Of yuppies and housing: gentrification, social restructuring, and the urban dream

N Smith
Department of Geography, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ 08903, USA
Received 13 January 1986; in revised form 22 October 1986

Abstract. The question of whether gentrification can and should be explained as the result of contemporary processes of social restructuring is considered. It has been proposed, in particular, that gentrification is caused by the rise of a 'new middle class', and this argument is evaluated in theoretical and empirical terms. There is, in fact, better evidence for the significance of women in the gentrification process, because of changing work patterns, changing patterns of reproduction, and the changing relationship between work and reproduction. In light of these arguments, issue is taken with the claim that gentrification is a 'chaotic conception' and it is suggested how, instead, the social restructuring that is currently being observed is closely related to an economic restructuring, and that both together involve a dramatic spatial restructuring of which 'gentrification' is one part. The new urban patterns now unfolding do involve the construction of 'consumption landscapes' in the city, and the emergence of an incipient 'urban dream' parallel to the suburban dream of the last decade, but this does not imply that urban geographical change is now somehow demand led.

1984 was not the year of George Orwell according to Newsweek but rather "The Year of the Yuppie". Or so read the front cover of their year-end issue, and it is no accident that the first photograph in the accompanying article identified the yuppie life-style with gentrification. Coined apparently in 1983 to refer to those young upwardly mobile professionals of the baby-boom generation, the term 'yuppie' has already achieved a wide currency; few words have had such an impressive debut in the language. Apart from age, upward mobility and an urban domicile, yuppies are supposed to be distinguished by a life-style devoted to personal careers and individualistic consumption. To the popular press, therefore, which generally extolls the virtues of gentrifying urban 'pioneers', the link between the two icons—yuppies and gentrification—has been irresistible. In the academic literature, traditional explanations have also emphasized the role of consumption choices, life-style changes, and the baby-boom generation, but recently a number of researchers seeking more rounded explanations have begun to conceive gentrification as the social and geographical correlate of the rise of the yuppie, or, in more sober terms, the development of a 'new middle class'. More generally, gentrification is treated as the product of contemporary and diverse processes of social restructuring (Mullins, 1982; Rose, 1984; Williams, 1984; 1986).

The purpose of this paper is to examine the claim that gentrification is a product of social restructuring. I begin by examining statistical evidence on the existence of the new middle class. In the second section, I look at the claim that the changing social roles of women constitute a significant impetus to gentrification, and the further claim that gentrification may be a chaotic conception. I conclude with a consideration of the argument, consistent with the emphasis on social restructuring, that today we are witnessing the construction of consumption landscapes in the city rather than production landscapes and the emergence of an urban rather than suburban dream.
A new middle class?
Who constitutes this new middle class? In a vivid portrait, Samuel (1982, pages 124–125) argues that the new middle class:

distinguishes itself more by its spending than its saving. The Sunday colour supplements give it both a fantasy life and a set of cultural cues. Much of its claim to culture rests on its conspicuous display of good taste, whether in the form of kitchenware, 'continental' food, or weekend sailing and cottages. New forms of sociability, like parties and 'affairs', have broken down the sexual apartheid which kept men and women in rigidly separate spheres ...

The new middle class are outward looking rather than inward looking. They have opened up their homes to visitors, and exposed them to the public gaze. They have removed the net curtains from their windows, and taken down the shutters from their shops. They work in open-plan offices and establishments, with plate-glass windows and see-through partitions and doors. In their houses they make a fetish of light and space, replacing rooms with open-access living areas and exposing the dark corners to view ... Class hardly enters into the new middle class conception of themselves. Many of them work in an institutional world of fine gradations but no clear lines of antagonism ...

The new middle class have a different emotional economy from that of their pre-war predecessors. They go in for instant rather than deferred gratification, making a positive virtue of their expenditure, and treating the self-indulgent as an ostentatious display of good taste. Sensual pleasures, so far from being outlawed, are the very field on which social claims are established and sexual identities confirmed. Food, in particular, a postwar bourgeois passion ... has emerged as a critical marker of class.”

If British in inspiration, this portrait captures enough of the underlying flavour of the new middle class that it is recognizable in a variety of national contexts. But far from a recent phenomenon as the popular perception holds, the 'new middle class' can be traced to the turn of the century. According to the historian Wiebe (1967, pages 111–132), this group of urban professionals, experts, and managers experienced a "revolution in identity" as the specialized needs of the emerging urban industrial system gave them an increasingly prominent social role. Individuals in this "new middle class", he says, were imbued with a "confident driving quality" and harboured "an earnest desire to remake the world upon their private models".

But once we move forward from these 'protoyuppies' of the Progressive Era, agreement is overtaken by ambiguity. Despite decades of debate, there is not only no generally accepted definition but not even any agreement on what we might call a general definitional arena. This single social group is conceptualized in a variety of specific niches on the social totem pole, as illustrated by the array of different labels by which they are denoted. Apart from the 'new middle class', the social science literature is replete with concepts of a 'new class' (Bruce-Briggs, 1979), a 'new working class' (Miller, 1965), a 'salaried middle class' (Gould, 1981), a 'middle strata' (Aronowitz, 1979), a 'working middle class' (Zussman, 1984), a 'professional managerial class' (Ehrenreich and Ehrenreich, 1979), and so on—not to mention the simple staid 'middle class' of old. In short, although these different concepts intersect, more or less, on the class map, there is no recognizable core around which the debate revolves. For the purposes of this paper, I am going to take as axiomatic the broad Marxist proposition that class is defined according to people's relation to the means of production. I am not going to attempt to discuss or arbitrate between the diverse interpretations of what this definition means in practice.

But we do have to consider briefly what makes it a new middle class. In an article which spurred some of the recent resurgence of interest in the topic, the
Ehrenreichs (1979) argued that, unlike the old middle class of artisans, shopkeepers, small farmers, and self-employed professionals, the professional managerial class was not independent of the capital-labor relation but was employed by capital for the purpose of controlling, managing, and administering to the working class. It now constitutes an estimated 25% of the US population. Others less analytical have tended to treat the new middle class as synonymous with the entire ‘white-collar’ labor force, which could put them at closer to 60% of the population. The late Nicos Poulantzas, in his structuralist scaffolding of the contemporary class system, wedged the new middle class in between the blue-collar working class and the capitalist class as that group of functionaries who neither own the means of production nor perform productive labor but who are political and ideological participants in the domination of the working class (Poulantzas, 1975). In a more sophisticated analysis, Wright (1978) has rejected attempts to straightjacket society into different class corners, and insists instead that we have to recognize the reality of ‘contradictory class positions’. The new middle class, for Wright, is the classic example of contradictory class location. This group is pulled hither and thither by the economic aspirations of the class above them, the political potential of the class below them and the ideological dictates of their daily occupations. More traditional analyses, many of them dating from the 1950s, are attempts to define this new class on the basis of consumption patterns, providing a consumption-side corollary for the ‘white-collar’ argument (for a summary and critique, see Parker, 1972).

The new middle class also has a highly ambiguous political profile and this would tend to lend support to Wright’s notion of contradictory class locations. Wiebe’s protoyuppies, as we have called them, were clearly ‘progressives’ (in the sense of the Progressive Era), and the Ehrenreichs (1979) depict the leaders of the New Left as coming from the same (if expanded) class six decades later. Indeed, the term ‘yuppie’ emerged in the USA in 1983 in connection with the candidature of Gary Hart for the presidency, and although neither he nor most of his supporters had roots in the New Left, they might be characterized as latter-day conservative progressives, the ‘neos’ of the 1980s—neoliberal and/or neoconservative. In Australia, the political stereotype of new middle-class ‘trendies’ is that they are personally conservative but socially conscious activists in the Australian Labour Party. In the British context, the new middle class are variously conceived as either ‘trendy lefties’ most likely in the left wing of the Labour Party or else the core supporters of the more right-wing Social Democratic Party (SDP). In the words of a columnist for the Financial Times of London, the formation of the SDP represented “primarily a sociological development, an example of the political system beginning to catch up with societal change ... There is a new class which outnumbers either the stereotypes of working class or capitalists” (Rutherford, 1981).

