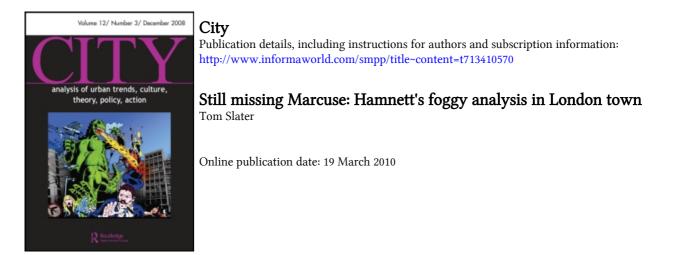
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On gentrification Still missing Marcuse: Hamnett's foggy analysis in London town

Tom Slater

'Now, I will grant you that, if you look at the world through the eyes of the dominant, the social landscape does look a lot rosier ...' (Loïc Wacquant, 2009, p. 128)

Introduction

s an undergraduate at Queen Mary, University of London (from 上 1995 to 1998), I was lucky enough to be treated to the breathtaking lectures of David M. Smith on his course entitled 'Geography and Social Justice'. They were not so much lectures as devastating weekly critiques of urban inequalities and all the forces that produce and sustain them. His book with the same title (Smith, 1994) was a powerful stimulus to engage in critical urban studies; it remains one of the best examples I have seen of how human geography and moral philosophy can be integrated into a powerful argument for social justice as equalization (of both life chances and living standards). This book offers a solid analytic foundation for my subsequent attempts to interpret urban inequality and marginality through the lenses of gentrification and displacement, and I have often returned to a chapter entitled 'Territory, Community and Home', which has a wonderfully instructive sentence for any scholar working on the displacement question:

'Those who take other people's place should have very good reason, and the moral principle of universalization, expressed in the question of how they would feel if the positions were reversed, is an appropriate test of whether the reason is good enough.' (Smith, 1994, p. 276)

My research has taken me to places where there was no good reason for displacement, where people were deeply affected by gentrification, where eviction from their homes was almost as disruptive and heartbreaking as the loss of a crucial relationship or even a loved one. With this in mind, in the last few years I have been arguing for more critical perspectives on gentrification, prioritizing the voices, concerns and interests of those adversely affected by the process. These arguments have been an effort to expose and resist a depressing intellectual zeitgeist, an age when supposedly left-leaning scholars (many of them very influential) have hardened the policy-infused terministic screens¹ of urban 'regeneration' and 'revitalization', dismissed the injustice of displacement in any or all of its forms as either trivial or fictitious, and focused narrowly on the expansion and consumer preferences of the gentrifying middle classes through empathetic conceptual glasses. Given the clear implications of the tempestuous and disturbing marriage of (neoliberal) urban policy and urban scholarship, I felt that a careful, methodical critique was justifiable and entirely necessary. People lose their homes and their right to the city because of gentrification, and some schol-

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arship is far from innocent in this loss. But how would some scholars feel if the positions were reversed?

Against this background, I thank Chris Hamnett for taking the time to respond to my article 'Missing Marcuse: On Gentrification and Displacement'. Gentrification and displacement remain key sites of theoretical debate amongst urban scholars, and flashpoints for what Shaw (2005) appropriately calls a 'principled public discussion' of major urban policy issues, and their implications. The debate is therefore a crucial one, not just analytically but politically, and Hamnett's early contributions to the literature (e.g. 1973, 1984; Hamnett Hamnett, and Randolph, 1986) were truly invaluable in both respects. His is a high-profile and eloquent voice, and its presence in a collective attempt to interpret and explain urban class change serves to attract onlookers who might otherwise not be concerned with a special issue of City entitled 'Cities for People, Not for Profit', in which 'Missing Marcuse' appeared. I have two related purposes in this reply; first, to reflect upon why Hamnett chose not to engage with the central argument of my paper in favour of a (wobbly) defence of his own recent writings, and second, to amplify some points made by the editors of the special issue (Brenner et al., 2009) about the key concerns and goals of critical approaches to urban questions, and how they can indeed be 'usefully counterposed' (p. 179) to mainstream approaches. Hamnett's response offers a welcome opportunity for me to demonstrate the different analytical registers employed by these approaches, and the political possibilities that issue not just from their useful counterposition, but also from the *exposition* of the analytical fogginess that characterizes mainstream urban studies. If Hamnett's response presents a chance for critical gentrification researchers to sharpen further their arguments in an ongoing, collective, inseparably political and intellectual research agenda, then on that basis alone there are grounds for thanking him for his engagement.

