

# In Search for a Bourdieusian Approach to “Gentrification”: Looking through the Radiance of Academic *Doxa*

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**Abstract.** Despite the potential of Pierre Bourdieu’s sociology to advance debates of urban studies, this potential is so far used only superficially. In this article I take arguments from the debate on gentrification as an example to show how Bourdieu’s sociology could help us look through the common sense notions of urban studies. But despite the critique for the debate on gentrification, I argue that we should keep on approaching these empiric locations. They enable us to produce sensitive stories on the effects that social forces have on our everyday lives in cities and – in particular – to show the role that housing policy has in the reproduction of power relations.

**Keywords:** Bourdieu, gentrification, housing policy, symbolic violence

## 1. Introduction: a moment of doubt in the debate on gentrification

Fifty years after 1964, when Ruth Glass had introduced term *gentrification* (Glass, 1964), a wide range of researchers, in particular human geographers, but also sociologists, anthropologists and academics from other fields have contributed to the debate on this subject. During the time there were plenty of attempts to provide different definitions of this phenomenon. But now it is more of a popular term, which is defined in the Merriam-Webster dictionary as:

“a process in which a poor area (as of a city) experiences an influx of middle-class or wealthy people who renovate and rebuild homes and businesses and which often results in an increase in property values and the displacement of earlier, usually poorer residents.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, s.v. “gentrification,” accessed May 19, 2021, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/gentrification>.

This definition contains all the most consistent elements maintained during the decades of the debate on gentrification. Firstly, there is the material base of it – deprivation of housing and built structures. Another important aspect is territoriality – cumulative effects of the phenomenon are observed in specific urban spaces, or neighbourhoods. And finally, there is a specific emphasis on social class. At the turn of previous decade, we could observe research overviews giving a certain sense of “order” in an otherwise very chaotic interdisciplinary debate (Lees et al. 2008; Brown-Saracino, 2010). These textbooks were picturing the debate on gentrification as anxiously gravitating between classical divisions of social theory – those of structure and agency.

Almost at the same time when the debate seemed to reach a state of calm maturity, one short but widely referenced essay has diagnosed eviction of critical perspectives from it (Slater, 2006). Tom Slater claimed that by drowning in theoretical and ideological quarrels, the debate had lost its grip on social realities and the capacity to explain how neoliberal urban policies are driving gentrification. This diagnosis was not the last moment of doubt in the debate. A decade later, leading scholars of gentrification claimed an indisputable global reach of the phenomenon and advocated for more of new global case studies (Lees et al. 2015). At the same time others called to consider the idea that the mobility of these middle range theories developed in Anglo-Saxon cities might very well be limited, as different cities of the world have their own histories of development (Maloutas, 2012; Maloutas, 2018). If this critique could be substantiated, even calls to look at gentrification as “a new urban colonialism” could also be seen as a certain product of colonial knowledge in themselves (Atkinson and Bridge, 2005; Willy, 2017).

### ***Following the Bourdieusian turn of urban studies***

Thus, problems with this debate are not technical ones, of what empirical cases and from where we should produce, but rather epistemological ones. One of the possible ways to approach these problems is to use Pierre Bourdieu’s concepts, which enable us to integrate arguments of structure and agency. However, this approach is suspiciously overlooked – both in the debate on gentrification and in urban studies at large (Savage, 2012; Wacquant, 2018). With this work, I will argue that previous attempts to use Bourdieu’s ideas in the debate on gentrification were not sufficiently receptive to his understanding of social space. They also did not make consistent use of the overall framework of Bourdieu’s analytic concepts. Thus, the main goal of this article is

to dismantle the concept of gentrification by the means of Bourdieu’s conceptual framework, which he used for analysis of symbolic domination.