Ambiguous as the notion of a new middle class might be, some commonly accepted themes are implied, and this allows us to go some way toward identifying this class in practice. Given the ambiguity of definitions, however, there are serious problems involved in translating from theory to empirical identification; the two avenues of identification discussed here—structural and economic—should therefore be seen not as definitions of class but at best as indicators of class specificity. In the first place, then, the new middle class is deemed to be the product of an altered occupational structure; the pattern of change is very familiar. The Western capitalist economies have experienced a decline in the relative importance of manufacturing employment and a parallel increase in the importance of professional, administrative, service, and managerial occupations in the producer services sector (finance, insurance, real estate, and such), nonprofit services (mainly health and education), and the government sector. In the USA, for example, in the three decades after World War 2,
the number of workers employed in manufacturing dropped from a third of the overall work force to under a quarter, while those employed in producer services doubled from 6% to 12% of the work force (USDC, 1978; on Britain see Routh, 1980). The transformation in occupational structures is undeniable, but this in itself does not prove the emergence of a new middle class. To make such an inductive leap too readily would be to risk a rather crude functionalism in the definition of class—class divisions equated to occupational differences. As regards gentrification it is also undeniable that professional, managerial, and upper level administrative personnel in the expanding sectors noted above are heavily represented among gentrifiers; a host of survey-centred case studies of gentrification have established this statistical generality (Laska and Spain, 1980). But it may not be the transformation of the occupational structure that is most crucial to this link between yuppies and gentrification.

The claim that gentrification emanates from contemporary patterns of social restructuring carries with it the implication not only that employment structures have changed, but that this new middle class is also distinguished economically by disproportionate wealth. The patterns of consumption associated with the new middle class, including patterns of housing consumption, are presumed to result from the higher incomes and the greater spending power that this sector of society has achieved. Essentially, we would expect that the emergence of a new middle class would result in an identifiable redistribution of income toward the upper centre of the income hierarchy. The ideology of the new middle class, after all, includes its tales of latter-day Horatio Algers who made it from the slums to Wall Street or the City of London. That is why they are ‘young upwardly mobile professionals’. Thus, although income differentiation is in no way synonymous with class differentiation, and even as an indicator of class it is very poor, in the specific argument linking gentrification and the new middle class it would be expected that a relative increase in income share would characterize the rise of this class.

But when we examine income distribution over the past four decades the pattern is not so simple. Absolute incomes have increased across the board in the postwar period, but the internal pattern of relative increases is more complex. Far from suggesting a redistribution of income, the aggregate data (table 1) present a picture of remarkable economic stability. Despite postwar economic growth, the poorest 20% of families and unrelated individuals did not earn a significantly greater proportion of the social pie (and nor did the richest 20% have to relinquish its half of the pie). The distribution of income was virtually the same in 1978 as it was in 1948, and this applies to the middle quintiles as well as the lowest and highest. A somewhat different picture, however, is presented by later data in which the incomes of unrelated individuals are disaggregated from families (table 2).

Table 1. Percentage share of aggregate US income by quintile, 1947–1978: families and unrelated individuals (source: USDC, 1980b).

| Year | Percentage distribution of income by quintile |
|------|---------------------------------------------|
|      | lowest | second | middle | fourth | highest |
| 1947 | 3.5    | 10.6   | 16.8   | 23.6   | 45.5    |
| 1950 | 3.1    | 10.6   | 17.3   | 24.1   | 44.9    |
| 1955 | 3.3    | 10.6   | 17.6   | 24.6   | 43.9    |
| 1960 | 3.2    | 10.6   | 17.6   | 24.7   | 44.0    |
| 1965 | 3.6    | 10.6   | 17.5   | 24.8   | 43.6    |
| 1970 | 3.6    | 10.3   | 17.2   | 24.7   | 44.1    |
| 1975 | 3.9    | 9.9    | 16.7   | 24.9   | 44.5    |
| 1978 | 3.8    | 9.7    | 16.4   | 24.8   | 45.2    |
Individual income displays considerably less stability than family income. In the first place, individual income distribution was much more polarized after the War, but for three decades until the late 1970s there was a relative convergence of income shares; the poorest 20% of individuals commanded 4.1% of total income in 1980, twice their share in 1947, whereas the richest 20% commanded 47.3%, a reduction of almost ten percentage points since the war. After the late 1970s, however, this income convergence reversed and a repolarization between rich and poor began. These shifts are pronounced compared with the relative stability of the middle quintiles, and, although there is a slight rise in the share of income commanded by the fourth quintile since 1947, there is actually a decline in income share since the 1950s and 1960s. These data do not reveal any significant redistribution of income toward a new middle class.

From a comparison of tables 1 and 2 it is evident that, in 1947, unrelated individuals were relatively underrepresented in all income quintiles except the highest; by the late 1970s there was no appreciable difference in income distribution between individuals and families, which means that, with the exception of those in the highest quintile, individual income has grown more rapidly than family income. Gentrification involves a disproportionate number of individuals as distinct from families, and whereas traditional treatments emphasize demographic explanations for the importance of individuals, these income data may suggest an economic corollary. Not only are there more unmarried individuals in the labor market but they are earning relatively higher incomes.

It is plausible that if the new middle class achieves no economic definition in relative economic terms, vis-à-vis other classes and sectors of society, gentrification may still result directly from the absolute increase in incomes at the upper end of the income scale. Thus between 1963 and 1983, the percentage of the labor force earning over $25000 in constant dollars rose from 13.3% to 16.8%; it peaked in 1973 at 20.7% (USDC, 1985). Whether we view modest increase in incomes as contributing to a new middle class would then be a secondary consideration; gentrification may be seen as one result of this somewhat larger reservoir of higher income earners. But account would have to be taken here of the parallel increase in new and existing house prices across the period. Thus from 1970 to 1984 the median price of existing houses (in current dollars) rose from $23000 to $72400 (USDC, 1986).

No simple pattern emerges from these data, but it is possible to adduce several possibilities concerning the role of a new middle class in gentrification. They are:

(a) The new middle class has a clear economic as well as structural identity, but in

Table 2. Percentage share of aggregate income, 1947–1982: unrelated individuals (source: USDC, 1984).

| Year | Percentage distribution of income by quintile |
|------|---------------------------------------------|
|      | lowest | second | middle | fourth | highest |
| 1947 | 2.0    | 6.2    | 12.7   | 22.5   | 56.6    |
| 1950 | 2.3    | 7.1    | 13.8   | 26.5   | 50.3    |
| 1955 | 2.5    | 7.2    | 13.3   | 24.7   | 57.4    |
| 1960 | 1.7    | 7.3    | 13.7   | 26.0   | 51.4    |
| 1965 | 2.9    | 7.6    | 13.6   | 25.0   | 50.9    |
| 1970 | 3.3    | 7.9    | 13.8   | 24.4   | 50.7    |
| 1975 | 4.0    | 9.0    | 14.7   | 24.3   | 47.9    |
| 1980 | 4.1    | 9.2    | 15.3   | 24.2   | 47.3    |
| 1982 | 3.8    | 9.0    | 15.2   | 24.3   | 47.7    |
absolute size this group is sufficiently small that its emergence does not register in aggregate national data. Its relative economic privilege provides the means with which to purchase housing in the relatively high-rent areas near the central city. (b) The new middle class does not distinguish itself on the basis of income but by occupational, political, or perhaps cultural criteria. Professional, managerial, and administrative work presumably engenders a distinct self-conception of one's social role and this may translate into equally distinct consumption choices resulting in a spatial concentration in the central and inner city. Absolute increases in income make this spatial concentration possible.
(c) More significant than the emergence of a new middle class is the relative rise in income status of individuals below the top quintile. We might argue that these individuals constitute the major reservoir of gentrifiers.
(d) The new middle class is not a distinct group by any criteria and the explanation for gentrification must be sought elsewhere.

Before exploring the viability of these four different possibilities, let us expand the range of the question. For the argument concerning the importance of social restructuring in gentrification refers not only to issues of class constitution but to the changing roles of women, the contemporary transformation of reproduction practices, and the changing relationship between work and reproduction.

Women and gentrification
As Rose (1984, page 62) observes, “it is now increasingly accepted that women are playing an active and important role in bringing about gentrification”. The reasons for this participation “have not yet been adequately conceptualised”, she says, but she suggests that larger and larger numbers of women may be led to gentrification either because they can afford such housing for the first time or because they cannot afford anything else. The general case for the involvement of women is perhaps most succinctly put by Markusen (1981, page 32):
“gentrification is in large part a result of the breakdown of the patriarchal household. Households of gay people, singles, and professional couples with central business district jobs increasingly find central locations attractive ... Gentrification in large part corresponds to the two-income (or more) professional household that requires both a relatively central urban location to minimize journey-to-work costs of several wage earners and a location that enhances efficiency in household production (stores are nearer) and in the substitution of market-produced commodities (laundries, restaurants, child care) for household production.”

This proposition linking women and gentrification has remained a general affirmation with little documentation of actual empirical trends. This in itself is somewhat remarkable given that research on gentrification has been dominated by an empiricist tradition (Smith and Williams, 1986, page 2), yet few of the myriad case studies and neighborhood surveys have involved explicit attempts to document the dimensions of women’s involvement in the process. What I want to do briefly in this section is to provide some statistical support for this link, both from national and local level data.

