

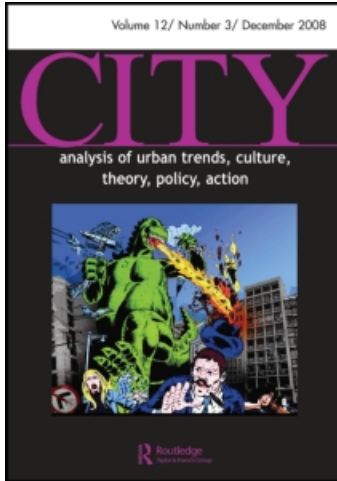
This article was downloaded by: [University of Edinburgh]

On: 22 March 2010

Access details: Access Details: [subscription number 917677464]

Publisher Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



## City

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t713410570>

### 'I am critical. You are mainstream': a response to Slater

Chris Hamnett

Online publication date: 19 March 2010

**To cite this Article** Hamnett, Chris(2010) 'I am critical. You are mainstream': a response to Slater', City, 14: 1, 180 — 186

**To link to this Article:** DOI: 10.1080/13604810903579287

**URL:** <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13604810903579287>

## PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Full terms and conditions of use: <http://www.informaworld.com/terms-and-conditions-of-access.pdf>

This article may be used for research, teaching and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, re-distribution, re-selling, loan or sub-licensing, systematic supply or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The accuracy of any instructions, formulae and drug doses should be independently verified with primary sources. The publisher shall not be liable for any loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

# On gentrification

## 'I am critical. You are mainstream': a response to Slater

Chris Hamnett

I am pleased to have the opportunity to respond once again to Tom Slater's (2010) arguments regarding gentrification and displacement. The issue is an important one, which has major social, analytical and political implications and it merits serious debate.

Tom's case seems to boil down to *four* key issues. These are: *first*, that I ignore or fail to engage with the key issue of Marcuse's classification of different types of displacement; *second*, that I focus on the claimed diversionary issue of replacement versus displacement, which is in fact undermined by Marcuse's concept of exclusionary displacement; *third*, that I utilize aggregate class analysis rather than a more rounded approach to class; and *fourth*, that my work is deemed to be mainstream versus critical. I will respond to each of these in turn. I will not respond to the various rhetorical devices employed by Tom to paint a negative image of my work as a detailed response would be tedious for readers.

First, however, I should clarify the reasons why I focus on his criticisms of my own work rather than engaging in a wider debate. There are two reasons. First, he accords my work a key role in his critique of current gentrification research, and as such, it merits a detailed response. Second, I think that my arguments and evidence regarding the nature of urban social class change and replacement are important and merit strong defence.

### Displacement versus replacement

Tom accuses me of ignoring the key issues and focusing on the diversionary issue of displacement versus replacement. I think I can make the same response, which is that he ignores or circumvents the key issue of the processes driving class change in many cities, namely, differential growth and decline. This issue is of great importance as many authors simply assume that gentrification always involves displacement and that the shrinking of the working class in many cities is inevitably the result of gentrification and displacement. This is not the case. By virtue of his rather narrow focus on displacement, Tom overlooks the much wider processes generating social class change in contemporary cities, not least the key role of de-industrialization and the rapid growth of the financial and business services sector, both of which have played a key role in reshaping the urban class structure. Over the last 40 years, the traditional manufacturing-based working class has rapidly shrunk, to be replaced by an expanding professional and managerial service class, a large and growing group of intermediate social classes and the economically inactive. Watt (2008) notes that the middle class are not the only class in town. He is of course correct, but equally gentrification is not the only game in town in terms of class change.

Tom argues that in my response to his article I ignore Peter Marcuse's classificatory work on displacement and focus on what he

