . . . [T]hey locate the basis of gentrification demand in the shifts in industrial, occupational and earnings structures linked to the shift from industrial to post-industrial cities (Hamnett, 2003: 2403).

In addition, Hamnett, just as he did in an influential essay published twenty years earlier (Hamnett, 1984), actually spends two pages criticizing Smith's rent-gap thesis (with precisely the same criticisms!). Badcock (2001: 1561) also joined in, claiming that it is: 'impossible to escape the structuralist and functionalist overtones of the rent-gap hypothesis'.

This debate was very important in the 1970s and 1980s as we tried to understand and explain gentrification, but by the twenty-first century few gentrification researchers needed to be reminded of what is excluded by the rent-gap thesis! One commentator has recently attempted to take the gentrification debate in a different direction, but reading between the rather opaque lines, it actually steers us back into the same territory:

> What needs rethinking on both sides of gentrification debate, is the implicit assumption that gentrifiers gentrify because they have to, in some form or another. This paper seeks to argue that they gentrify because they can. Clearly, on the supply side, this argument is made by emphasising the new-found ability to improve a property, although this is far from being a sufficient condition. On the demand side, the insistence that gentrifiers gentrify because they have to is manifested in the position that gentrification represents some form of class constitution in itself, or that, alternatively, it represents the expression of some new form of class constitution (Redfern, 2003: 2352).

The problem with re-hashing these old debates is not just epistemological, that it just precludes widespread agreement that gentrification is a *multi-faceted* process of class transformation that is best explained from a holistic point of departure; it is also *political*, in that critical perspectives get lost within, or are absent entirely from, the squabbling about whether Smith or Ley has got it right in a certain gentrification context. So much time and ink has been spent in disagreement over what is causing the process that one wonders whether labour could have been better spent, first, accepting something pitched by Eric Clark:

> Attempts to draw connections between different aspects of gentrification call for ambidexterity in dealing with concepts which may defy reduction to a single model. Sometimes these connections can be made through an integration which practically dissolves any previously perceived mutual exclusion (Clark, 1992: 362).

and, second, moving on to acknowledge that gentrification is an expression of urban inequality and has serious effects, and that academics have a role to play in exposing these effects and perhaps even challenging them (Hartman *et al*., 1982).

Displacement gets displaced

> Displacement from home and neighbourhood can be a shattering experience. At worst it leads to homelessness, at best it impairs a sense of community. Public policy should, by general agreement, minimize displacement. Yet a variety of public policies, particularly those concerned with gentrification, seem to foster it (Marcuse, 1985a: 931).

Until very recently, studies of gentrification-induced displacement, part of the original definition of the process and the subject of so much sophisticated inquiry in the late 1970s and 1980s, had all but disappeared. Many of the articles in early collections on gentrification such as Laska and Spain (1980), Schill and Nathan (1983), Palen and London (1984) and Smith and Williams (1986) were concerned with displacement and,

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indeed, much greater attention was paid to the effects of gentrification on the working class than to the characteristics of the new middle class that was moving in. Although there was not necessarily agreement on the severity and extent of the problem (Sumka, 1979), displacement was undoubtedly a major theme. Even scholars (wrongly) associated with a less critical take on the process were very concerned about displacement:

> The magnitude of dislocation is unknown . . . though the scale of renovation, demolition, deconversion, and condominium conversion noted . . . implies that tens of thousands of households have been involuntarily displaced through various forms of gentrification over the past twenty-five years in Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver, and Ottawa alone (Ley, 1996: 70).

Displacement is and always will be vital to an understanding of gentrification, in terms of retaining definitional coherence and of retaining a critical perspective on the process.

The reason why displacement itself got displaced from the gentrification literature was methodological. In 2001, I remember being told by a community organizer in Park Slope, Brooklyn, that the best way I could help with local efforts to resist gentrification was to 'come up with some numbers to show us how many people have been and are being displaced'. He was not impressed when I explained what a massive undertaking this is, if indeed it was possible at all. Atkinson (2000) has called measuring displacement 'measuring the invisible', whereas Newman and Wyly sum up the quantification problem as follows:

> In short, it is difficult to find people who have been displaced, particularly if those people are poor . . . By definition, displaced residents have disappeared from the very places where researchers and census-takers go to look for them (Newman and Wyly, 2006: 27).