It is well known that there has been a virtually steady increase in women’s labor-force participation since World War 2. From 30.8% in 1946, the figure has risen steadily to 53.9% in June 1984 (USDC, 1985). Increased participation in the ‘official’ labor market, however, has not significantly improved the relative incomes of women. According to the US Department of Commerce (USDC, 1980a), the ratio of female to male earnings remained remarkably constant throughout the 1960s and 1970s hovering within 2 cents either way of 59 cents to the man’s dollar. Further, there was no secular upward trend. In fact, the ratio tended to drop in periods of recession, presumably reflecting the greater susceptibility of women to layoffs and wage cutbacks.
Behind this stasis at the aggregate level, however, there is a marked internal differentiation. Between 1969 and 1979, despite two severe recessions, there was a modest and steady increase in the number of women in higher wage brackets. Whereas only 0.9% of women workers earned over $25000 in 1960 (measured in constant 1983 dollars), by 1983 the figure was 5.2%. For men the figures were 14.5% rising to 31.2% in 1973 and declining thereafter to 25.8% by 1983 (USDC, 1985). What this suggests is that, in absolute terms, there was indeed an expanding high-income population, at least until 1973, and that women were an increasing proportion of this group. But, given the remarkable stability of women's incomes in the aggregate the data also suggest that the relative increase in the number of upwardly mobile women is matched by a compensatory drop in the wealth of women lower down the income scale. This of course would be consistent with the feminization-of-poverty argument (Stallard et al, 1983; Scott, 1984).

The significance of these data is that, at the top end of the nationwide income hierarchy, a significant expansion in the number of women is taking place and this group represents a reservoir of potential gentrifiers. They are upwardly mobile and, as Rose (1984) suggests, may be able to afford relatively salubrious housing for the first time. But a more detailed affirmation of the role of women in gentrification depends upon local studies of gentrifying neighborhoods. This is not the place to attempt a comprehensive empirical investigation, but a brief summary of findings from ongoing research will provide some statistical documentation of the role of women in gentrification. Insofar as the data come from five neighborhoods in New York City we should interpret the results with care; this is clearly a very restricted sample and serves to illustrate some points rather than prove the dimensions of women's involvement in gentrification.

All of the neighborhoods under study clearly experienced gentrification in the 1970s. They were selected according to three criteria:
(a) personal knowledge of the gentrification process in each of the areas;
(b) the neighborhoods display a variety of physical and social characteristics;
(c) census data for each neighborhood demonstrate consistently higher than average increases both in rent and in income levels during the 1970s, providing some statistical confirmation that gentrification had taken place (Schaffer and Smith, 1986).

The first neighborhood is Greenwich Village, including much of the West Village. The Village is predominantly residential and, for all its cultural frenzy, comprises an established set of communities; much of the more recent gentrification has been on the fringes of the Village, especially in the West Village where it is predominantly gay gentrification. SoHo and Tribeca are the second and third neighborhoods, lying on the southern border of the Village; they are erstwhile industrial zones dominated by converted warehouses and lofts (Zukin, 1982; Jackson, 1985), and SoHo is designated an Artists' Zone. The fourth area is in the Upper West Side immediately adjacent to the Lincoln Center, and although predominantly residential it also includes Columbus Avenue with its upscale restaurants and boutiques. The fifth area is Yorkville which straddles the border between the Upper East Side and East Harlem; this area has experienced a gradual transformation of the existing housing stock in recent years, but is now the target for an intense construction program of luxury housing. In all, twenty-four census tracts were examined and profiles of change established from census data (USDC, 1972; 1983).

The results of this analysis are striking. In the first place, whereas the population of New York City declined by 11.5% during the 1970s, all five of these neighborhoods experienced increases in their overall population, indicating a repopulation of previously declining neighborhoods where some abandonment had occurred (Yorkville, Upper West Side), or else the conversion of industrial, commercial, and
other nonresidential structures into residential uses (SoHo and Tribeca). But even more striking is that with only two exceptions, the adult female population in these tracts increased more rapidly than the male, despite the fact that city-wide the proportion of women fell; in twenty-two out of twenty-four of these tracts across all five neighborhoods an increasing percentage of residents was female. Further, the two tracts which proved exceptions to this rule, and which actually experienced declines in their female population, lay in the West Village and the western edge of Tribeca where gay men have led and dominated the gentrification process. Other than the dramatic increase in their relative numbers, the profile of change in the female population is akin to what one would expect in a gentrifying neighborhood. The increase among females is disproportionately comprised of single women, with twenty-one of the twenty-four census tracts showing higher than (city-wide) average increases in the number of single women. Especially in the Upper West Side and Yorkville, the increase in single women living alone or sharing households was matched by an absolute decline in the number of married women as well as in female-headed households. The latter might seem surprising at first, but probably reflects the socioeconomic transformation of the neighborhood; that is, poorer female-headed households have declined in importance, presumably displaced, and wealthier single women have moved in. The loss of female-headed households is also evident in the Village, SoHo, and Tribeca areas. As regards age, there was a considerable increase in the number of women in the 25–34 and 35–44 cohorts, despite the fact that city-wide, these cohorts lost 15% and 8.2%, respectively, through the 1970s. As regards employment, perhaps the most important change in all the neighborhoods except Yorkville is that, despite lower absolute numbers of married women, a greater percentage of those with the husband present participate in the official labor force. That is, a higher proportion of families is bringing in two or more salaries. Last, it appears that an increasing percentage of residents in the study neighborhoods have professional, managerial, and technical occupations, although the change in census categories between 1970 and 1980 makes this a more speculative conclusion. Whether these findings are replicated in other cities or whether New York City is in this as in other respects unique remains to be shown. But the evidence from five New York City neighborhoods does lend significant support to the hitherto asserted link between women and gentrification. More difficult to discern, however, is precisely what role women do play. It would be an error in the first degree to conclude that in women we find the premier agency behind gentrification; correlation is not causation, involvement not necessarily instigation. There are really two questions here: first, among women, is it the better economic fortunes of a relatively few women at the top of the income hierarchy that lies behind women's involvement in gentrification—an essentially economic explanation—or is it the political and structural changes in the labor market and in styles and modes of reproduction which have loosened previously oppressive social bonds, albeit again affecting only a specific segment of women? Second, to what extent do women play a specific and different role in gentrification as women? The involvement of women in gentrification, a happening whose very name suggests a class-based rather than gender-based analysis of society, together with a concern for the complexity of this apparently new process, have led Rose (1984) to conclude that gentrification is a 'chaotic conception'. To the extent that women do play a specific role in the process, regardless of class differences, this argument depicting 'gentrification' as chaotic may have some validity, and this is the path Rose pursues. Before we venture further conclusions on the role of women in gentrification it will help to consider Rose's argument.
Is gentrification a chaotic concept? A sympathetic critique

Elaborating on a casual comment of Marx's (1973, page 100) Sayer (1982) has proposed that in much of our scientific analysis we employ concepts which are not up to the task we demand of them. In general, these 'chaotic conceptions' are ill-defined and incapable of grasping the real situations they are meant to convey. Sayer has a more specific definition in mind, related to the abstraction process through which we derive concepts:

"When we abstract, we isolate particular one-sided aspects of objects. We know that these aspects rarely stand in visible isolation spontaneously in the real world, and the purpose of experiments in natural science is precisely to achieve or objectify this abstraction. A 'rational' abstraction is one which isolates a significant element of the world which has some unity and autonomous force.

On the other hand, a poor abstraction or 'chaotic conception' combines the unrelated or divides the indivisible" (pages 70-71).

The meat of the epistemological problem, of course, according to this perspective, is to distinguish those aspects of reality that are unrelated and those that are indivisible, and to devise concepts accordingly. That is, we seek to develop concepts which bound these 'isolated aspects of objects' exactly, including nothing that should be omitted and omitting nothing that should be included.

Borrowing from this epistemological realism, Rose (1984) proposes that 'gentrification' is a chaotic concept. It is a complex argument but her basic point is that "the terms 'gentrification' and 'gentrifiers', as commonly used in the literature, are 'chaotic conceptions' which obscure the fact that a multiplicity of processes, rather than a single causal process, produce changes in the occupation of inner-city neighborhoods from lower to higher income residents" (page 62). For Rose, gentrification is too narrowly defined in economic terms, and she attempts to reconstruct the concept based on a new set of concepts. She focuses on changing household structures, alternative 'life-styles', and the transformation in forms of reproduction of people and labor power; for Rose, then, as for Beauregard (1986) and Williams (1986) the primary question to be confronted is how potential 'gentrifiers' come to be produced and reproduced. To explore some of the complexities of the process, she introduces the concept of the 'marginal gentrifier' who, she says, may well be female, has only a very moderate income, certainly does not fit our paradigmatic conception of the 'gentrifier', but may nonetheless play an important part in the gentrification process. She gives the example of a college-educated single parent who in 1983 earned $195 per week and inhabited a small studio in the "not-too-nice area of Oakland" (page 67).