My argument is that to achieve a new quality of urban studies, we need to question the current concepts marking certain spatial modalities in cities, such as *gentrification*. By arguing that such a methodological approach is far more productive than a continuation of an orthodox debate on gentrification, I raise the following three objectives for this paper:

- To think of the debate on gentrification through the notion of field and the values of its capital;
- To indicate misuse of the notion of habitus in the debate, which is currently driven by a belief in the rational actor and preconceived notions of social class;
- To discuss how the concepts supporting the notion of symbolic violence could further our understanding of symbolic domination in areas of increasing social segregation.

## 2. Sticking to the core field in analysis of gentrification

To embrace a Bourdieusian approach to gentrification or to social life at large, we should start thinking about society as constituting a range of social *fields*, which he explained as:

“...relatively autonomous space of possible forces that affect everyone who enters it – the structure of the field being no more than the structure of distribution of the specific kind of power at work in the field in question, with a position in the field being defined by the position held in this structure. As a field of possible forces, the field is also a field of possible actions and, in particular, a field of struggles aiming to preserve or transform the field of forces.” (Bourdieu, 2020, p. 347)

Bourdieu also often explained the field through the metaphor of a game, which immediately poses a question of what *field* or *fields* are at stake when we talk about the processes of gentrification, and what are the stakes at hand in this game?

### *A need for a more nuanced look at the housing capital*

The most straightforward answer to this question from the debate on gentrification would be *housing* and especially the “rent gaps” (Smith, 1979). The thesis of “rent gaps” developed by American human geographer Neil Smith constitutes a structural pillar of the debate on gentrification. Contrary to a previous sporadic and rather descriptive analysis of neoclassical economists, Smith famously claimed that it is not the movement of people, but movement of capital, motivated by possibility to receive higher returns from the investment in built structures, that defines this process. Smith noted that what makes housing different from capital investments in land, on which it stands, is that it deteriorates during time. In the middle of the deterioration cycle, housing property secures a still sufficient level of rent not to be renovated. For Smith, this difference between the rent that one *can* receive in the market and the rent one *could* achieve after necessary capital investments was the most meaningful one to understand gentrification processes, because this *rent gap* is the highest for the most run-down housing, which attracts the attention from property developers.<sup>2</sup> Human geographer Eric Clark performed perhaps

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<sup>2</sup> A comprehensive summary of the debate on rent gaps is provided in Lees L., Slater T., Wyly E.K. (2008). *Gentrification*. Routledge: Taylor & Francis Group, pages 55-73.

the most scrupulous historic analysis of land use data and provided us with sufficient evidence that these “rent gaps” do actually exist (Clark, 1988). But his theoretical analysis showed that “rent gaps” could actually be interpreted not only from positions of structural Marxism, but also from positions of neoclassical economy, against which Neil Smith has formulated his own position.

The catchy simplicity of the “rent gap” was probably what made Smiths’ contribution to one of the core axes of a very lively, but also polarised debate on gentrification. To overcome such polarising effects of a purely structural argument, we should address the *material*, *symbolic* and *social* values of housing or all the stakes that there are in the field of housing. Here it is where Bourdieu’s conceptualisation of capitals comes at hand. More specifically, Bourdieu defined the three types of rewards from taking up a specific location in physical space, which are the following (Bourdieu, 2018b):

- *of occupation*: the gains from control of the occupied space over unwanted intrusions;
- *of situation*: higher preference is given to locations closer ones to getting to the desired goods, neighbours, or services and further away from undesirable ones;
- *of position or rank*: or symbolic gains of having exclusive access to a distinctive location.

In his own analysis of housing, Bourdieu particularly emphasized the *symbolic* rewards of housing (Bourdieu, 2005). He claimed that housing cannot be fully understood if it is analysed only as a subject of purely economic exchange. Looking at his conceptualisation of spatial rewards makes us understand how exactly the “rent gap” theory limits our sociological imagination.