Missing Marcuse, again

Hamnett (2009, p. 476) ends the first paragraph of his response with these telling words: 'I confine my response to his criticisms of my own work'. It is never a pleasant experience to have one's work subjected to sharp critical scrutiny, and it is understandable that he should wish to expend energy defending his arguments. However, it is disappointing that Hamnett chose not to engage with anything else in my paper, particularly its central argument, reflected in its title. In his response, the name Peter Marcuse only appears once-when I am being quoted! My central argument was that the denials of extensive displacement among a number of scholars researching gentrification-of which Hamnett is probably the most renownedare analytically defective when considered alongside Marcuse's conceptual clarity on the various forms of displacement in gentrifying neighbourhoods. It is no coincidence that those who have been pressing the view that displacement is negligible and that gentrification is not as troubling as the extensive literature suggests have all, quite simply, missed Marcuse. At length I summarized Marcuse's work and used it to challenge a body of scholarship that has become highly influential in both media and policy circles, yet is deeply problematic when careful conceptual verification is brought to bear on its declamatory discourse. I concluded by outlining some of Marcuse's related work on the decommodification of housing and its political salience today—a hot topic on which one might feel Hamnett, as an expert on housing, would have some penetrating insights. Sadly his response ignores all of this in favour of yet another gyration on his 'replacement not displacement' chorus; a rather desperate attempt to salvage a semblance of relevance as his arguments collapse under a critical spotlight, and as his post-1980s political metamorphosis is exposed.

When outlining clearly and forcefully why he views displacement as a 'consistent assumption', Hamnett offers this statement: "[W]hile there is no doubt that rapid house price inflation can and does effectively price out low income groups ... this is not the same as direct or forced displacement as is often simplistically assumed. (2009, p. 477)

In 'Missing Marcuse', I tried to break with simplistic assumptions by spending four pages (Slater, 2009, pp. 302-306) elaborating the crucial distinctions between the different forms of displacement identified by Marcuse. Hamnett is correct to say that rapid house price inflation effectively pricing out lowincome groups is not the same as direct or forced displacement, but Marcuse calls this pricing out exclusionary displacement, something affecting low-income and workingclass households that cannot access housing as it has been gentrified. This is displacement because a household's right to place (Imbroscio, 2004) has been removed; in Marcuse's words (1985), the household is 'excluded from living where it would otherwise have lived' (p. 206). It is fascinating that Hamnett has nothing to say on exclusionary displacement, and it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that this is because it invalidates in a single stroke his class replacement thesis. Instead of a careful dissection of Marcuse's work and my engagement with it, Hamnett presents this diversion:

'Slater cannot simply assume that American findings are of equal applicability in the UK. (2009, p. 477)

Marcuse's work is certainly anchored in a painstaking, exhaustive study of the New York City housing market² in the 1980s, but some recent scholarship from London (Davidson, 2007), Amsterdam (Uitermark, 2009), Copenhagen (Larsen and Hansen, 2008), Berlin (Bernt and Holm, 2009), Brussels (van Criekingen, 2008), Melbourne (Shaw, 2008), Montreal (Rose, 2004) and Toronto (Walks and August, 2008) offers much support for his insistence that any discussion of gentrification and displacement cannot be confined simply to landlords evicting tenants. Exclusionary displacement is without question a growing phenomenon in advanced societies as gentrification has expanded *horizontally* and *vertically* (Smith, 2002) as a consequence of housing becoming a major vehicle for capital accumulation in the aftermath of the early 1990s recession (Wyly and Hammel, 2001). With regard to geographical context and the applicability of findings elsewhere, like many others (Ley, 1996; Lees, 2000; Phillips, 2004) I have been arguing for a 'geography of gentrification' for some time now, one that is sensitive to both contextual variations and common threads behind the process. I have drawn on empirical work conducted in Toronto and New York to illustrate why geography matters in how we understand the imprint of class inequality at a variety of spatial scales (Slater, 2004).³ Hamnett makes no mention of this body of scholarship.