I think two arguments are being conflated here, and when we separate them, much of the chaos Rose perceives in 'gentrification' evaporates. The first argument concerns the increasing difficulty which many poor people have finding reasonable and affordable housing in a 'nice area'. Women are particularly affected by dint of lower incomes and discrimination in the housing market, and certain groups of women are more affected than others: minority women, single parents, lesbians, and unemployed women. Rose's second argument is that as gentrification proceeds, it loses its narrow class character, as "white-collar households of much more modest incomes than the type who gave gentrification its name" (page 60) become involved. These are two separate arguments and still today they refer to two separate populations—gentrifiers and the poor—yet in her concept of the 'marginal gentrifier', as she presents it, Rose obscures the essential difference between these diverse aspects of urban change and the different populations they affect. There is little doubt that gentrification has become a housing option for a larger reservoir of people in general and women in particular, and in that sense the opportunity to
gentrify has filtered down the economic hierarchy and across the political field, but it has hardly filtered down so far that female-headed households earning barely $10000 per year should be considered 'gentrifiers'. To include such a household under the rubric of 'gentrification' is to force a chaos on the term which I do not think it has 'as commonly used'. Further, it is difficult to reconcile Rose's position with the statistical evidence cited above from New York City where gentrification was accompanied by the decline rather than increase in female-headed households. In those neighborhoods, there was a divergence or polarization between rich and poor women, as well as a “marginalization of non-family households” (Watson, 1986), not the kind of convergence that is implied in the notion of marginal gentrifiers.

This is not to say that poor women and men, college educated or not, do not at times move into cheap decapitalized areas which might also be experiencing the beginning of some kind of gentrification. Quite clearly this does happen. The important point here is that gentrification must be seen as a process not a state of existence; in good realist fashion it should be defined at its core not its margins. Thus the importance of Rose's notion of the 'marginal gentrifier' is not that these agents define, or indeed redefine, the gentrification process but precisely that they are marginal to a process already defined by its more central characteristics—the change "of inner-city neighborhoods from lower to higher income residents" (Rose, 1984, page 62). Marginal gentrifiers are important particularly in the early stages of the process and may well be distinguished by cultural attributes and alternative life-styles (Zukin, 1982; DeGiovanni, 1983), but to the extent that the process continues and property values rise, their ability to remain in gentrifying neighborhoods is dependent more on their economic than their artistic portfolio. Thus it is the concept of the marginal gentrifier which is, in the end, chaotic. Yet it is potentially an important notion, carrying considerable descriptive and historical validity; it conveys the hitherto unconceptualized evolution of gentrification from a socially narrow into a much broader process. But it will remain a chaotic conception until it is decoupled from the question of the central defining characteristics of gentrification.

Last, an implicit political argument lies behind the use of marginal gentrifiers as proof of chaos in the concept of gentrification. Rose argues that, since "we cannot put an end to all gentrification", and since there are very different groups involved, all with different interests, broad-based political alliances and coalitions offer the best hope for "progressive types of intervention" and the identification of “oppositional spaces” in which we might experiment with “prefigurative ways of living and working”. We “ought not to assume in advance that all gentrifiers have the same class position as each other and that they are 'structurally' polarised from the displaced” (page 68). Indeed, such a rigid assumption would not tell us much about the gentrification of specific neighborhoods, but at the same time this should not blind us to the fact that there is a very clear polarization ('structural' or otherwise) between people who participate in the gentrification of a neighborhood and people who are thereby displaced. One of the consequences of the concept of 'marginal gentrifiers', as Rose proposes it, is the minimization, in the name of coalition building, of the evident polarization taking place in many gentrifying neighborhoods.

Gentrification, class, and gender: some tentative conclusions
The difficulty experienced in identifying a new middle class, especially in economic terms, should give us pause before we glibly associate yuppies and gentrification. It could well be that 'yuppies' and the 'new middle class' are merely empirical generalizations (Sayer, 1982; Chouinard et al, 1984), providing a deceptively neat characterization of a process that seems intuitively obvious to us but which really
we do not understand. These concepts generalize an apparently identifiable empirical reality, yet they may convey a misplaced theoretical concreteness.

Still, it is entirely possible that the difficulty here is a symptom of the more general difficulty inherent in finding and using empirical indicators of class distinction. There is no doubt that employment structure has changed dramatically and that a profound social restructuring is taking place (for example, see Mingione, 1981) and that it is altering both the traditional roles of women— in and between the home and the workplace—and also the class configuration of society. Equally, this social restructuring is heavily implicated in the gentrification process.

Rose is right to reject abstract functionalist (not to be confused with structuralist) treatments of class as a means to comprehend gentrification. Such class analysis may have emerged in the early period of the rediscovery of Marx and Marxism by social scientists—the effort to begin, however crudely, to see the class character of the societal processes shaping the geographical landscape. The contemporary debate has clearly moved beyond this level, which means not that class distinctions are irrelevant but that class analyses must be more sophisticated. The two-class model of classical Marxism does give us considerable insight into capitalism as a whole, but as a tool for comprehending specific experiences of social and political change, it must be refined considerably (for example, see Marx, 1967 edn, volume 1, pages 640–648; volume 3, pages 370–371, 814–824; 1963; 1974). For examining the gentrification of a neighborhood the two-class model would have the effectiveness of a chain saw for wood carving. Not that the two-class model is intrinsically blunt; it is necessary for cutting and shaping the block out of which our more intricate carve of gentrification can be fashioned. Rather, it is a case of misapplication. Just as the two-class model cannot cut the sharp outlines of gentrification, the intricate, more refined, and more contingent tools of class analysis appropriate for portraying gentrification in a given locality are ineffective for explaining the larger historical and theoretical patterns of capitalist society. They would be as nail files to a forest.

Cybriwsky (1978), for example, offers a rich and detailed view of social conflict in a gentrifying neighborhood in Philadelphia, a view which is not at all rooted in a Marxist analysis of class, yet one which is not inconsistent with such an analysis. This, despite the obvious fact that Cybriwsky relates a sad tale of white alliance, between 'gentrifiers' and threatened working-class residents, on the basis of racial prejudice. Indeed, the discussion of these and other alliances provides the grist for a Marxist urban politics. At the regional, urban, or community scales, such alliances "are not aberrations of class struggle" (Harvey, 1985, page 150); rather, the challenge is to understand the chain of necessary and contingent relations that link specific local responses and initiatives to overall social structure, or indeed to determine when such links are too tenuous to be relevant (see also Katznelson, 1981).

In any case, the rigidity of Marxist conceptions of class is generally overplayed. Concepts of the working class and capitalist class are often interpreted with a perverse empiricist literalism; a single individual who does not quite fit every angle of the conceptual class mould is deemed sufficient excuse to consign the mould, its maker, and all who have cast eyes on her, to dust. That certainly was not Marx's own conception of class and I seriously doubt that such a strict Calvanism characterises even the more 'functionalist' misinterpreters of Marx. Nonetheless, to clarify any possible misunderstanding, it is worth establishing a less-repressed base-theory of class under capitalism. In the context of the present debates, it is Wright (1978) who points the way toward a better conceptualization of class. While accepting that class position depends first and foremost on one's relationship to the means of production—whether one owns companies or one's labor power is owned by them—
Wright emphasizes that this criterion does not provide hermetically sealed class boundaries. On the contrary, many people occupy 'contradictory class positions'; the source of contradiction is historically determined and might involve anything from the occupation of an individual to the level of class struggle in a given period. The latter is particularly important; during periods of diminished class struggle, such as the present, class boundaries become more difficult to identify. (In this way, it is worth noting, the question of consciousness is built into the definition of class, which is not at all to say that it determines class.) In a much less formalistic and more fluid view than even Wright's, I would suggest that classes be seen not as pigeonholes, overdetermined sets with precise boundaries and exact binary rules for inclusion and exclusion: you are in or you are out. Rather, classes are as fuzzy sets which are defined more or less sharply depending on social, economic, political, and ideological conditions. This shifts the argument about class structure from fatuous debates about which individuals belong in which box to a more serious historical concern with the rise and decline of classes as such and their changing constitution.

But this loosening up of class categories is only part of the answer. It certainly opens up a space not only for the middle classes but also for a changing emphasis on different classes and class relations, depending on the scale and topic of analysis. There remains, however, the more far-reaching objection that a class analysis derived from the social relations of production is from the start inappropriate for comprehending the consumption sphere in which gentrification is seen to fit.

Recently, and in the context of urban change, this argument has been proposed most insistently by Saunders.