### ***The field in the making of gentrification***

Looking for inspirations from Bourdieu on how to fix the limitations of structural arguments of the debate would also bring us back again to the question of the *field* in the making of gentrification. At the outset of the theoretically oriented debate on gentrification, the debate was clearly concerned with the social domain of *housing*. Yet this is no more the case. Current academic and even popular discourses on gentrification suggest that we should treat gentrification as a multifaceted process manifesting in very different domains of urban life. This trend could be exemplified by a study of gentrification processes in London, structured in relation to *housing*, *employment*, *consumption* and *education* (Butler, 2003). This study is relevant here as it is also one of the few direct attempts to incorporate Bourdieu’s notion of the *field* into debate on gentrification. This attempt, however, is also a very problematic one and was already indirectly criticised for its rhetorical use of Bourdieu’s concepts without any deeper regard to their analytical capacity (Wacquant, 2018). What I want to add here is that such studies provide us with a false impression that the debate on gentrification has already used up the leads available in Bourdieu’s work for an analysis of these processes, when it in fact has not.

This is not a particularly big problem if we want to anticipate how the field analysis in the debate on gentrification could look like, as we could also be inspired by other works that are close in their theoretical approach. In her analysis of the 1970s wave of transformation of New York lofts into living apartments, Sharon Zukin provides a very diligent analysis of the strategies that actors of *real estate re-development* and *world of arts* take in the process of gentrification (Zukin, 1989). She proposed a concept of the *artistic mode of production*, linking the process of urban renewal with changes in economic base. The primary difference of this analysis from what could be a Bourdieusian reconstruction of the *field* in the making of gentrification is that instead of picturing structures of relations *within* social domains of art or real estate development, Zukin was concentrated on relations *between* these domains. However, a meticulous mapping of the actors benefiting in the process of gentrification is a clear neo-Weberian trait, which puts Zukin's work closer to Bourdieu's thought than most of the other works in debate are.

There are several ways in which a Bourdieusian approach would differ from the one that Zukin used in her book, that I discuss here. Firstly, Bourdieu himself did not believe in the existence of any "trans historic laws of the relation between fields" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 109). He saw such a relational analysis of *fields* as being overly complicated and would have likely taken a different path than Zukin. Secondly, in her text, Zukin was using an economic supply-demand rhetoric, which shows her firm inclination towards rational choice. It seems that for her it is only the *rational choices* of the *patrician elites* in the quest to pursue their own *interests*, which is so smoothly coordinating actions of all the many actors in the urban growth machine fuelling gentrification. And this is where her approach significantly diverges, as Bourdieu challenged the relevance of the rational *homo economicus* as constructed based on economic theories (Bourdieu, 2020). This is an important observation in the context of the gentrification debate, as in a way Bourdieu had the same opponents that Neil Smith had in his take on the "rent gaps."

Bourdieu emphasised that every economic practice is rooted in its social circumstances. And by removing their cases out of historic contexts in which they operate, economists in their theories ratify the "apparent self-evidence" of the social conditions in which agents operate. Bourdieu was also applying these thoughts to the *field of housing* (Bourdieu, 2005). He showed how that which is by economists pictured as a self-evident meeting point between supply and demand in the market is, in fact, a product of the *housing policy*, which was a certain national variant of applying *neo-liberal* ideology into the French *field of housing*. Bourdieu's sociology thus calls for a much more radical critique of economism than the one which was proposed by Smith. But taking this lead could be a significant challenge for those in the debate, as it would mean dropping assumptions currently important for the consistency of the debate itself. My stand is that if the debate on gentrification is to regain its' critical relevance, those assumptions should be dropped. And the first not so fearsome step would be turning back to the beginnings and keeping differential access to *housing* back at very centre of the debate.

### 3. Looking at agents in the struggles of “gentrification”

If human agency is not governed by rational choice, then there is a need for other explanations of the social principles governing everyday actions of individuals. Bourdieu suggested to look at agents as following their *habitus*, which is

the strategy-generating principle enabling agents to cope with unforeseen and ever-changing situations... a system of lasting and transposable dispositions which, integrating past experiences, functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations and actions and makes possible the achievement of infinitely diversified tasks. (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 18).

