

Call for papers

Representing Urban Change: Gentrification and Displacement in Literature and other Media

International Symposium

**Department of Modern Languages, Uppsala University
Institute for Housing and Urban Research (IBF), Uppsala University**

**In collaboration with
The Association for Literary Urban Studies (ALUS)
Uppsala Forum for Democracy, Peace and Justice
Faculty of Humanities, Psychology and Theology, Åbo Akademi University**

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Keynote speaker: James Peacock, Keele University (UK)

Gentrification is one of the most controversial and visible urban phenomena of the post-1945 era. With the acceleration of urbanisation and globalisation, gentrification has taken new forms and has grown increasingly complex. The classical account of gentrification, the word itself coined by Ruth Glass (1964) observing London, was predicated on cities in the West, but today gentrification processes can equally be observed in smaller cities, new-build areas and countryside regions all over the world. This calls for new and interdisciplinary approaches to gentrification. As early as 2009, the ‘sustained interest in gentrification research’ over ‘more than a generation’ was noteworthy (Ley 2009: 274). As David Ley pointed out then, this followed from the topic’s ‘engagement with a number of important conceptual categories including class, gender, and, most recently, race, patterns and styles of consumption, housing and other service needs, social polarization and the governance practices of neo-liberalism in the global city’. The most recent theorizations emphasize that while earlier research concentrated on ‘social gentrification’, its ‘architectural’, ‘functional’ (especially in commerce) and ‘symbolic’ aspects call for further attention (Döring and Ulbricht 2018: 11). Literary fictions of gentrification have abounded in multiple urban contexts during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Some analyses of gentrification processes as represented in particular novels and districts such as the East End

and Brooklyn, New York, have indicated the way (e.g. Brouillette 2009; Peacock 2015; Peacock 2020). But sustained critical attention to the gentrification novel as a category of writing crossing national and linguistic borders is still very new.

At the beginning of the 2020s the concept of gentrification, which has been enormously influential worldwide since the 1990s, is itself under challenge, with alternative terms such as ‘financialization’ proposed to take into account the great variety of effects on housing patterns of altered legal and banking environments (Rolnik 2013). Activist urban scholars, drawing on Global South contexts, propose the examination of dispossession and displacement experienced by citizens rather than the inward movement of wealthier people which may drive prices upwards (Ghertner 2014). Our symposium will explore both the history of the concept and reflect on its possible futures, through the lens of literary and other cultural representations of it and related phenomena.

The study of literature and in particular of the urban novel can make an important contribution to research into gentrification and related phenomena. In the formulation of James Peacock (2020: 132), ‘the novel’s abiding interest in multiple subjectivities, and its potential for combining lyricism with ethnography, can allow for a nuanced treatment of gentrification in all its messiness’. In this symposium, the Association for Literary Urban Studies (ALUS) calls for more systematic attention to artistic representations of gentrification in literature and other media, and for investigation of how these relate to other accounts of the phenomenon, including sociological, economic and political ones. While organized by researchers in literary studies, the symposium welcomes discussion of textual or narrative aspects of many sorts of text, including novels and films but also memoirs, journalism, architectural writing, ethnographies, and academic discourse. Speakers could come from any of a range of disciplines or be interdisciplinary in two or more fields, including but not limited to literary studies, human geography, urban history, sociology, architecture, planning or design.

Our keynote speaker, Dr James Peacock of Keele University, is a leading scholar of gentrification narratives. His research is particularly focused on Brooklyn, a vitally important site in developing twenty-first-century understandings of the topic worldwide (Peacock 2015; Peacock 2020).

Papers may be case studies or present a theoretical or methodological approach. ***Suggested topics may include, but are not limited to:***

- representations of gentrification in literature (e.g. novel, short story, drama, poetry)
- accounts of gentrification in creative non-fiction genres including life writing, memoir, psychogeography and travel writing
- representations of gentrification in audio-/visual arts and media (e.g film, TV drama and documentary)
- gentrification in the news media and political/social debate
- gentrification in specific urban, national and regional contexts (e.g. London, Amsterdam, Berlin, New York, Nordic Countries, post-Socialist Europe, the ‘Rustbelt’ USA)

- gentrification narratives in urban planning
- theoretical perspectives on representations of gentrification
- gentrification aesthetics
- ethnographies of gentrification
- parallel and related phenomena, including financialization of employment and architecture, secondary gentrification, studentification, and gated communities (often in contexts beyond Europe and North America including the Pacific rim, Central and South America, South Asia, the Middle East, Africa)
- cultural mediations of gentrification seen in terms of different dimensions of gentrification (architectural, social, functional, symbolic)

Proposals (300 words maximum) for 20-minute papers should be sent to Jason Finch (jfinch@abo.fi) by 15 April 2020. Please feel free to contact any of the organizers with questions, including about the probable suitability of your topic.

Organizers

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