Saunders began with an attempt to rehabilitate the concept of housing class (1978; 1981), initially proposed by Rex and Moore (1967). Positioning himself, as they did, on squarely Weberian theoretical ground, Saunders argued that notions of class derived from Marxist analysis were at best relevant only in the sphere of production, but did not apply to the 'analytically distinct sphere' of consumption. Since consumption patterns, and especially patterns of housing consumption, are more important sources of social differentiation than is generally acknowledged, it was necessary, Saunders argued, to set up a parallel set of class distinctions based on the means of consumption. More recently, Saunders (1984) has abandoned "the attempt to theorize home ownership as a determinant of class structuration" (page 202), not so much as a result of a total critique of the Weberian origins of the notion but more as a result of a hardening of his political separation between production and consumption spheres supported in part by the empirical information amassed by Dunleavy (1979): his previous approach "overextends class theory and ultimately fails to relate class relations generated around ownership of domestic property to those generated around ownership of means of production" (page 206). Instead, he suggests that "divisions in the sphere of consumption do not restructure class relations but do crosscut them". Further, "consumption-based material interests are no less 'basic' or 'fundamental' than production-based (class) ones" (page 207).

Now this critique of Marxist class analysis and flirtation with Weber has had considerable appeal among researchers in gentrification, even if it would seem to lead to a rather drastic separation of spheres which feminist analysts sought to integrate. In particular, it has provided a direct or indirect means by which explanations of gentrification can be rooted in contemporary social rather than economic restructuring. In a summary critique, Harloe (1984) has challenged what he sees as Saunders's asserted rather than demonstrated social relationships. Harloe especially contests the contention that British society is witnessing "a major new fault line drawn not on the basis of class (ownership of means of production) but on the basis of sectoral alignment (ownership of means of consumption)" (Saunders, 1984,
This new fault line, for Saunders, separates owners of residential means of consumption (homeowners) from those who do not own their means of consumption, and are thereby forced to consume housing in collective form, that is, state-owned housing. Harloe denies that privatization constitutes a new and long-term emergence of this fault line. It is worth noting too that, although private ownership of housing seems to play a more integrative political role in the USA (Agnew, 1981), the distinction between homeowners and public renters makes even less empirical sense there than in Britain. In the USA almost a third of households still live in private market rental apartments and only 2-3% of housing units are public housing. These 'nonowners of the means of consumption', are spread widely across the income and class map and do not represent a coherent consumption sector. Thus, in New York City 20% of renting households earned less than $4960 in 1980 and 25.3% earned incomes below the official federal poverty level. But, by the same token, 20% of renting households earned over $22,744 (Stegman, 1982, pages 146-150).

But the application of Saunders's critique presents special conceptual problems in the context of gentrification. Although not everyone would openly subscribe to such a radical distinction between production and consumption as Saunders has proposed, the middle ground of mutual interaction between consumption and production has not adequately been explored in practice (Fincher, 1984) and so researchers have tended to come down too narrowly on one side of this dichotomy or the other. Thus, I accept Hamnett's (1984) critique of earlier work (Smith, 1979) for conflating a variety of life-style and demographic arguments under a somewhat grab-bag concept of consumption-side and consumer-preference explanations. The attempt to integrate consumption-side and production-side arguments—not in some mechanical resort to the notion that one 'crosscuts' the other, but rather in the notion that production and consumption are mutually implicated—should be at the top of our agenda.

This might not prove as easy in practice as it is in words. Recent attempts to reformulate Marxist analyses and to soften the exclusivity of the earlier emphasis on economic and production-side questions, have emphasized a different set of questions (Rose, 1984; Beauregard, 1986; Williams, 1986). These contributions have focused on the following questions: Where do the 'gentrifiers' come from? What are the social processes that are responsible for producing them as a coherent social group? As Beauregard (1986, page 41) puts it: "The explanation for gentrification begins with the presence of gentrifiers" (see also Rose, 1984, pages 55-57). The overarching importance of this work is that it has introduced the broad questions of social restructuring which are clearly fundamental to explaining gentrification. However, they also bring certain intrinsic dangers with them. If, indeed, gentrification is to be explained first and foremost as the result of the emergence of a new social group—whether defined by class, gender, or in other terms—then it becomes difficult to avoid at least a tacit subscription to some sort of consumer-preference model, no matter how watered down. How else does this new social group bring about gentrification, except by demanding specific kinds and locations of housing in the market? This is implicit even in Saunders's approach, when he argues (after Giddens, 1981) that homeownership fulfills some deep-seated desire for "ontological security" (1984, pages 222-223; see also Rose, 1984).

I do not mean to suggest here that consumer demand is illusory or that it finds no expression in the market. Nor do I mean to suggest that such demand is unchanging or impotent. There is no argument but that demand can at times—and especially those times when demand changes dramatically—alter the nature of production. But the conundrum of gentrification does not turn on explaining where middle-class demand comes from. Rather it turns on explaining the essentially
geographical question why central and inner areas of the city, which for decades could not satisfy the demands of the middle class, now appear to do so handsomely. If, indeed, demand structures have changed, we need to explain why these changed demands have led to a *spatial* reemphasis on the central and inner city.

We can now return to the hypothetical possibilities that emerged from the earlier discussion of the new middle class. Four possibilities were suggested, three of which tied economic and labor-market transformations to gentrification and one rejected the primacy of social restructuring as an explanation of gentrification. Whether or not the increase in incomes in the upper-middle range amounts to the emergence of a new middle class, it is difficult to imagine how this economic argument could account for gentrification. Higher levels of disposable income may well make a central or inner-city domicile affordable for larger numbers of people, but this is at best an enabling condition. Higher incomes do not in themselves imply a spatial bias toward the central city; indeed quite the opposite assumption was an important cornerstone (erroneously, it now seems) of land-use theory based in neo-classical economics (Alonso, 1960). Equally, there can be little doubt that a continued and even accelerated centralization of administrative, executive, professional, managerial, and some service activities may make a central domicile more desirable for a substantial sector of the middle class. But do these arguments really amount to an explanation of the geographical *reversal* of location habits by a proportion of middle-class women and women? Were there no young upwardly mobile professionals in the 1950s, or even the 1920s? Why did not the 'proto-yuppies' of six or eight decades ago initiate the gentrification process instead of spearheading the rush to the suburbs? Where younger middle-class people did reclaim city neighborhoods against the suburbanization trend, they were sufficiently uncommon that as in Greenwich Village, they and their life-styles were perceived as 'Bohemian'.

A similar argument can be made about the changing roles of women. Although more distinct economic and occupational changes are evident at least for some women, and the data suggest a clear correlation with gentrification activity, the conspicuousness of these changes should not blind us to less visible but possibly more trenchant changes. The increase in the number of households with two or more incomes (family or otherwise) certainly enhances the rationale for a central domicile for those households with central workplaces. But it is incumbent on us to explain why the gradual quantitative increase in the proportion of women working and of women in higher income brackets translates into a substantial *spatial* change of domicile. After all, married women were in the official work force before World War 2, albeit in smaller numbers, and some of these were in relatively well-paying professional positions, yet no gentrification process seems to have blunted the suburban flight of the time. How could such a comparatively quick spatial reversal be explained by more gradual social changes alone? And why do such social changes lead to spatial changes in residence as opposed to an ossified spatial structure where increased costs are simply borne by affected households? Of course, it is just possible that we have here an excellent illustration of Engels's 'first law of dialectics', namely that quantitative change converts into qualitative change. But even if this is so—and I for one am sceptical about this 'law'—we need to give a more concrete explanation of the manner in which this quantitative social change suddenly becomes qualitative in spatial terms. Therefore, as it stands, the argument that social restructuring is the primary impetus behind gentrification is substantially underdetermined.

It is not unreasonable to conclude, then, that Markusen (1981, page 32) overstates the case when she suggests that "gentrification is in large part a result of the breakdown of the patriarchal household". This breakdown of the patriarchal
household is undeniable, as is its contribution to gentrification, and this is a doubly important argument when linked with changing employment patterns. The breaking down of "sexual apartheid which kept men and women in rigidly separate spheres" (Samuel, 1982, page 124) seems to have selectively benefited women of higher socioeconomic position and more educated women for whom a range of previously closed occupations have now become relatively more accessible. And, although a gradual loosening of this sexual apartheid may already have been occurring, it is predominantly the result of the strong feminist movement (Rose, 1984) which emerged in the 1960s and remained powerfully effective throughout most of the 1970s. Here, indeed, we may see a more cataclysmic political and social change that contributes to the spatial shift associated with gentrification. Yet this can only be a part of the story; however significant, it is a narrow base on which to rest responsibility for the massive economic and geographical restructuring that gentrification represents. We still require a broader explanation for the partial geographical shift of investments associated with gentrification.