Like most of other concepts of Bourdieu’s, *habitus* is a relational category that loses its explanatory power if used separately from others. This was often overlooked in the debate on gentrification.

#### *Use and misuse of the notion “habitus”*

For most researchers in wider circles of urban studies, the very thought of the absence of *rationality* in the housing field might sound somewhat controversial. After all this is a field of high stakes. Players are particularly mobilised during a moment of acquisition, during which they search for solutions that would minimise their pains and would maximise pleasures – or, in the words of the rational choice, rationalise their decisions to find best fit for their *interests*. Bourdieu has criticised the very idea of reducing agency of individuals to the functioning of such utilitarian principles (Bourdieu, 2020). That being said, he also claimed that *rationalisation* does exist, but only as a property of a very specific *habitus*. In urban studies this is so far the most widely used concept of Bourdieu’s, but it is also grossly misused (Savage, 2012; Wacquant, 2018). One of the reasons of such misuse is a lack of clarity regarding the *field* at hand. In the debate on gentrification, the *field* was used like a direct replacement of the notion of “gentrification.” And with this mistake done it is very difficult to make use of other concepts of Bourdieu’s apparatus and *habitus* especially.

The work by Gary Bridge exemplifying this problem is particularly important here, because unlike most other contributions of the time it also aimed to reflect the relevance of the notion of *habitus* for the debate on gentrification (Bridge, 2001b). Based on his observations of how owners, buyers and property agents strike the deals on the properties in gentrifying Sidney’s neighbourhoods, Bridge claimed that Bourdieu’s framework suggests an overly socialised and passive view of human agency (Bridge, 2001a). He has also suggested that theories of rational choice not only explain certain choices, but also could illuminate how through these choices certain dispositions are sinking into what he claimed to be a newly forming *habitus*. These could be interesting arguments, but they were made without relation to the *field*, the forces of which should have enabled to understand the strategy-generating principles in the *habitus* of property agents.

One could see these limitations of Bridge's analysis as largely technical, which were invoked by a lack of English translations of Bourdieu's work at the time. This is most likely true, but here I would also see a deeper problem of urban studies, the works of which often choose to look at the social reality through a specific urban space, rather than through the social laws of their production. Such geographical interest narrowed down to a specific type of urban space is acceptable in the field of human geography, which is also leading the debate on gentrification. But from a sociological point of view, it is problematic and also raises some practical issues for the field work. In these empiric locations we can observe actors, such as property agents, which are very strongly related to the field of *housing*. But at the same time, gentrifying neighbourhoods are also like melting pots of very different social agents, the *habitus* of which is influenced more strongly by other fields than the field of housing. These agents are taking very different positions in the social space – or in other words, are of very different social classes.

### ***Contested relationship to the notion of social class***

Thus, it is not possible to speak about a Bourdieusian approach to gentrification without touching upon Bourdieu's understanding of social class. The term "gentrification" itself implies that there is one particular social class – the *gentry*, or a particular fraction of middle classes with lower levels of economic capital, but sufficiently large cultural capital – which is important in the making of the phenomena. Taking such suggestion for a granted, however, leads to a normative relation towards social class and immediately distorts our observations of these urban locations. For Bourdieu, similar uses of any notion of *social class* were one of the core problems in the creation of sociological knowledge. Unlike in natural sciences, in social sciences researchers use classifications, which in turn also classify themselves. Thus, the problem that Bourdieu saw with many epistemological choices, in particular those of various modes of Marxism, is that their usage eventually becomes a political choice (Bourdieu, 2018a). Such an approach to the notion of *social class* is a perfect starting point for productive critique for the debate on gentrification.