sees as the 'red herring' of class replacement. There is no doubt that Marcuse's conceptual work on types of displacement is of considerable analytical and practical importance and I would broadly support the distinctions he makes between direct and exclusionary displacement. The problem is not with Marcuse's types of displacement, however, but with Tom's failure to grasp that a decline in the working-class population of a city is not necessarily the result of displacement, whether direct or exclusionary, but is, in large part, a result of the changing industrial and class structure of the city – he is thus in danger of focusing on the symptom and appears to choose not to diagnose the issue. Research on London (Buck *et al.*, 1986), New York (Buck *et al.* 1992), Chicago (Wilson, 1996) and other cities has consistently shown the impact of large-scale de-industrialization over the last 40 years. Many of the jobs traditionally defined as 'working class' have disappeared and, with them, large parts of the working class themselves. This decline has led to associated changes in housing demand. This is, arguably, one reason for the abandonment of areas of working-class and lower income housing in the inner areas of former industrial cities such as Manchester and Liverpool in Britain (Keenan *et al.*, 1999) and Detroit, Philadelphia and Cleveland in the USA (Wilson *et al.*, 1994; Margulis, 1995). These areas have not declined or been abandoned as a result of gentrification but as a result of the decline of the industrial base, a shrinking workforce, ethnic change and suburbanization. Tom tends to ignore these wider changes in the economic base and occupational class structure of cities and their implications for the housing market. In this respect he treats gentrification as the only game in town in terms of social class change, which it is not.

Regarding exclusionary displacement, there is no doubt that the growth of a new middle class of professionals and managers, working in high-paid jobs in London and other cities, has led to rapid house price inflation over the last 40 years and to the pricing

out of lower income groups from the housing market, and I have written extensively about this issue (Hamnett, 2003, 2009a) and argued that a process of spatially displaced demand linked to gentrification has pushed up house prices in lower priced areas of London and thereby led to exclusionary displacement through the price mechanism. To accept the existence of exclusionary displacement in some circumstances, however, is a world away from accepting Tom's view that the long decline of the urban working class in some cities is primarily a result of gentrification-induced displacement. There is also a wider problem in that house price inflation is not restricted to gentrified areas and nor is it simply the result of gentrification. On the contrary, as I have shown elsewhere (Hamnett, 2009a) average property prices in both London and England and Wales as a whole rose by exactly the same percentage (230%) from 1995 to 2006 and created major affordability problems. But, as Marcuse (1986) notes in his definition of the term: 'Exclusionary displacement from gentrification occurs when any household is not permitted to move into a dwelling, by a change in conditions which affects that dwelling or its immediate surroundings, which ... differs significantly and in a spatially concentrated fashion from changes in the housing market as a whole' (p. 156). Thus, it is not possible to extend the concept of exclusionary displacement to the city as a whole. It has to possess spatial focus in order to retain its explanatory power.

While there is no doubt that many low-wage workers have been effectively priced out of the inner city by rising house prices, this is a far cry from linking working-class decline to middle-class growth in a direct causal model. In this respect, the focus on displacement as a cause of working-class decline is somewhat of a red herring. The primary cause is the collapse of the industrial employment base and associated changes in occupational class over a 40-year period during which period virtually the entire labour force has been replaced. The growth

of the professional/managerial middle classes in cities such as London and Paris has led to exclusionary displacement of lower income groups as a result of house price and rent inflation but this is essentially a secondary factor in working-class decline. Tom's consistent and unremitting focus on the role of gentrification and displacement makes him something of 'a one club golfer' in terms of understanding wider processes of contemporary urban social change.

### Understanding urban social class change

When we come to the issue of social class change, Tom's argument is essentially that my claims regarding the growth of the middle classes in London are exaggerated because I rely on both the uncritical adoption of government class categories and census data which 'confuses the measuring tool (the census) with class itself (*a social relation irreducible to measurement*)' (p. 172) and a Goldthorpean type of employment aggregate approach to class analysis 'where social class is nothing more or less than an empirical question, and one that involves totting up the amount [*sic*] of people who fit into (dubious) occupational categories' (p. 173) rather than a more sophisticated analysis of class analysis concerned 'with other crucial processes of class constitution, namely the social relations of class struggle, collective action, exploitation, alienation and domination' (p. 173).

It is heartening to see that Tom has at last entered the debate about the nature of class change, though it seems to me that the quote he provides from Goldthorpe regarding the basis of his schema does engage directly with some of the realities of class position and experience and that it is quite false to claim that he is 'interested in social class structure *purely for the sake of categorisation*, going no further than employment relations'. There is no doubt that Goldthorpe has been consistently engaged in the issue of class definition and categorisation, but so have most other class analysts such as Wright and Martin

(1987), Marshall and Rose (1985), Marshall *et al.* (1988), Esping-Andersen (1993) and Wright (2005). This is for the simple reason that if you cannot meaningfully define, operationalise (and thus hopefully measure) class, you can say very little beyond assertion regarding the nature of class changes.