Due to space constraints I cannot respond to every one of Hamnett's charges, but one in particular does require some further engagement:

'Slater is so convinced about the inevitability of displacement in all its forms that he cannot see, and thus denies, the possibility of forms of urban social class change which do not necessarily hinge on displacement but reflect underlying changes in occupational class structure. (Hamnett, 2009, pp. 477–478)

These 'underlying changes' constitute the bedrock of Hamnett's entire analysis, and the basis for his oft-repeated conclusion that 'London is now a much more middle-class city than it was 40 years ago' (2009, p. 478). But his analysis hinges on uncritically accepting the social class categories and boundaries provided by the government in the UK Census, and confuses the measuring tool (the census) with class itself (a social relation irreducible to measurement). With regard to the former, the UK Census class schema is derived from the work of sociologist John Goldthorpe (1980). Initially it was a sevenfold scheme, designed for the following purposes:

'to combine occupational categories whose members would appear, in the light of the available evidence, to be typically comparable, on the one hand, in terms of their sources and levels of income, their degree of economic security and chances of economic advancement; and, on the other hand in their location within the systems of authority and control governing the processes of production in which they are engaged, and hence in their degree of autonomy in performing their work-tasks and roles.' (Goldthorpe, 1980, p. 124)

Reading this passage, it does not take a sophisticated class analyst to calculate that Goldthorpe (and the state authorities who drew on his work for the Census) was interested in social class structure purely for the sake of categorization, going no further than employment relations. The schema is not concerned with other crucial processes of class constitution, namely, the social relations of class struggle, collective action, exploitation, alienation and domination (Katznelson, 1981; Wright, 2005). When updating the occupational categories in the class schema from 7 from 11,4 Erikson and Goldthorpe (1992, p. 37) wrote that their rationale was 'to differentiate positions within labour markets and production units or, more specifically ... to differentiate such positions in terms of the employment relations they entail'. Hamnett is thus a descendant of the Goldthorpe tradition: the 'employment aggregate' approach to class analysis (see Crompton, 1998), where social class is nothing more or less than an empirical question, and one that involves totting up the amount of people who fit into (dubious) occupational categories.

Hamnett rejects the stirring, incisive commentary of Paul Watt (2008) on the limits of the employment aggregate approach (skirting Watt's key point that the approach misleadingly equates the decline of workingclass occupations with the decline of the working class per se), and I am accused of 'providing not a shred of evidence' (Hamnett, 2009, p. 478) to support my argument that Hamnett exaggerates middleclass expansion in London. But powerful evidence can be found via closer inspection

of the very categories Hamnett draws upon to form his class replacement thesis. In their critique of Butler *et al.*'s study (2008) of social class change in London from 1981 to 2001—a study that deploys the employment aggregate approach to argue that London is becoming a 'much more middle-class city'— Davidson and Wyly (2009) place under a microscope the occupations classified in the SEG (Socio-Economic Groupings) 5.1 and 5.2 groups, in which Butler *et al.* argue there has been the most significant middle-class expansion. Here is what they find:

'[O]ccupations captured in this group [SEG 5.2] include counter clerks and cashiers, sales assistants, telephone operators and security guards; clearly, whether these occupations constitute the "lower middle classes" is highly debatable. Yet, even when we consider the much more significant SEG 5.1 group, questions remain. Occupations in SEG 5.1 include: occupational safety officers, clerks, assistant nurses, dental nurses, company secretaries and librarians. Whether these are middle class workers, or indeed whether they have any form of collective association with other occupations (e.g. air traffic controllers or civil service executive officers), must be questioned.' (pp. 9-10)

The class schema used in Hamnett's analysis even has 'petrol-pump forecourt attendant' within the category SEG 5.2, where all occupations are accepted by Hamnett as lower middle class. As Davidson and Wyly point out, the categories in the schema are 'a grabbag of occupations with questionable class identity' (p. 22). So my point remains: Hamnett exaggerates the expansion of the middle classes in London beyond all sensible limits, in the process sustaining the 'invisibility of the working class in the public sphere and social inquiry' and its 'collective demoralization and symbolic devaluation in civic and scientific debate' (Wacquant, 2008a, p. 199). Some time ago now David Ley (1994) carefully reminded us that 'numbers a class do not make' (p. 55)—surely a crucial theoretical and methodological lesson.

