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The Battle for the High Street. Retail Gentrification, Class and Disgust. Phil Hubbard, London, *Palgrave Macmillan*, 2017, 260 pp, £66.99, ISBN 9781137521521

A short way into his dissection of the contemporary British high street, Phil Hubbard takes stock of Whitstable. This Kent seaside town, with its £16.50 cod and chips and its 'bijou and self-consciously twee outlets' is depicted as the front line of hipsterfication, the erasure of working-class culture through the proliferation of 'shabby chic vintage shops, hipster micropubs and retro cupcake shops'.

Hubbard knows his enemies, and isn't to be put off by the fact that they ooze charm and sup locally brewed craft beer while nibbling on artisan unpasteurised cheese. In the front line of the battle for the high street, the new entrepreneurs beloved of TV retail guru Mary Portas and the New Economics Foundation are the implacable foes of traditional working-class communities, whose preferred retail outlets - betting shops, takeaways and Wetherspoons pubs - are being squeezed out.

Hubbard's thesis is deliberately provocative, and no less pertinent for its one-sidedness. It is that retail gentrification, or the advent of upmarket independent stores, art galleries and coffee shops, is a form of exclusion as destructive of traditional working-class communities as the more visible damage done by housing gentrification.

His study, drawing mainly on existing literature but also on his own research in British towns and cities, frames current debates over the 'high street' as a battle between class interests. In this battle the favoured weapons of the gentrifiers and their allies in the planning profession are disgust and disapproval: sex shops objectify women, takeaways encourage obesity, payday lenders exploit people on low incomes.

Hubbard does not exactly counter these arguments, but suggests they are being deployed in ways that denigrate working-class communities in order to exclude them from urban space. His book draws on the sociology of distinction pioneered by Pierre Bourdieu (1998) and taken up in studies of retail gentrification in the United States (Zukin et al., 2009). His book is a response to a 'sense of injustice' (p.7), a view that planning and retail policies are 'fixated on certain middle-class modes of consumption'.

His opening chapter sets the scene, introducing the concept of retail gentrification. In Chapter 2 he moves on to argue that discourses of the 'death of the high street' have been deployed to aid and abet gentrification processes, creating a demand for intervention. The next chapter places the quest for 'distinction' in the context of a reaction against the anonymity and predictability of out-of-town shopping malls.

Chapter 4 is the lynchpin of the book, casting the supposed renaissance of the high street as an assault on working-class communities and interests. He declares that 'when

stakeholders promote retail regeneration they are tacitly supporting gentrification and a revaluation of space that ultimately works in the interests of capital, not people' (p.68) and that this marginalisation of communities is supported by language that 'relies on metaphors of disgust, pollution and contamination' (p.75).

The next four chapters home in on specific aspects of this marginalisation, discussing contemporary discourses around pubs and bars, sex shops and lap dancing clubs, betting shops and takeaways. In each case Hubbard identifies moralising discourses designed to drive a wedge between better-off and low-income communities, deriding working-class households' tastes as offensive while pricing 'authentic' alternatives out of their reach.

In Chapter 9 the author attacks ideas of the 'creative city' or arts-led regeneration as an instance of the same school of exclusionary discourse. Finally, in Chapter 10, he returns to the ideal of 'vital and viable' town centres as enshrined in UK planning policy, drawing on the work of Henri Lefebvre (1996) to suggest that 'the middle and upper classes have forgotten the lower classes have rights to the city too' (p.236).

Hubbard's views are frequently contentious, and his association of particular forms of consumption with the preferences of entire communities is problematic, risking a caricature of the working class consumer who goes to the betting shop in the morning, drinks at Wetherspoons at lunchtime, visits a lap dancing club in the evening and ends up at the high street kebab shop.

Doubtless this is not the author's intention, but there is little recognition of complexity and contradiction in his depictions either of working-class communities or of the 'hipsters' he sees as their nemesis. At the risk of diluting his argument, he might have acknowledged that our cities are also places where marginalised communities engage in 'fragile and contradictory movements for new kinds of citizen power and social justice' (Holston, 2009).

Nevertheless Hubbard's intervention in the debate over the future of Britain's high streets is timely, reminding planners that high streets that 'succeed' only by marginalising large sections of society cannot be regarded as vital or viable.

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