We all know that there is clearly much more to class analysis than simply totting up the number of people in different class categories, not least the nature of changing class inequalities (Sennett and Cobb, 1972; Savage and Egerton, 1997), and the changing nature of class identities (Savage, 2004), but I would be interested to know what class categories Tom would propose, and what they are based on, and how, if at all, they can be measured. Tom appears to have been granted some form of divine access to an understanding of class change denied to most social scientists who have struggled to find out how class structure is actually changing. Thus he apparently understands the realities while the rest of us labour in a cloud of misapprehension.

There is also a fundamental contradiction in Tom's argument. If he believes that class is 'a social relation irreducible to measurement' and he approvingly quotes Ley (1994) that 'numbers a class do not make', why does he bother quoting at some length from an unpublished manuscript by Davidson and Wyly (2009) which apparently takes issue with the validity of the class categories employed by the census and used by Butler *et al.* (2008)? Davidson and Wyly point to classificatory issues with Socio-economic group 5 (SEG 5). There is no doubt that SEG 5, the intermediate non-manual workers, is a very diverse group which includes a wide variety of occupations, and some of the occupations included in SEG 5.2 raise problems of accurate class categorisation. But this is all well known, and the problems were explicitly noted in a lengthy footnote 2 of our 2008 paper (Butler *et al.*, 2008).

Tom can argue that class is capable of classification and measurement, or that it is not, but he cannot have it both ways which he

seems to be attempting. Given that he devotes considerable space to an apparent critique of our research on London it seems that he does in fact accept that class is capable of classification and measurement and that we are thus arguing about the appropriateness of the measures rather than saying class is not measurable. This is a step forward. What Butler and I were using in our analysis was a standard measure of occupational class to try to examine changes in occupational class structure. We are not making claims about its utility in wider debates about class change such as class struggle or collective action.

There are some well-known issues with occupational class categories, which is precisely why it was decided to replace the traditional system of social classes and socio-economic groups with a new National Statistics Socio-Economic classification in the 2001 census (Rose and O'Reilly, 1997). Also, class categories do have analytical bite in that the official class categories have, for many years, shown consistent class-based variations in educational attainment, health, housing tenure, mortality, unemployment and access to higher education (Halsey *et al.*, 1980; Reid, 1998). If official class categories are as pointless and useless as Tom seems to suggest, why do they show consistent differences in terms of life chances, and why does the Labour government consistently push policies to try to reduce class inequalities based on these measures?

### New build gentrification and displacement

Tom criticises my claims regarding the lack of displacement by new build gentrification and he claims that I 'fail to appreciate' the work of Davidson and Lees (2005) who, Tom says, have 'carefully documented the displacement effects of this form of gentrification'. He quotes them as stating that: 'Using census data we have identified gentrification-induced social change along the river, in particular the displacement of low-

income groups by high-income groups' (Davidson and Lees, 2005, p. 1186). In fact, their work does not support Tom's claim in any way as a careful reading would show. First, their research on occupational change in Thameside London boroughs from 1991 to 2001 shows that managers, professionals and associate professionals and technical staff increased by 21, 43 and 44%, respectively (broadly equivalent in magnitude to the changes in class composition shown by Butler *et al.*, 2008), which Tom dismisses as unrealistic while the other groups (with the exception of sales and customer service occupations) all declined by 8–29%. In fact, their data shows that the top three occupational groups increased from 40% of the total in 1991 to 52% of the total in 2001, and if they included the administrative occupations as would be normal, the share would be much greater. In other words, their aggregate data supports the claims made in Butler *et al.* (2008). This is an own goal for Tom.

Second, their research claims on displacement display many of the problems I criticised in my initial response to Slater (Hamnett, 2009b). In order to try to measure the extent of potential displacement in riverside London, they aggregate the occupational categories of all adult residents in 1991 and 2001 into two broad 'classes'. Class 1 is what they term a 'gentrifier proxy' and includes SEGs 1, 2 and 3 (managers and senior officials, professionals and associate professionals, respectively) and class 2, a 'displacee proxy' which includes SEGs 4 (clerical and secretarial), 6 (personal services), 9 (process operatives) and 5 (skilled trades) plus the permanently sick and retired. They then show that class 1 grew rapidly in virtually all boroughs while class 2 contracted, though to a lower extent.