The limits to mainstream urban studies

"The point of theory is not to generate a comprehensive social design which the politician then seeks to implement. Things don't work that way, because implementing a design requires whole cloth, and nothing in contemporary politics is made out of whole cloth. Politics is an endless struggle, and theory serves as a weapon in that struggle, because it provides a characterization of its direction, and of its controlling purpose." (Cohen, 1994, p. 4)

In their introduction to the special issue of *City* in which 'Missing Marcuse' appeared, Brenner *et al.* (2009, p. 179) outline five core concerns of critical approaches to urban studies:

- (a) to analyse the systemic, historically specific, intersections between capitalism and urban processes;
- (b) to examine the changing balance of social forces, power relations, socio-spatial inequalities and political-institutional arrangements that shape, and in turn are shaped by, the evolution of capitalist urbanization;
- (c) to expose the marginalizations, exclusions and injustices (whether of class, ethnicity, 'race', gender, sexuality, nationality or otherwise) that are inscribed and naturalized within existing urban configurations;
- (d) to decipher the contradictions, crisis tendencies and lines of potential or actual conflict within contemporary cities, and on this basis;
- (e) to demarcate and to politicize the strategically essential possibilities for more progressive, socially just, emancipatory and sustainable formations for urban life.

This is not the place for a detailed elaboration of each core concern, especially as each paper

in the special issue 'Cities for People, Not for Profit' serves as an exemplar of the critical approach, exhibiting one or more of these core concerns. My purpose here is to explain how Hamnett's response, together with his other recent writings, offers a textbook illustration of an uncritical, *mainstream* approach to the study of gentrification and displacement, captured clearly in these words from his commentary in the *Guardian*:

"The new middle classes have to live somewhere, so why not in the inner cities where many of them work? ... [G]entrification has helped to turn areas around, and a growing new urban middle class is living in previously rundown areas that planners had almost given up on.' (Hamnett, 2008)

In terms of its broad politics, this perspective is light years apart from Hamnett's earlier work on gentrification in London, where all five core concerns of critical urban studies were present. The analytical limits of Hamnett's gradual switch from a critical to mainstream approach are particularly clear when considering his reaction to my critique of his co-authored research on loft conversions and 'new build' gentrification in Clerkenwell, London (Hamnett and Whitelegg, 2007), to which I now turn.

Hamnett disagrees with my assessment that, in Clerkenwell, he has discovered an example of what Peter Marcuse terms *displacement pressure*. He again insists there has been no displacement:

"[T]he new loft units are all in former warehouses, factories or offices, other commercial uses or new build. In other words, there has been net addition through conversion to the housing stock, and none of the existing residents have been displaced for the simple reason that the buildings had no previous residents. It goes almost without saying that few, if any, of the existing social housing residents can afford to buy or rent the new housing units, but previously there were no such units.... If Slater wishes to term this displacement pressure because of the rise of new establishments he is stretching the term so far as to make it almost meaningless. (Hamnett, 2009, p. 480)

Not only has Hamnett failed to consult what is actually meant by displacement pressure (again there is no mention of Marcuse at all); he has also conducted an empirical investigation of loft gentrification in London that is devoid of political-institutional arrangements, power relations and the role of the state; in short, he has retreated from the social critique that characterized his work in the 1970s and 1980s. In the case of his research on lofts in London, 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. The mainstream approach shines no analytical light upon the underlying socio-political structures constituting capitalist urban land markets and policies—these are left accepted, churning: a fait accompli. intact, In Hamnett's Guardian commentary (2008), marginalizations, exclusions and injustices are not just sidelined, they are naturalized within existing urban configurations:

'Regrettably, it is also no use saying that the areas could have been regenerated with more social housing as this was very unlikely to happen. Since 1979 the Conservatives and New Labour have presided over the contraction of the council sector. And if it had continued to grow, it's unlikely the middle classes would have returned to the inner cities in the numbers they have.'

This mainstream musing has much to offer policy elites looking for scientific evidence to support decisions and pathways they have already taken. *Decision-based evidence making* in urban policy, as I have termed it, comes hand in hand with the rise of mainstream argumentation—a rather noxious blend of political defeatism ('it is no use saying') and historical fatalism ('this was very unlikely to happen').