For Bourdieu, rather than being direct representation of social reality, social classes – occupational, educational and others – such as they are being used in social research, are more bureaucratic notions created during the process of classification sanctioned by institutions of power (Bourdieu, 2018a). These ideas on social class became very influential after Bourdieu published *Distinction*, which is probably the most referenced work of Bourdieu's in the debate on gentrification (Bourdieu, 1984). These references however look more like a quick audition for concepts and ideas to cover up the most obvious gaps in the post-industrial narrative on gentrification, rather than being precise or at least sincere attempts to follow a Bourdieusian path of analysis (Ley, 2003). The biggest deficiency of these contributions is not that their findings would not be relevant for our understanding of social realities in cities. The main drawback is that these contributions

seem to criticize the epistemological positions of the structural arm of the debate using ideas of Pierre Bourdieu, although in fact they do not engage with such critique. Taking this yet unused lead would help to move away from the contested relationships with social class, which is unnecessarily politicising a debate on what should be an object of scientific observation – a specific modality of urban space.

#### 4. Symbolic violence and cities

The field of urban studies has been discussing the symbolic production of urban space for quite some time now. And there is also a way to connect these attempts to ideas of Bourdieu, who invited us to look at built structures in a similar way as he did to observe the dominant discourses:

“Appropriated space is one of the sites where power is asserted and wielded, and no doubt under the most invisible form, that of symbolic violence as unperceived violence.” (Bourdieu, 2018b, p. 108)

Integrating the notion of *symbolic violence* into the debates of urban studies, as proposed by this note, would be a difficult task – much more than just a technical addition to the existing arguments. But it also gives a promise of softening frequent polarisations between structural and cultural arguments in the debates of this academic field.

#### *Uncovering the symbolic dimensions of the struggles of “gentrification”*

A task for urban studies is to find out how the notion of *symbolic violence*, which Bourdieu mostly applied for language, could help us better understand cities (Bourdieu, 1991). In the debate on gentrification, previous attempts to turn towards symbolic aspects of the fight for control and domination of urban space turned to be very normative and brought little clarity to an already sufficiently ideologically polarised debate (Smith, 1996). The later attempts invite us to have a softer look at processes of gentrification – as one followed by silent consent to the freshly established *cultural hegemony*, rather than by direct actions of warfare between social classes of different positions (Paton, 2014). Kirsten Paton argued that the notion of *cultural hegemony* could help to build a less contested, but nevertheless deeper and more nuanced narrative about gentrification. Having in mind that Bourdieu’s notion of *symbolic violence* was also developed in dialogue with Gramsci’s *cultural hegemony*, this argument could very well be applied to the notion, which has a special place in the overall conceptual framework of Bourdieu’s sociology (Bourdieu, 1991).

Bourdieu’s own research gives important leads on how one should analyse *symbolic violence* in cultural forms of cities. In his analysis of French social housing districts, Bourdieu explained the *stigmatization* or symbolic deprivation of these neighbourhoods through the overly negative coverage of life in these neighbourhoods (Bourdieu et. al,

2000). These insights were further developed into the notion of *territorial stigmatisation* of ghetto areas of US metropolises (Wacquant, 2007). Wacquant invited to look at the fate of these areas as a long-term result of state *policies*, which produce a fragmentation of the working class and restraint from social protection measures. Through stigmatisation it also leads to public belief that these are the areas in which these social problems are actually produced.

Research on deprived Parisian neighbourhoods shows how bringing together people who have nothing in common except of their disadvantaged position in the social space leads to a mutual ignorance at best or, at worst, spurs into direct violence, which is accelerated by the feeling of being stuck in this situation of *social suffering* – where the real sources of suffering will always stay hidden (Bourdieu et. al, 2000). The urban poor, however, are not the only ones to experience *social suffering* induced by *symbolic violence* covered by the cultural forms of cities. Bourdieu also used the same logic in his analysis of “petite” sufferings that the petite-bourgeoisie experienced in Parisian suburbia (Bourdieu, 2005). For the dream of a detached family house for the households of this class becomes a certain trap not only economically, but also symbolically, as such housing aspirations are soon after acquisition recognised by social critics either as a manifestation of pure consumerism and *embourgeoisement* or as lifestyles of insufficient cultural sophistication.