In the 1990s especially, these considerable barriers to a research agenda did not steer researchers in the way of a qualitative agenda to address displacement, but rather steered them away from displacement altogether. In the neoliberal context of public policy being constructed on a 'reliable' (i.e. quantitative) evidence base, no numbers on displacement meant no policy to address it. It was almost as if displacement didn't exist. This is in fact the conclusion of Chris Hamnett (2003: 2454) in his paper on London's rampant gentrification from 1961 to 2001; in the absence of data on the displaced, he reasserts his thesis that London's labour force has 'professionalized':

> The transformation which has taken place in the occupational class structure of London has been associated with the gradual replacement of one class by another, rather than large-scale direct displacement.

Yet isn't it precisely a sign of the astonishing scale of gentrification and displacement in London that there isn't much of a working class left in the occupational class structure of that city? Labour force data support an interesting story Hamnett has been telling for over a decade now, but in the absence of any numbers on displacement it appears that he is blanking out the working class in the same manner as Butler's interviewees in Barnsbury.

The lack of attention to displacement has recently changed — dramatically — with the work of Lance Freeman and Frank Braconi (2002; 2004), who are increasingly seen by the media and, worryingly, policymakers, as putting forward the 'definitive verdict' on gentrification and displacement (see Newman and Wyly, 2006: 29) — the verdict being that displacement is negligible and gentrification therefore isn't so bad after all. Their work has been summarized at length elsewhere (Newman and Wyly, 2005; 2006), but briefly, Freeman and Braconi examined the triennial *New York City housing and vacancy survey* (which contains questions pertaining to demographic characteristics, employment, housing conditions and mobility), and found that between 1996 and 1999, lower-income and lesser-educated households were 19% less likely to move in the seven gentrifying neighbourhoods studied than those elsewhere, and concluded that displacement was therefore limited. They suggested that such households stay put

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because they appreciate the public service improvements taking place in these neighbourhoods and thus find ways to remain in their homes even in the face of higher rent burdens. This was the main reason that the *USA Today*, on 20 April 2005, decided to feature their work with the spurious headline: 'Gentrification: a boost for everyone'. The media coverage completely ignored the fact that Freeman and Braconi (2002: 4) cautioned that 'only indirectly, by gradually shrinking the pool of low-rent housing, does the reurbanization of the middle class appear to harm the interests of the poor', and that Freeman more recently wrote this:

> The chief drawback [of gentrification] has been the inflation of housing prices on gentrifying neighbourhoods . . . Households that would have formerly been able to find housing in gentrifying neighbourhoods must now search elsewhere . . . Moreover, although displacement may be relatively rare in gentrifying neighbourhoods, it is perhaps such a traumatic experience to nonetheless engender widespread concern (Freeman, 2005: 488).

On the point of shrinking the pool of low-rent housing, it is important to return to Peter Marcuse's identification of 'exclusionary displacement' under gentrification, referring to households unable to access property because it has been gentrified:

> When one household vacates a unit voluntarily and that unit is then gentrified . . . so that another similar household is prevented from moving in, the number of units available to the second household in that housing market is reduced. The second household, therefore, is excluded from living where it would otherwise have lived (Marcuse, 1985b: 206).

As Marcuse (2005) has recently pointed out, the Freeman/Braconi work only touches on this crucial question: are people not moving not because they like the gentrification around them, *but rather because there are no feasible alternatives available to them in a tight/tightening housing market* (i.e. that so much of the city has gentrified that people are trapped)? This is the carefully considered conclusion of an excellent recent paper on the gentrification of Brussels by Mathieu van Criekingen:

> Evidence highlighted in Brussels strongly suggests that poorly-resourced households are less likely to move away from marginal gentrifying districts because they are 'trapped' in the lowest segment of the private rental housing market, with very few alternatives outside deprived neighbourhoods, even in those areas experiencing marginal gentrification (van Criekingen, 2006: 30).

On the point of traumatic experiences of displacement, these have been documented recently in New York City by Curran (2004), Slater (2004a) and particularly Newman and Wyly (2006), who as well as conducting interviews with displaced tenants, used the same data set as Freeman and Braconi to demonstrate that displacement is not 'relatively rare' but occurs at a significantly higher rate than they implied. This points to the absolute necessity of mixing methods in the study of displacement:

> The difficulties of directly quantifying the amount of displacement and replacement and other 'noise' in the data are hard to overcome. It may be that further research at a finer spatial scale using a more qualitative approach could usefully supplement this work (Atkinson, 2000: 163).