Moving to 'new build' gentrification, Hamnett cited an article by Davidson and Lees (2005) as evidence that this form of the process has happened quite extensively along London's riverside in recent years, but fails to appreciate that those authors carefully documented the displacement effects of this form of gentrification—effects he disputes. Here is what Davidson and Lees (2005) point out:

'Using census data we have identified gentrification-induced social change along the river, in particular the displacement of lowincome groups by high-income groups. Moreover, research at a finer spatial scale with a more qualitative approach has shown that the new-build developments have caused indirect displacement by attracting new, middleincome, residents to what they perceive to be an up-and-coming, that is, gentrifying, neighbourhood. As we hypothesised, the new-build developments have acted like beachheads from which the tentacles of gentrification have slowly stretched into the adjacent neighbourhoods.' (p. 1186)

It is doubtful whether one of the core features of the mainstream approach to urban studies is the skim-reading of relevant material, but social scientific debate does need to have firm roots in the absorption of the available scholarship. This lack of serious library immersion allows Hamnett to make false characterizations:

'By extending the definition of displacement so widely as to embrace provision of any new middle class housing in the city, whether conversion or new build, and any shops or restaurants that the middle classes might visit, Slater's arguments lose both analytical coherence and political bite. (2009, p. 481)

In 'Missing Marcuse' (see Slater, 2009, pp. 294–295), I defined displacement very clearly

following the work of Chester Hartman, and that definition bears no resemblance to Hamnett's words above. Further misinterpretation of my arguments can be found in this passage:

'Not only does Slater seem to be denying them [the middle classes] the possibility of middle class housing outside existing areas, but he appears to embrace, if not celebrate, the continuation of existing forms of residential class segregation in cities with, for example, a solid and largely homogeneous working class in East London and a middle class West End, as was the case for much of the nineteenth century. (Hamnett, 2009, p. 481)

Typical of the mainstream approach to intellectual debate, this preposterous accusation of embracing class segregation skirts my crucial concern, shared by those of a critical persuasion: gentrification robs a city of its affordable housing stock, and working-class households banishes to peripheral locations (where they have to migrate in search of cheaper housing). The accusation also steers attention away from the propitious role of the state in the removal of a right to the city for those lying at the bottom of the urban class structure. To subject the process to rigorous critique is not to advocate a continuation of existing forms of residential class segregation, but rather to elaborate how those existing forms have been *amplified* and aggravated by state and housing policies buttressing the quest for profits from middle-class settlement, at the expense of households affected by work instability, unemployment and stigmatization. Gentrification is a visible expression of class inequality; any critique of this process must go beyond Hamnett's narrow, mainstream perspective on 'who moves in and who moves out' of urban neighbourhoods and instead scrutinize the broad mechanisms that create cities where the needs of business and policy elites take precedence over community and home.

Conclusion

'Inequality today, in capitalist, marketdominated economies, is grounded in an historical process of unequal acquisition of property. The existing distribution is a function of past distributions which, if unjust by whatever criteria, simply perpetuate injustice. And the present projects injustice into the future. Hence the calls sometimes made for a once-and-for-all-time radical redistribution of wealth and property ownership, to eliminate entrenched hierarchies.' (Smith, 1994, p. 122)

In keeping with the political tone of the special issue of City in which 'Missing Marcuse' appeared, and to avoid getting locked into another irritatingly repetitive debate (just like the tautological productionconsumption debate that dominated gentrification research in the early 1990s), this response to Chris Hamnett's valuable insight into mainstream urbanism would not be complete without outlining two ways forward for critical gentrification scholarship. The first is concerned with the civic duty of the analyst; the second, drawn from influential work on urban marginality (Wacquant, 2008b), is concerned with a view of displacement 'from below' (in the terms of those who experience it) as opposed to 'from above' (in descriptive statistics drawn from dubious categories).

In a recent interview, Loïc Wacquant (2009) has sketched out a vision for contemporary social science that I find especially compelling:

'[T]he social sciences of today can make a civic contribution of the first order by playing the *double role of solvent and beacon*. They can act as solvent of the new neoliberal common sense that "naturalizes" the current state of affairs and its immanent tendencies, through the methodical critique of the categories and topics which weave the fabric of the dominant discourse.... Social science can also function in the manner of a *beacon* that casts light on contemporary transformations, making latent properties or unnoticed trends emerge from the shadows ... and especially reveals possible alternative paths, points of bifurcation in the road of history.' (p. 129)

As British universities morph into 'grotesque parodies of businesses' (Smith, 2001, p. 146), it seems of paramount importance to remind ourselves of these civic duties, for it helps to guard against a trend captured by Chris Allen (2008):