### ***Classificatory logic of urban locations***

An analysis of *territorial stigmatisation* is an important source of inspiration. But just like urban ghettos or suburbia are not the only types of urban spaces, there is also no single way to approach domination in urban space, the strategies of which can be very elaborated. Cultural strategies manipulating symbolic meanings of city spaces are among the topics of the debate on gentrification for quite some time now. Once again, Sharon Zukin is an important author here. Her analysis of how image production became the main development strategy in the cities of the US in the 1970s could be seen as an analysis of *symbolic domination* (Zukin, 1995). Zukin’s analysis shows how the symbolic changes made to the neighbourhoods do not only raise the risks of direct displacement through the rise of rents, but also impose a certain *symbolic displacement* through the loss of signs important for local identity. In her later work she also used the notion of *authenticity* to tell stories of how specific urban forms are being appropriated by people with an irresistible urge for *difference* (Zukin, 2010). And the biggest paradox is that these urban forms finally end up being destroyed by this very irresistible urge or desire for *authenticity*.

These are important research examples not only for illustrating how sociological thought influences the debate on gentrification. They are also indirectly following Bourdieu’s ideas of symbolic domination in everyday life through social production of taste. Unlike in her earlier works, Zukin no longer devotes herself to full reconstructions of

histories or objective structures of social domains of urban life, but rather lets herself “browse” through different observations of “authentic” urban places of New York city. Her later observations look more like free-floating narratives poetically accompanying sociological analysis, which has lost some of the critical heaviness felt in her previous work. And although these still are inspiring examples of urban sociology, the historic analysis of the locations should not necessarily take such a form.

One way to go about historic reconstruction of a case is, instead of standing on the histories of one particular location of a city, to analyse a history of planning a city as a whole (Marom, 2014a; Marom, 2014b). Marom claims that practices of urban planning are related to *principles of vision and division* that Bourdieu used to explain classification struggles and social differentiation. They are also an elaboration of Bourdieu’s observations of coincidence of urban and social spaces, which he explained through the example of Paris, where the river of Seine seems to separate the bourgeoisie of the city into those with the most of economical and with the most of cultural capitals – a principal division in his proposed understanding of the structure of the social space (Bourdieu, 1996). Marom’s elaboration of this idea is very important and could be seen as a productive starting point for further analysis. It is in history of urban planning that the dispositions of locations are created as part of a certain enduring intertwined system, where qualities of locations can be judged relationally. And Marom argues that despite the changing ideologies and resulting methods of urban planning, it is the production of spatial divisions or *spatial distinctions*, which remains at the centre of this practice until now. Thus, rather than looking at one particular case of segregation or “gentrification,” we should see every such case in a larger picture of spatial developments of a chosen city.

Another relevant suggestion of Bourdieu’s is that ethnographic observations of social life within these planned structures should allow to grasp how these structures make impact on the habitus of individuals – he anticipated that urban structures are embodied through a control of bodily movements and senses (Bourdieu, 1996). Over time such impacts should leave their mark in the *habitus* of subjects (Bourdieu, 2018b). The built form of the city thus should have its symbolic weight embodied in subjects and taking part in a way they understand the social world and how, without noticing, it takes social divisions, inscribed in urban space, for granted. Bourdieu however did not provide us with any studied example showing how urban space sinks into the habitus of its subjects. But if we would look for inspirations on how such an analysis could be performed in his earlier work on Kabyle house, we would likely start seeing gentrifying urban spaces as part of a system of socially meaningful oppositional dispositions, which are connected to modern mythologies of the social world that we live in (Wacquant, 2018; Bourdieu, 1990). This path of analysis, however, stays directly untouched.