There are several problems with this analysis. First, what they term socio-economic groups are not in fact SEGs but broad occupational groups or Standard Occupational Categories which are quite different. Second, they do not say how they converted or

standardized the 1991 data to 2001 categories as the 2001 census did not in fact include any data on SEGs. Third, they include the retired and permanently sick in class 2 which is untenable, as the retired are just as likely to include both ex professionals and managers as they are unskilled workers. Fourth, by labelling class 2 as a ‘displace’ proxy, rather than say, lower class, they effectively prejudge the causal processes at work.

Fifth, their conclusion that ‘Using census data we have identified gentrification-induced social change along the river, in particular the displacement of low-income groups by high-income groups’ (Davidson and Lees, 2005, p. 1186) is simply not borne out by their evidence. I would challenge Davidson and Lees or anyone to show how census data can provide convincing evidence of displacement. It can show that one class or housing tenure has grown and that another has declined but it cannot show displacement. In fact, class 2 – the so-called displaces – is likely to have declined as a result of a long-term process of class change stemming from de-industrialisation and the decline of working-class jobs rather than the growth of new build gentrification. Indeed, Davidson and Lees state earlier in the paper that: ‘Although these strong concentrations of gentrifiers and proportional decreases in displace populations *cannot unconditionally demonstrate direct displacement*, they do strongly indicate that river-side areas have already experienced significant population change’ (2005, p. 1178). This is much more accurate but Tom does not refer to this important caveat. In his enthusiasm to search out work which apparently casts doubt on my research he either misrepresents or misunderstands it.

Finally, of course, there is a remarkable contradiction in Tom’s reference to the work of Davidson and Lees as they utilize much the same aggregate census employment statistics as in Butler *et al.* (2008), which Tom himself so roundly condemns in his response and which Davidson and Wyly also apparently criticise in their unpublished paper.

Tom seems to want to have his cake and eat it in terms of empirical evidence.

Tom’s rather cavalier attitude to empirical research is well shown in his throwaway comment on my work on loft conversions in London (Hamnett and Whitelegg, 2007). Tom states that:

‘the outcome is an essay that will tell us a great deal about planning applications for residential conversion (the *mundane transactions* facilitating a particular type of gentrification in London), but very little about the marginalizations, exclusions and injustices that allow some people to become luxury loft dwellers whilst others around them experience a loss of place.’ (p. 175, emphasis added)

Drew Whitelegg and I spent a lot of time collecting and analysing data on the number of planning applications for conversions in different boroughs for the simple reason that it was necessary to try to find out the scale of the process, when it started, how it spread and the identity of the applicants. Tom dismisses these as ‘mundane transactions ... facilitating gentrification’, but they are key to understanding the scale of the process and parallel the data collected and analysed by Marcuse (1986) in his analysis of displacement in New York City where he looks at the scale of cooperative and condominium conversions, and the loss of single room occupancy units (pp. 161–163) and also the data collected by Bill Randolph and myself (Hamnett and Randolph, 1988) for our research on the scale and extent of flat ‘break ups’ in London. This type of work is crucial to understanding what is actually happening rather than simply pontificating from the sidelines as Tom seems to do.

### Critical or mainstream?

Finally, I turn to the issue of critical versus mainstream scholarship which Tom makes so much of. Critical analysis does not necessarily entail taking Tom’s point of view. He

has a very one-sided and partial view of what constitutes critical scholarship, which includes those who adhere to the view that gentrification induces displacement, and anyone who disagrees is labelled mainstream. It is fascinating to note that Tom juxtaposes the terms critical and mainstream (mostly in relation to my work) no fewer than 10 times (maybe more) in his response. This reminds me of the Daleks in *Dr Who* (a British TV series) who repeat in a mechanical voice 'I am critical, you are mainstream': 'exterminate!'. Tom seems to have discovered a novel way to conjugate the verb to criticise which goes along these lines:

I am critical  
He is mainstream  
You are mainstream  
We are critical  
They are mainstream.'

Tom is trying to appropriate the critical high ground and claim it as his own. In Tom's rather monocentric view, critical is what he believes in and mainstream is what he is opposed to. I would term this stereotyping and an attempt to create an 'in-group' and an 'out-group'. I think the issues are too important to play this kind of exclusionary game. But if that is indeed the game, I think it very reasonable to claim that it is Tom who is forcefully defending the mainstream position, and me who is being critical.