In a huge literature on gentrification, there are almost no qualitative accounts of displacement. Doing something about this is vital if critical perspectives are to be reinstated.

Neoliberal urban policy and 'social mix'

The current era of neoliberal urban policy, together with a drive towards homeownership, privatization and the break-up of 'concentrated poverty' (Crump, 2002), has seen the global, state-led process of gentrification via the promotion of social or tenure 'mixing' (or 'social diversity' or 'social balance') in formerly disinvested neighbourhoods

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populated by working-class and/or low-income tenants (Hackworth and Smith, 2001; Smith, 2002; Slater, 2004b; 2005; plus many articles in Atkinson and Bridge, 2005). But social mixing may not necessarily be a neoliberal enterprise — in a striking recent study, Rose (2004: 280) acknowledges that gentrification is 'a particularly "slippery" area of social mix discourse' and demonstrates the impact of recent municipal policies to encourage the movement of middle-income residents into Montreal's inner-city neighbourhoods. Much of this is facilitated by new housing construction, 'instant gentrification' as Rose calls it, yet there has also been a municipal drive to provide social housing in the vicinity of middle-income developments. As she points out, unlike in Toronto (Slater, 2004b), 'the Montreal policies and programs can scarcely be cast in terms of a neoliberal agenda' (Rose, 2004: 288); there are geographical variances in policy-led gentrification in Canada (Ley, 1996). By interviewing professionals who moved into small-scale 'infill' condominiums (constructed by private developers on land often purchased from the city) in Montreal between 1995 and 1998, Rose harvested the views of gentrifiers on municipally encouraged 'social mix'. Interestingly, the majority of these 50 interviewees expressed either tolerant or egalitarian sentiments with respect to the prospect of adjacent social housing; as one interviewee remarked:

> At a certain point, I think you shouldn't live in a closed circle where everybody has the same [middle-class] social standing, where everything is rose-coloured. That's not the way it is . . . The attraction of a city in general is that it's where things happen. And, everyone has the right to be there and to express themselves [translation] (interviewee 479 quoted in Rose, 2004: 299–300).

While Rose is undoubtedly correct to divorce social mix from neoliberal ideas and sentiments in the Montreal case, unlike some other researchers (Florida, 2002; Bromley *et al*., 2005) she does stop short of pushing social mix as a remedy for urban disinvestment and decay, which is *precisely* the intention of neoliberal urban policies elsewhere.

In a powerful study of Vancouver's tortured Downtown Eastside, Nick Blomley has commented on just how 'morally persuasive' the concept of social mix can be in the face of addressing long-term disinvestment and poverty:

> Programs of renewal often seek to encourage home ownership, given its supposed effects on economic self-reliance, entrepreneurship, and community pride. Gentrification, on this account, is to be encouraged, because it will mean the replacement of a marginal anticommunity (nonproperty owning, transitory, and problematized) by an active, responsible, and improving population of homeowners (Blomley, 2004: 89).

Blomley's work helps us to think more in terms of who has to move on to make room for a social mix:

> The problem with 'social mix' however is that it promises equality in the face of hierarchy. First, as often noted, it is socially one-sided. If social mix is good, argue local activists, then why not make it possible for the poor to live in rich neighbourhoods? . . . Second, the empirical evidence suggests that it often fails to improve the social and economic conditions for renters. Interaction between owner-occupiers and renters in 'mixed' neighbourhoods seems to be limited. More importantly, it can lead to social segregation and isolation (*ibid*.: 99).

As Smith (2002) has noted, creating a social mix invariably involves the movement of the middle class into working-class areas, not vice versa, working on the assumption that a socially mixed community will be a socially 'balanced' one, characterized by positive interaction between the classes. Such planning and policy optimism, however, rarely translates into a happy situation in gentrifying neighbourhoods, not least South Parkdale, Toronto, where a deliberate policy of social mixing initiated in 1999 exacerbated homeowner NIMBYism, led to rent increases and tenant displacement

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(Slater, 2004b). Gentrification disguised as 'social mix' serves as an excellent example of how the rhetoric and reality of gentrification has been replaced by a different discursive, theoretical and policy language that consistently deflects criticism and resistance. In the UK, social mix (particularly tenure mix) has been at the forefront of 'neighbourhood renewal' and 'urban regeneration' policies for nearly a decade now, but with one or two well-known exceptions (Smith, 2002; Lees, 2003a) there is still not much of a critical literature that sniffs around for gentrification amidst the policy discourse. If we listen to one influential analyst, we are still under a linguistic anaesthetic:

> Not only does 'urban regeneration' represent the next wave of gentrification, planned and financed on an unprecedented scale, but the victory of this language in anaesthetizing our critical understanding of gentrification in Europe represents a considerable ideological victory for neoliberal visions of the city (Smith, 2002: 446).