## 5. Conclusions: towards a more radical critique of economism in cities

At this point I risk being somewhat predictable by simply inviting to embrace Bourdieusian thinking in the debate on gentrification. But instead of doing just that we could also ask ourselves several uncomfortable questions. For example, why is it so that despite so many good reasons to embrace ideas of reflexive sociology of Pierre Bourdieu in the debate on gentrification, his ideas are largely overlooked? One simple answer is that this debate is led by discipline of human geography, where the *physical space* is the primary object of enquiry. Following the steps of reflexive sociology of Pierre Bourdieu would require leaving a mode of thinking centred on *physical space* for the one centred on *social space*. Such step would very much likely be against the professional instincts of this discipline. And it is the work for urban sociologists to make this step. I believe I have provided sufficient arguments suggesting this path could be productive. But it would also require dropping some of the core assumption of the debate, which is a rather artificial bouquet of very distant lines of neo-Marxist and neo-Weberian thinking. On the other hand, participating in the debate on “gentrification” along the lines of its orthodox theories gives researchers easy access to an established discourse about the phenomenon, which is seen as publicly relevant. Flirting with this possibility – and in a way with this article I am also doing that – gives quick and obvious academic benefits in terms of being quoted, financed and published.

Ideas of reflexive sociology of Pierre Bourdieu are not yet widely used in this subfield of urban studies. And when these ideas are used, they are awkwardly hinged to sustain the debates’ *scholarly doxa*, which proposes its own disciplinary take on how one should look at the life worlds of the city. In academia such *doxic* views on the social world – the common sense views on the world being “as it is” when we experience it – is often wrapped up in technical jargon and numerous rituals required from the production of scientific discourse (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). Without questioning and dismantling these *scientific doxas*, discourses of disciplines do nothing else but contribute (and in a very sophisticated form) to the reproduction of symbolic violence, of an uncontested *doxic* acceptance of our daily life world. The debate on gentrification seems to be ill with this flaw. It is also taking a very strange position of being politically involved, but at the same time avoiding methodological choices, which would enable a much more radical critique of economism in cities, which the proponents of the debate for so long claimed to be fighting against.

A self-discipline, which would be needed to produce critically reflexive knowledge on such urban issues as “gentrification,” is far more likely to be reached in local multidisciplinary communities of social researchers mobilized to work on particular city cases, rather than in specialized professional groups of social researchers following the leads of globally circulating concepts such as “gentrification.” Practitioners of various disciplines of urban studies – urban historians, anthropologists, human geographers, but also sociologists, researchers of social policies and political economy – should work on combining their efforts of learning about cities of their interest. And Bourdieu’s thought

proved particularly effective in facilitating such interdisciplinary research programmes. Leaving the postulates of gentrification debate does not require us to leave “gentrifying” urban locations, which indeed offer us certain unique possibilities of empiric research. Among other benefits, these are the urban spaces where *housing* is an important reference *field*. Given that current research in housing studies holds way too much of a positivist approach and is looking for possibilities of renewal, an interpretative analysis of housing practices in “gentrifying” neighbourhoods could also benefit the neighbouring field of housing studies (Aalbers, 2018).

“Gentrifying” urban spaces are also very specific empirical situations, because they are urban areas where agents from very different positions in the social space meet up. In these spaces we can observe agents of very different social histories, embodying a *habitus* with inconsistent if not opposite *trajectories*, relating to similar urban environment and housing. These material structures, which are a result of human agency, of a struggle against surrounding forces – both natural and social – at the same time are representation of the individuals’ “sense of place.” And “gentrifying” locations provide unique possibilities to observe different social bodies in interaction with the same urban space, but also with each other. This possibility to observe direct interactions or bodily tensions between actors taking different positions in the social space is exactly an attribute of gentrifying urban spaces. A sociological analysis of these urban locations would allow us to go beyond post factum statements on *displacement*. A consistent application of Bourdieu’s approach could help us create much more sensitive accounts on how the changing relationships of power are reproduced on the ground of such locations and change our everyday lives. And in this particular area of urban studies, we might have little alternatives but to follow the lead of the Bourdieusian turn in urban studies. Otherwise, we risk shifting back and forth through the history of social theory, again and again finding ourselves in Chicagoan modes of thinking about the city as if a century of intellectual work on social theory has never happened.

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