## References

- Buck, N., Drennan, M. and Newton, K. (1992) 'Dynamics of the metropolitan economy', in S. Fainstein, I. Gordon and M. Harloe (eds) *Divided Cities: New York and London in the Contemporary World*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Buck, N., Gordon, I. and Young, K. (1986) *The London Employment Problem*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Butler, T., Hamnett, C. and Ramsden, M. (2008) 'Inward and upward: marking out social class change in London', *Urban Studies* 45(1), pp. 67–88.
- Davidson, M. and Lees, L. (2005) 'New-build gentrification and London's riverside renaissance', *Environment and Planning A* 37, pp. 1165–1190.
- Davidson, M. and Wyly, E. (2009) 'Class-ifying London: questions of social division and space claims in the post-industrial city', unpublished manuscript.
- Esping-Andersen, G. (1993) *Changing Classes: Stratification and Mobility in Post-Industrial Societies*. London: Sage.
- Halsey, A.H., Heath, A.F. and Ridge, J.M. (1980) *Origins and Destinations: Family, Class and Education in Modern Britain*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Hamnett, C. (2003) 'Gentrification and the middle-class remaking of Inner London, 1961–2001', *Urban Studies* 40(12), pp. 2401–2426.
- Hamnett, C. (2009a) 'Spatially displaced demand and the changing geography of house prices in London, 1995–2006', *Housing Studies* 24(3), pp. 301–320.
- Hamnett, C. (2009b) 'The new Mikado? Tom Slater, gentrification and displacement', *City* 13(4), pp. 476–482.
- Hamnett, C. and Randolph, W. (1988) *Cities, Housing and Profits: Flat Break-up and the Decline of Private Renting*. London: Hutchinson.
- Hamnett, C. and Whitelegg, A. (2007) 'Loft conversion and gentrification in London: from industrial to post-industrial land-use', *Environment and Planning A* 39(1), pp. 106–124.
- Keenan, P., Lowe, S. and Spencer, S. (1999) 'Housing abandonment in inner cities—the politics of demand for housing', *Housing Studies* 14(5), pp. 703–716.
- Ley, D. (1994) 'Gentrification and the politics of the new middle class', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 12, pp. 53–74.
- Marcuse, P. (1986) 'Abandonment, gentrification, and displacement: the linkages in New York City', in N. Smith and P. Williams (eds) *Gentrification of the City*, Allen and Unwin, pp. 153–177.
- Margulis, H.L. (1995) 'Housing credit lending and housing markets: a canonical analysis of pooled longitudinal data', *Urban Affairs Review* 31(1), pp. 77–103.
- Marshall, G. and Rose, D. (1985) 'Proletarianisation in the British class structure?', *British Journal of Sociology* 24(3), pp. 377–396.
- Marshall, G., Newby, H., Rose, D. and Vogler, C. (1988) *Social Class in Modern Britain*. London: Hutchinson.
- Reid, I. (1998) *Class in Britain*. London: Polity Press.
- Rose, D. and O'Reilly, K. (1997) *Constructing Classes: Toward a New Social Stratification for the UK*. Swindon: ESRC/ONS.
- Savage, M. (2004) *Rethinking Class, Identities, Cultures and Lifestyles*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- Savage, M. and Egerton, M. (1997) 'Social mobility, individual ability and the inheritance of class inequality', *Sociology* 31(4), pp. 645–672.

- Sennett, R. and Cobb, R. (1972) *The Hidden Injuries of Class*. New York: Vintage books.
- Slater, T. (2010) 'Still missing Marcuse: Hamnett's foggy analysis in London town', *City*, 14(1–2), pp. 170–179
- Watt, P. (2008) 'The only class in town? Gentrification and the middle-class colonization of the city and the urban imagination', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 32, pp. 206–211.
- Wilson, D., Margulis, H. and Ketchum, J. (1994) 'Spatial aspects of housing abandonment in the 1990s: the Cleveland experience', *Housing Studies* 9(4), pp. 493–510.
- Wilson, W.J. (1996) *When Work Disappears: The World of the New Urban Poor*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Wright, E.O. (2005) *Approaches to Class Analysis*. London: Sage.
- Wright, E.O. and Martin, B. (1987) 'The transformation of the American class structure, 1960–1980', *American Journal of Sociology* 93, pp. 1–29.
- Chris Hamnett is Professor of Geography at King's College London. Email: chris.hamnett@kcl.ac.uk*