In this context, I would defend the rent-gap analysis (Smith, 1979) not as in itself a definitive or complete explanation but as the necessary centerpiece to any theory of gentrification. It is the historical patterns of capital investment and disinvestment in the central and inner cities that establishes the opportunity (not the necessity) for this spatial reversal in the first place. In the early decades of the century the disinvestment from central areas was in its infancy, the suburbs only beginning to sprawl, and the link between social restructuring and the restructuring of the central urban environment virtually inconceivable. Not until major disinvestment had created the opportunity for profitable reinvestment and urban renewal had demonstrated its feasibility could gentrification begin. It is the existence of the rent gap in the center that facilitates the translation of more gradual social processes into a spatial reversal of some residential, recreational, and employment activities (see Smith, 1986).

The city as consumption landscape?

In this concluding section, I want to try to propose an appropriate way of conceiving the integration of production-side and consumption-side arguments vis-à-vis gentrification. This will involve presenting a societal restructuring argument in historical terms, and an attempt to incorporate the social aspects of this restructuring with its economic and spatial and political dimensions. This is obviously exploratory and should be treated as merely suggestive.

Embedded in Saunders's (1984) argument is a discussion of historical phases of consumption patterns which provides an appropriate starting point for this synthesis. He claims that in the last 150 years, there has been a succession of three phases in the mode of consumption. According to his empirical generalization of the history, for he explicitly denies that these phases are evolutionary, a 'market' phase dominated the 19th century, but was superceded by a 'socialized' mode of consumption, and ultimately in the 1970s by a 'privatized' mode of consumption. Thus, for Saunders, the recent privatization programs of Mrs Thatcher and President Reagan are part of a major long-term restructuring away from state involvement in the sphere of consumption. One geographical corollary of this argument is the claim that the "urban reform ideology" of the new middle class, "the present day counterparts of Veblen's leisure class", is fashioning a postindustrial city with a consumption landscape rather than a production landscape (Ley, 1980, page 243). The world of productive industrial capitalism is superceded by the ideology of consumptive pluralism, and gentrification is one of the ways in which this historical transformation is inscribed in the modern landscape. An urban dream is coming to supercede the suburban dream of past decades. Like Saunders's historical phases, this claim is a
shallow empirical abstraction—"a vacuous set of generalizations" (Walker and Greenberg, 1982, page 17)—incapable of sustaining theoretical scrutiny. Yet there is something appealing about it nevertheless; as we watch a Rouse arcade come to fruition in Baltimore, an erstwhile derelict Columbus Avenue become the definition of chic in New York, a magnificent Eton's Center rise in Toronto, and a sparkling Bonaventure Hotel become the symbol of postmodernism in Los Angeles, our field sense tells us that the times are certainly changing and that indeed something like a bourgeois playground is being constructed in many downtowns. But does this merit the conclusion that urban form is now being structured by consumption ideologies and demand preferences rather than by production requirements and geographical patterns of capital mobility?

It is hardly a new theme that we are on the verge of a consumption society. The same notion has continually surfaced both in analytical and in utopian tracts, and was a staple of sociological discourse long before Bell's (1973) announcement of postindustrial society. In the postwar period alone, this theme appears in different guises—in Burnham's managerial revolution, Galbraith's affluent society, and Whyte's organization man. Riesman (1961, page 6), in The Lonely Crowd, gives it particularly sharp and optimistic expression when he places postwar America alongside the Renaissance, the Reformation, and the Industrial Revolution, and declares that the postwar revolution involves nothing less than "a whole range of social developments associated with a shift from an age of production to an age of consumption" (page 20). To clarify what is implied in this "age of consumption" and to improve our comprehension of the limits and potential of the consumption landscape which come in its trail, let us return to Riesman's age of production—Saunders's age of a market mode of consumption—and pick the story up there.

During the 19th century, the international expansion of capital was accomplished primarily through the appropriation of absolute surplus value and the consequent economic expansion in absolute geographical space (Smith, 1984). This is the period dominated, according to Aglietta (1979, page 71), by the "extensive regime of accumulation". At the close of the 19th century, there were, however, severe crises of overaccumulation and also an increasingly organized and militant working class prepared to fight for a whole array of demands, which, although conducted on an economic basis, included not only workplace issues of wage rates, the length of the working day, and overall conditions, but also housing questions, rent levels, and so forth. In response to these economic and social challenges to capital, whether from overaccumulation or wage laborers, the capitalist system underwent a broad sequence of transformations toward an intensive rather than extensive regime of accumulation. Absolute surplus value was superceded by relative surplus value, and this meant a revolutionizing of the workplace, the rise of Taylorism, and scientific management. But it also meant a revolutionizing of consumption relations and of the deep-seated social relations between capital and labor. The solution to the problem of over-accumulation lay ultimately in the economic enfranchisement of the working class, who became a powerful magnet of consumption in their own right. It was this intensive regime of accumulation, which Aglietta (after Gramsci, 1971 edn) refers to as Fordism, that dominated the two decades of dramatic postwar economic growth, and it involved an unprecedented intervention by the state. The transition to an intensive regime of accumulation is also marked by the geographical transition from the absolute expansion of global capitalism to its internal expansion and differentiation, and the emergence of the classical pattern of uneven development (Smith, 1984; see also, Dunford and Perrons, 1983).

This is a highly schematic summary of many complex societal changes, but the urban transformation wrought in the midst of this process is readily recognizable.
At the urban scale it was a period of dramatic suburbanization, especially in the USA, where the state actively sponsored working-class homeownership (Harvey, 1977; Checkoway, 1980) and a whole array of expanded consumption patterns. Where national and colonial expansion had once held the key to solving problems of overaccumulation and disequilibria between production and consumption, a new key was now found in an internal redifferentiation of geographical space. The 'suburban solution' (Walker, 1977; 1981) was part of this, but equally a part of the solution was the expansion of a massive welfare state and, in general, the development of a much more socialized economy, as described by Saunders. This involved a rapid expansion of collective consumption, in housing, health care, education, transportation, and so on; society as a whole, and individuals in particular, were drawn into the heart of the capital—a real subsumption under capital in the consumption sphere—through mortgages, car loans, consumer debt, and the costs of college education. This is the process to which O'Connor (1984, pages 170–171) refers when he notes that individual needs are increasingly social but at the same time are increasingly fulfilled by means of commodity consumption; real social needs are in fact frustrated by the expansion of commodity 'needs'. But, as a result of this historical process, there was a dilution of cultural boundaries, a partial homogenization of consumption patterns across class boundaries, and a comparatively quiescent working class in this period in part because of the capital–labor accords reached in the late 1940s and early 1950s. In fact, there was a very real fuzzing of class boundaries; they were not only contradictory, they were increasingly indistinct, and it was this reality which gave rise to so much of the optimistic expectation of a homogeneous middle-class society.

"Capitalism shifted gears", according to Harvey (1985, page 202), "from a 'supply-side' to a 'demand-side' urbanization". This gave rise in the ashes of World War 2 to what he calls the 'Keynsian City' which, with its demand-led urbanization, took on all the appearances of a 'postindustrial city'. Consumption was no longer the poor relation of production, in the economy, in people's individual lives, or in the production of geographical space, as it had been under the extensive regime of accumulation. Most of the analysis of this economic and social restructuring has focused on the new roles of the working class, because their integration into a mass-consumption society is one of the historically important developments that distinguishes Fordism. But the ethic of consumption which accompanied this sea change was by no means restricted to the working class, or rather to certain sectors of that class. It was generalized throughout postwar society. The middle class shared in the spirit of the time as much as the better-off sectors of the working class, but this was a much less remarkable event since the middle class was already identified with comfortable consumption habits. This new structure of consumption norms was in turn made possible by considerable standardization of commodity production, especially in housing and automobiles, although the housing sector continued to lag behind the production of consumer durables in terms of technical and organizational advances in the labor process. According to Aglietta (1979, pages 160–161):

"This meant the creation of a functional aesthetic ('design'), which acquired fundamental social importance ... Not content to create a space for objects of daily life, as supports of a capitalist commodity universe, it provided an image of this space by advertising techniques. This image was presented as an objectification of consumption status which individuals could perceive outside themselves. The process of social recognition was externalized and fetishised."