At a time when cities 'have become the incubators for many of the major political and ideological strategies through which the dominance of neoliberalism is being maintained' (Brenner and Theodore, 2002: 375–6), and at a time when so many urban researchers are charting and challenging neoliberalism, it is surprising that there are fewer critical takes on policy-led gentrification in Europe than ever before. It is difficult to isolate why this is the case, but the very nature of policy research, usually funded by policy institutions, may be a significant factor. Loic Wacquant has captured this well:

> In the United States, it is 'policy research' that plays the lead role as a cover and shield against critical thought by acting in the manner of a 'buffer' isolating the political field from any research that is independent and radical in its conception as in its implications for public policy. All researchers who want to address state officials are obliged to pass through this mongrel field, this 'decontamination chamber,' and agree to submit to severe censorship by reformulating their work according to technocratic categories that ensure that this work will have neither purchase nor any effect on reality (over the entrance gates of public policy schools is written in invisible letters: 'thou shalt not ask thy own questions'). In point of fact, American politicians never invoke social research except when it supports the direction they want to go in anyway for reasons of political expediency; in all other cases, they trample it shamelessly (Wacquant 2004: 99).

This also applies to the case of policy research in Britain, where uncomfortable findings and academic criticisms of policy are often watered down by those who fund such research. Furthermore, when the language of gentrification is used in a research proposal, it is very difficult to secure research funding from an urban policy outlet to assess the implications of an urban policy designed to entice middle-class residents into working-class neighbourhoods! A dirty word has its limits.

Addressing an enduring dilemma

> I would love to see a world after gentrification, and a world after all the economic and political exploitation that makes gentrification possible (Smith, 1996: xx).

> Gentrification cannot be eradicated in capitalist societies, but it can be curtailed (Clark, 2005: 263).

> It can therefore be argued that gentrification has been too limited in Danish urban renewal (Skifter-Anderson, 1998: 127).

> Only a manic optimist could look upon Kilburn High Road and not feel suicidal: it's going to take a *lot* of gentrifying (Dyckhoff, 2006: 76).

In a systematic review of 114 published studies on gentrification, Atkinson found that:

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> On the issue of neighbourhood impacts it can be seen that the majority of research evidence on gentrification points to its detrimental effects . . . [R]esearch which has sought to understand its impacts has predominantly found problems and social costs. This suggests a displacement and moving around of social problems rather than a net gain either through local taxes, improved physical environment or a reduction in the demand for sprawling urban development (Atkinson, 2002: 20–1).

This suggests that we have a serious social problem affecting central cities, which must be seen in a negative light. Yet Atkinson's conclusion steers us away from the critical attention his review findings might warrant:

> [T]he wider and positive ramifications of gentrification have been under-explored . . . a move away from a black and white portrayal of the process as simply good or bad will inevitably be an improvement (*ibid*.: 21).

It is a puzzling conclusion, to suggest that in the absence of many positive accounts of gentrification we must now go and find the positives! Yet on the basis of some recent work on the subject discussed in this paper, it seems that some researchers are attempting to do just that. It is a sign of the times that in the latest edited book on the subject, a very useful resource on the global diffusion of the process, the editorial introduction summarizes some recent work and lists a number of 'positive neighbourhood impacts' of gentrification (Atkinson and Bridge, 2005: 5), alongside the negatives. It was not so easy to find a list of positives[12] when people first began researching gentrification.