"The lack of critical thought ... emanating from the British academy shows what happens when academic thought is shaped according to the principle of applicability and to "real world" problems defined by policy makers.' (p. 201)

With respect to the study of gentrification, the (anti)intellectual adherence to government and business 'newspeak'-and research agendas-on urban renaissance, regeneration, resurgence and renewal (jettisoning questions of social justice) is in large measure a response to the pressures of securing funding and having some sort of 'impact'. This is not to say that critical voices are somehow absent, but few of those voices would dispute that mainstream and conservative urban scholars (and developers, policymakers, journalists and investors) have painted a very different picture of gentrification and displacement from the one experienced by displacees, housing activists, social movements and community organizers. Any progressive study of gentrification that is genuinely concerned with the fate of lowincome and working-class exiles will show that Wacquant's 'possible alternative paths' can be found not in an acceptance of the dominant discourse, but in the intense scrutiny of any study or grant application boasting 'policy relevance', and in the associated critique of the structural and institutional arrangements under which a great deal of urban research and publication takes place. It is the civic duty of critical urbanists to expose the false debates and dubious topics and categories that waste time, money and scholarly

energy. As Max Horkheimer (1937) once argued, effective and powerful critique must be *epistemological* as well as social. It is hard to see how effective and powerful critique can result from making our research more amenable, accessible and appealing to policy elites.

The second way forward for critical studies of gentrification (particularly those interested in the displacement question) is to draw upon pioneering work by Chester Hartman and deliver spirited rejections of mainstream cost-benefits thinking in urban and housing policy, in favour of an understanding of *displacement costs* as emotional, psychological, individual and social. In a classic essay entitled 'The Right to Stay Put' (1984), Hartman wrote these words, which surely serve as a devastating critique of any argument that displacement is negligible due to low mobility of the working classes (or the expansion of the middle classes):

'In seeking a new place to live, the displaced tend to move as short a distance as possible, in an effort to retain existing personal, commercial, and institutional ties and because of the economically and racially biased housing-market constraints they face. What they find usually costs more, has less adequate space, and is of inferior quality. Involuntary residential changes also produce a considerable amount of psychosocial stress, which in its more extreme form has been found analogous to the clinical description of grief.' (pp. 305–306)

Hartman's blend of the analytical and the political, the intellectual and the emotional now serves as a touchstone, foreshadowing some of the insights of the burgeoning (Lefebvrian) Right to the City movement and of an emerging political philosophy for a 'right to place' (Imbroscio, 2004). It also foreshadows the insights of one of the more striking studies of displacement to appear in quite some time, written by a medical doctor, Mindy Fullilove (2004), who equates displacement with a clinical condition called root shock (the title of her book): 'Root shock, at the level of the local community, be it neighbourhood or something else, ruptures bonds, dispersing people to all the directions of the compass. Even if they manage to regroup, they are not sure what to do with one another. People who were near are too far, and people who were far are too near. The elegance of the neighbourhood—each person in his social and geographic slot—is destroyed, and even if the neighbourhood is rebuilt exactly as it was, it won't work. The restored geography is not enough to repair the many injuries to the mazeway.' (p. 14)

Just as there are valuable theoretical lessons to be learned from critical studies of the formation and constitution of middle-class gentrifiers, so there are from poignant accounts of love and loss in the context of the devastation of displacement. It is the deficit of work along the lines of the latter that has provided a licence for mainstream urbanists to write as if displacement is mostly urban fiction, and to offer conclusions to the media and to policy elites without any reflection (in the manner of David M. Smith) on how they might feel if the positions were reversed.

Notes

- Kenneth Burke (1966) Language as Symbolic Action, pp. 44–62. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- 2 Hamnett mentions that New York City and Santa Monica are the two cities in the USA offering private rented tenant protection against displacement, without any reflection upon the fact that it was in New York City where Peter Marcuse identified four forms of displacement, and long before tenant protection was subject to neoliberal gutting from the 1990s onwards (see Newman and Wyly, 2006).
- 3 A full critical summary with case studies can be found in Lees et al. (2008)—the most comprehensive resource available on gentrification research, which also did not make it onto Hamnett's skeletal reading list.
- 4 There are now 17 categories in the schema, itself an indication of the messiness inherent in the employment aggregate approach.

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