Just as the standardization and cheapening of commodities extended the consumption habits of the working class, it made more and different commodities available to (and even prized by) the middle class; the standardization of products
at one pole placed a particular premium on differentiation at the other. It is this question of cultural differentiation in a mass market which is most relevant to gentrification. Gentrification is a redifferentiation of the cultural, social, and economic landscape, and, to that extent, one can see in the very patterns of consumption clear attempts at social differentiation. Thus gentrification and the mode of consumption it engenders are an integral part of class constitution (Jager, 1986; Williams, 1986); they are part of the means employed by new middle-class individuals to distinguish themselves from the stuffed-shirt bourgeoisie above and the working class below. Interpreting ‘urban conservation’ in Melbourne’s Victorian neighborhoods, Jager writes (1986, pages 79–80, 83, 85):

“urban conservation is the production of social differentiation; it is one mechanism through which social differences are turned into social distinction. Slums become Victoriana, and housing becomes a cultural investment with facadal display signifying social ascension ... The ambiguity and compromise of the new middle classes is revealed in their esthetic tastes. It is through facadal restoration work that urban conservation expresses its approximation to a former bourgeois consumption model in which prestige is based upon a ‘constraint of superfluousness’ ... But ... those consumption practices are anxiously doubled up on what may be termed a Victorian work ethic embedded in renovation work ... The effacing of an industrial past and a working-class presence, the whitewashing of a former social stain, was achieved through extensive remodelling. The return to historical purity and authenticity (of the ‘high’ Victorian era) is realised by stripping away external additions, by sandblasting, by internal gutting. The restoration of an anterior history was virtually the only manner in which the recent stigma of the inner areas could be removed or redefined ... Inner wordly asceticism becomes public display; bare brick walls and exposed timbers come to signify cultural discernment, not the poverty of slums without plaster ... In this way ‘the stigma of labour’ ... is both removed and made other. Remnants of a past English colonial presence survive through the importance attributed to hand made bricks, preferably with convict thumbprints.”

The pursuit of difference, diversity, and distinction forms the basis of the new urban ideology, but it is not without contradiction. It embodies a search for diversity as long as it is highly ordered, and a glorification of the past as long as it is safely brought into the present. If it is in part a reaction to the perceived homogeneity of the suburban dream (Allen, 1984, page 34), the urban dream also shares much of the angst of the former. History was a commodity no less for Connell’s (1976) commuting restorers of Surrey farm cottages than for Jager’s Melbourne gentrifiers. Whether in the urbs, suburbs, or exurbs, however, the perpetual search for difference and distinction amid mass consumption is eternally frustrated. In the context of the city especially, it can lead to a new “gentrification kitsch” (Jager, 1986, page 87), in which cultural difference itself becomes mass produced. As the process proceeds, this becomes increasingly clear. As the choicest structures are converted, and open sites become increasingly conspicuous (and expensive) in otherwise gentrified neighborhoods, the infill is accomplished by new construction. Here the architectural form provides no existing historical meaning that can be reworked into cultural display, and the appeal to a new gentrification kitsch is therefore extreme. Where such modern infill occurs in gentrifying neighborhoods, whether in Baltimore’s Otterbein, in scattered sites throughout Washington’s Capitol Hill, or in Central London Barratt estates, one has the impression of having come full circle, in geographical and cultural as well as architectural terms. This infill gentrification is accomplishing a visual suburbanization of the city.
How does this perspective differ from that of postindustrial advocates who now see a demand-led urbanization in which consumption landscapes are superceding production landscapes? The answer comes in three parts. First, the perspective implied above is an attempt to understand the changing importance of consumption in terms of the social restructuring that has occurred since the end of last century, and, in turn, to relate that social restructuring to the economic and spatial restructuring which accompanies it.

Second, urban development in the postwar period may have been consumption led in the sense that the accumulation of capital depended on an unprecedented level of production of consumption goods, and that this aspect of the economy had a highly spatial identity. It is necessary to be careful about this argument, however, because postwar expansion also led to massive increases in the production of means of production, not to mention means of destruction. Production of the means of destruction was also a defining feature of postwar growth, as suggested in the notion of a permanent arms economy (Vance, 1951). In any case, 'consumption-side urbanization' is not necessarily the same thing as 'demand-led urbanization'. Consumption-side growth implies the importance of sectors producing for individual consumption, whereas 'demand-led urbanization' implies that, in the move from the extensive to the intensive regime of accumulation, the dynamics and demands of accumulation are now subordinated to those of consumption. Accumulation is potentially relegated to a by-product of consumption and some sort of consumer-demand theory would then be necessary to understand the direction of 'demand-led urbanization'.

The third, and arguably most important difference between the perspective proposed here and the postindustrial thesis is essentially historical, and suggests a justification for the accumulation model elaborated above. If postwar expansion, the political pact between labor and capital, and a developing ethic of mass consumption substantially muddied the waters of class distinction during this period—in reality as well as in appearance—this was not destined to be a permanent, gradual, and progressive transformation of all the United States of America into a homogeneous middle class. 1973 was an ironic year for Bell, the 1950s author of The End of Ideology, to publish his tract on postindustrial society, because it was in the same year that the industrial system began to reassert itself with a vengeance. For several years, the international economic system had been stumbling toward recession, but the oil embargo of October 1973 triggered a crisis—reaching much deeper into the fabric of society than a mere energy crisis—which has been with us ever since. If consumption was stepping out during post-war expansion as an independent agent, it was rudely grounded after 1973 when its dependence on production was abruptly reasserted. And this had dramatic spatial effects.

To the extent that urbanization and changing urban form were part of the solution to the problems of an earlier regime of capital, they suddenly appeared as part of the problem when the intensive regime broke down. The sharp changes in urban patterns since the late 1960s suggest the extent to which the city will necessarily be part of the solution to contemporary crisis (Harvey, 1985, page 212). The lack of synchronicity between production and consumption is only one facet of the current crisis, but it is particularly evident at the urban scale where consumption patterns are being reorganized by the restructuring of production. In effect, the optimistic homogenization of society in the realm of consumption was only partially accomplished, and only briefly, and since 1973 has been abruptly truncated and even reversed; the social equalization championed by consumption-led urbanization has given way to a redifferentiation of society at the hands of industrial decline, unemployment, declining wages, elevated attacks by employers
against the broad conditions of work, and parallel attacks against the gains achieved by the feminist and civil rights movements in the 1960s.

The point here, as regards gentrification, is that the drastic ‘grounding’ of the mode of consumption was highly uneven. The economic restructuring that followed economic collapse has also been accompanied by a social restructuring in which a new cleavage is being asserted. The ‘new fault lines’ in part follow old class lines, but, with the expansion of the so-called service sector of the working class, they also cut into new territory. Yet the overall result is an increasingly polarized city; about this there is consensus from right as well as left (Sternlieb and Hughes, 1983; Marcuse, 1986). That is, the consumption ethic and consumption-side urbanization are a continuing reality for many in the middle classes, whereas it is a ‘dream turned sour’ for many industrial and service workers. Thus, despite the economic recession, gentrification appears to be proceeding faster than ever, while at the other pole, the rate of private residential mortgage foreclosures is expected to reach record proportions for 1986. This is a radical bifurcation of the consumption dream, urban or suburban, producing “a city of haves and have-nots” (Goodwin, 1984). The leading historical edge of the ‘city of the haves’ is well represented by so-called yuppies and mushrooming gentrification; round the corner and in close geographical proximity is the city of ‘have-nots’ represented by the burgeoning homeless, estimated to number anywhere from 250 000 to 3 million in the USA (USHUD, 1984).

Acknowledgments. A number of people kindly commented on and critiqued earlier versions of this paper. Special thanks to Benno Engels, Ron Horvarth, Hal Kendig, Les Kilmartin, Laura Reid, Damaris Rose, Chris Toulouse, Leyla Vural, Peter Williams, and Sharon Zubin, as well as to an anonymous referee.

References

Aglietta M, 1979 A Theory of Capitalist Regulation (New Left Books, London)
Agnew J A, 1981, “Homeownership and the capitalist social order”, in Urbanization and Urban Planning in Capitalist Society Eds M Dear, A J Scott (Methuen, Andover, Hants) pp 457–480
Allen I L, 1984, “The ideology of dense neighborhood redevelopment”, in Gentrification, Displacement and Neighborhood Revitalization Eds J J Palen, B London (State University of New York Press, Albany, NY) pp 27–42
Alonso W, 1960, “A theory of the urban land market” Papers and Proceedings of the Regional Science Association 6 149–157
Aronowitz S, 1979, “The professional-managerial class or middle strata”, in Between Labor and Capital Ed. P Walker (South End Press, Boston, MA) pp 213–242
Beauregard R, 1986, “The chaos and complexity of gentrification”, in Gentrification of the City Eds N Smith, P Williams (Allen and Unwin, Hemel Hempstead, Herts) pp 35–55
Bell D, 1973 The Coming of Post-industrial Society (Basic Books, New York)
Bruce-Briggs B, 1979 The New Class? (Transaction Books, New Brunswick, NJ)
Checkoway B, 1980, “Large builders, federal housing programmes, and postwar suburbanization” International Journal of International and Regional Research 4 21–44
Chouinard V, Fincher R, Webber M, 1984, “Empirical research in scientific human geography” Progress in Human Geography 8 347–380
Connell J, 1976 The End of Tradition: Country Life in Central Surrey (Routledge and Kegan Paul, Andover, Hants)
Cybriwsky R, 1978, “Social aspects of neighborhood change” Annals of the Association of American Geographers 68 17–33
DeGiovanni F, 1983, “Patterns of change in housing market activity in revitalizing neighborhoods” Journal of the American Planners Association 49 22–39
Dunford M, Perrons D, 1983 The Arena of Capital (Macmillan, London)
Dunleavy P, 1979, “The urban bases of political alignment” British Journal of Political Science 9 409–443
Ehrenreich B, Ehrenreich J, 1979, “The professional–managerial class”, in Between Labor and Capital Ed. P Walker (South End Press, Boston, MA) pp 5–45
Fincher R, 1984, “Identifying class struggle outside commodity production” Environment and Planning D: Society and Space 2 309–327
Of yuppies and housing: gentrification, social restructuring, and the urban dream