Gentrification is not, as one might be encouraged to think from reading recent scholarship, the saviour of our cities. The term was coined with critical intent to describe the disturbing effects of the middle classes arriving in working-class neighbourhoods and was researched in that critical spirit for many years. It has since been appropriated by those intent on finding and recommending quick-fix 'solutions' to complex urban problems, and in extreme cases depoliticized and called something else. In two Chicago neighbourhoods, Brown-Saracino (2004: 153) refers to a process of 'social preservation', defined as 'the culturally motivated choice of certain highly educated people to live in the central city or small town in order to live in authentic community embodied by the sustained presence of old-timers'. Despite the efforts of the highly educated to protect the 'old-timers' from displacement, one has to question whose interests it serves to avoid using the term gentrification when it so clearly captures what has been happening extensively in the neighbourhoods of 'capital's metropolis' (Wyly and Hammel, 2000). Surely it is a sign of the scale and continuing threat of gentrification in Chicago that 'social preservationists' now want to protect the perceived authenticity that real estate corporations and media marketed to them?

The eviction of critical perspectives is very serious for those whose lives are affected by reinvestment designed for the middle-class colonization of urban neighbourhoods. Qualitative evidence establishes beyond dispute that gentrification initiates a disruption of community and a crisis of affordable housing for working-class people — how could it be anything other than a crisis, given the widening inequalities produced by the system of uneven capital flows upon which gentrification flourishes? Furthermore, and in contrast to what journalists informed by researchers somewhat less critical of the process like to put forward, gentrification is neither the opposite of nor the remedy for urban 'decay':

> Gentrification is no miracle cure, but nor is it a disease. As Larry Bourne tells me, in diplomatic fashion, 'it certainly seems better than the alternative' of constant, pervasive, apocalyptic decay. As a process and an end result, it's the best we've got (Whyte, 2005).

12 As I see it, and in homage to the German political scientist I discussed at the start of this article, the only positive to gentrification is being able to find a good cup of coffee when conducting fieldwork.

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Perhaps a key victory for opponents of gentrification would be to find ways to communicate more effectively that *either* unliveable disinvestment and decay *or* reinvestment and displacement is actually a *false choice* for low-income communities (DeFilippis, 2004:89), and that progress begins when gentrification is accepted as a problem and not as a solution to urban poverty and blight. As community organizations such as Brooklyn's Fifth Avenue Committee have shown (see Slater, 2004a), it is possible to enlist the support of residents of gentrifying neighbourhoods and use research findings to find ways to work outside, wherever possible, the ball and chain of market transactions and insist on the human and moral right that is adequate and affordable housing. And finally, the task for academics interested in resisting gentrification and reinstating a largely critical perspective is best described as follows:

> Critical thought must, with zeal and rigor, take apart the false commonplaces, reveal the subterfuges, unmask the lies, and point out the logical and practical contradictions of the discourse of King Market and triumphant capitalism, which is spreading everywhere by the force of its own self-evidence, in the wake of the brutal collapse of the bipolar structure of the world since 1989 and the suffocation of the socialist project (and its adulteration by supposedly leftwing governments de facto converted to neoliberal ideology). Critical thought must tirelessly pose the question of the social costs and benefits of the policies of economic deregulation and social dismantling which are now presented as the assured road to eternal prosperity and supreme happiness under the aegis of 'individual responsibility' — which is another name for collective irresponsibility and mercantile egoism . . . [T]he primary historical mission of critical thought . . . [is] to perpetually question the obviousness and the very frames of civic debate so as to give ourselves a chance to think the world, rather than being thought by it, to take apart and understand its mechanisms, and thus to reappropriate it intellectually and materially (Wacquant, 2004: 101).

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Résumé

On assiste depuis quelques années à un extraordinaire regain d'intérêt pour le processus d'embourgeoisement des quartiers, accompagné d'une vague de publications sur le sujet. À partir de quelques textes, universitaires ou grand public, l'article envisage les raisons pour lesquelles les points de vue, souvent très critiques, émis sur l'embourgeoisement au cours des précédentes décennies se sont étiolés. Parmi les nombreux motifs invoqués, trois sont analysés: d'abord, la persistance de querelles théoriques et idéologiques sur les causes de l'embourgeoisement, au détriment de l'étude de ses conséquences; ensuite, la disparition du déplacement comme trait inhérent au processus et sujet de recherches; enfin, l'invasion des politiques urbaines néolibérales de mixité sociale dans les quartiers centraux. D'une part, 'l'éviction' des points de vue critiques d'une sphère où ils abondaient auparavant a de graves implications pour ceux que menace l'embourgeoisement des quartier et, d'autre part, reprendre le terme à ceux qui ont édulcoré ce qui, il n'y a pas si longtemps, était un 'gros mot' (Smith, 1996) est indispensable à l'efficacité potentielle des mises en cause politiques du processus.

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