Giddens A, 1981 A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism. Volume I: Power, Property and the State (University of California Press, Berkeley, CA)

Goodwin M, 1984, “Recovery making New York city of haves and have-nots” New York Times 28 July, page AI

Gould A, 1981, “The salaried middle class in the corporatist welfare state” Policy and Politics 9(4) 401-418

Gramsci A, 1971 cdn, Prison Notebooks (International Publishers, New York)

Hamnett C, 1984, “Gentrification and residential location theory: A review and assessment”, in Geography and the Urban Environment, Volume 6: Progress in Research and Applications Eds D T Herbert, R J Johnston (John Wiley, New York) pp 283-319

Harloe M, 1984, “Sector and class: a critical comment” International Journal of Urban and Regional Research 8 228-237

Harvey D, 1977, “Labor, capital and class struggle around the built environment in advanced capitalist societies” Politics and Society 7 265-275

Harvey D, 1985 The Urbanization of Capital. Studies in the History and Theory of Capitalist Urbanization (Basil Blackwell, Oxford)

Jackson P, 1985, “Neighbourhood change in New York: the loft conversion process” Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie 76 202-215

Jager M, 1986, “Class definition and the aesthetics of gentrification: Victoriana in Melbourne”, in Gentrification of the City Eds N Smith, P Williams (Allen and Unwin, Hemel Hempstead, Herts) pp 78-91

Katzenelson I, 1981 City Trenches: Urban Politics and the Patterning of Class in the United States (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL)

Laska S, Spain D (Eds), 1980 Back to the City: Issues in Neighborhood Renovation (Pergamon Press, Elmsford, NY)

Ley D, 1980, “Liberal ideology and the postindustrial city” Annals of the Association of American Geographers 70 238-258

Marcuse P, 1986, “Abandonment, gentrification and displacement: the linkages in New York City”, in Gentrification and the City Eds N Smith, P Williams (Allen and Unwin, Hemel Hempstead, Herts) pp 153-177

Markusen A, 1981, “City spatial structure, women’s household work, and national urban policy”, in Women and the City Eds C R Stimpson, E Dixler, M J Nelson, K B Yatrakis (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL) pp 20-41

Marx K, 1963 cdn The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte (International Publishers, New York)

Marx K, 1967 cdn Capital 3 volumes (International Publishers, New York)

Marx K, 1973 cdn Grundrisse (Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, Middx)

Marx K, 1974 cdn The Civil War in France (Progress Publishers, Moscow)

Miller S, 1965, “The ‘new’ working class” in Blue-Collar World Eds A Shostak, W Gomberg (Harper and Row, New York) pp 2-9

Mingione E, 1981 Social Conflict and the City (Basil Blackwell, Oxford)

Mullins P, 1982, “The ‘middle-class’ and the inner city” Journal of Australian Political Economy 11 44-58

O’Connor J, 1984 Accumulation Crisis (Basil Blackwell, Oxford)

Parker R, 1972 The Myth of the Middle Class (Harper and Row, New York)

Poulantzas N, 1975 Classes in Contemporary Capitalism (New Left Books, London)

Rex J, Moore R, 1967 Race, Community and Conflict (Oxford University Press, Oxford)

Riesman D, 1961 The Lonely Crowd (Yale University Press, New Haven, CT)

Rose D, 1984, “Rethinking gentrification: beyond the uneven development of Marxist urban theory” Environment and Planning D: Society and Space 2 47-74

Routh G, 1980 Occupation and Pay in Great Britain 1906-1979 (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge)

Rutherford M, 1981, “Why Labour is losing more than a deposit” Financial Times 28 November

Samuel R, 1982, “The SDP and the new political class” New Society 22 April, pp 124-127

Saunders P, 1978, “Domestic property and social class” International Journal of Urban and Regional Research 2 233-251

Saunders P, 1981 Social Theory and the Urban Question (Hutchinson, London)

Saunders P, 1984, “Beyond housing classes: the sociological significance of private property rights and means of consumption” International Journal of Urban and Regional Research 8 202-227

Sayer A, 1982, “Explanation in economic geography” Progress in Human Geography 6 68-88
Schaffer R, Smith N, 1986, “The gentrification of Harlem?” Annals of the Association of American Geographers 76 347–365

Scott H, 1984 Working Your Way to the Bottom: The Feminization of Poverty (Pandora Press, Andover, Hants)

Smith N, 1979, “Toward a theory of gentrification: a back to the city movement by capital not people” Journal of the American Planners Association 45 538–548

Smith N, 1984 Uneven Development: Nature, Capital and the Production of Space (Basil Blackwell, Oxford)

Smith N, 1986, “Gentrification, the frontier and the restructuring of urban space” in Gentrification of the City Eds N Smith, P Williams (Allen and Unwin, Hemel Hempstead, Herts) pp 15–34

Smith N, Williams P (Eds), 1986 Gentrification of the City (Allen and Unwin, Hemel Hempstead, Herts)

Stallard K, Ehrenreich B, Sklar H, 1983 Poverty in the American Dream. Women and Children First (South End Press, Boston, MA)

Stegman M, 1982 The Dynamics of Rental Housing in New York City (Center for Urban Policy Research, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ)

Sterling G, Hughes J, 1983, “The uncertain future of the central city” Urban Affairs Quarterly 18 455–472

USDC, 1972, “Census of Population and Housing, Census Tracts, New York, NY SMSA, 1970” Bureau of the Census, US Department of Commerce, Washington, DC

USDC, 1978 Survey of Current Business Bureau of Economic Analysis, US Department of Commerce, Washington, DC

USDC, 1980a A Statistical Portrait of Women in the United States: 1978 Bureau of the Census, US Department of Commerce, Washington, DC

USDC, 1980b Money Incomes of Families and Unrelated Persons in the United States: 1978 Bureau of the Census, US Department of Commerce, Washington, DC

USDC, 1983, “Census of Population and Housing, Census Tracts, New York, NY–NJ SMSA, 1980” Bureau of the Census, US Department of Commerce, Washington, DC

USDC, 1984 Money Income of Households, Families and Persons in the United States: 1982 Bureau of the Census, US Department of Commerce, Washington, DC

USDC, 1985 Current Population Reports series P-60, number 146, Bureau of the Census, US Department of Commerce, Washington, DC

USDC, 1986 Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1986 106th edition, Bureau of the Census, US Department of Commerce, Washington, DC

USHUD, 1984 A Report to the Secretary on the Homeless and Emergency Shelters Office of Policy Development and Research, US Dept of Housing and Urban Development, Washington, DC

Vance T N, 1951, “The permanent war economy” New International January–February issue, pp 29–45

Walker R, 1977 The Suburban Solution PhD dissertation, Department of Geography and Environmental Engineering, The Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, MD

Walker R, 1981, “A theory of suburbanization: capitalism and the construction of urban space in the United States”, in Urbanization and Urban Planning in Capitalist Society Eds M Dear, A J Scott (Methuen, Andover, Hants) pp 383–430

Walker R, Greenberg D, 1982, “Post-industrialism and political reform in the city: A critique” Antipode 14 17–32

Watson S, 1986, “Housing and the family: the marginalization of non-family households in Britain” International Journal of Urban and Regional Research 10 8–28

Wiebe R, 1967 The Search for Order, 1877–1920 (Hill and Wang, New York)

Williams P, 1984, “Economic processes and urban change: an analysis of contemporary patterns of residential restructuring” Australian Geographical Studies 22 39–57

Williams P, 1986, “Class constitution through spatial reconstruction? A reevaluation of gentrification in Australia, Britain and the United States”, in Gentrification of the City Eds N Smith, P Williams (Allen and Unwin, Hemel Hempstead, Herts) pp 56–77

Wright E O, 1978 Class, Crisis and the State (New Left Books, London)

Zukin S, 1982 Loft Living: Culture and Capital in Urban Change (The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, MD)

Zussman R, 1984, “The middle levels: engineers and the ‘working middle class’” Politics and Society 13 217–237

© 1987 a Pion publication printed in Great Britain