Urban studies currently face a dilemma. There is a striking lack of dialogue between popular theoretical frameworks on the one hand, and empirical urban studies on the other. Urban theory is increasingly concerned with mobility, networks, liquidity, and fluidity, and has sought to reorient urban analysis away from a tired urban sociology which delineates the city in terms of its fixed territorial properties (for examples, Amin and Thrift 2002; Graham and Marvin 2001; Urry 2007; Sheller and Urry 2006; Gandy 2005). These new interests admirably explore the technological dimensions of distributed or networked urbanism, instantiated in devices such as transport and communication, and in flows such as those of money, sensory perceptions, objects, and people. On the other hand, numerous empirical urban studies emphasize inequalities and stratification. Some writers identify that the “spatialization of class” appears as endemic within the current urban fabric (Parker et al. 2007). Whether marked in the exclusionary practices of the middle class in suburban locations (notably in gated communities), or in the revanchist politics of gentrification, or in wide-ranging processes of ghettoization and residualization, the socio-spatial sedimentation of social inequalities seems intrinsic to urban process (see, for example, Butler and Watt 2007; Blokland and Savage 2008; Ellison and Burrows 2006; Atkinson 2006; Atkinson and Blandy 2007; Parker 2003).

Urban studies needs to find a way of staging a more effective dialogue between these two currents. This is, however, singularly difficult. The sociology of stratification continues to be focused on an employment aggregate approach which concentrates on occupational classes (see the discussion in Crompton 2008) and has little ready means of dealing with the spatiality of social inequality. Marxist-inspired urban analyses, for instance that associated with the regulation school, have developed powerful analyses of neo-liberal restructuring and urban governance but have
largely stayed clear of sociological debates about how inequality can best be conceptualized. By contrast, “post-human” urban theorists find it difficult to bring a focus on human inequalities within their purview in a developed or elaborated way. On occasion, their concerns are seen to displace conventional sociological categories such as that of social class (see notably Latour 2005, who calls for an “associational sociology”).

In the face of this stand-off, I will suggest here that Pierre Bourdieu’s social theory retains the potential for effectively recharging urban studies, so long as this is interpreted within the frame of field analysis. A few writers such as Loic Wacquant (2007; 2008), Chris Allen (2008a; 2008b), Tim Butler (Butler and Robson 2003), Paul Watt (e.g. 2008), as well as myself (e.g. Savage et al. 2005a; Savage 2009) have argued that Bourdieu’s conception of field, habitus, and capitals is a theoretically powerful way of reorienting urban theory in ways which take account of the significance of flows and mobility, yet which embeds these in processes of social stratification. Currently, however, this work remains marginal within urban studies. In part this is due to the perception of Bourdieu as a reductive sociologist with limited geographical concerns. This reputation is partly deserved due to the way that Bourdieu – especially in his later political writings pitched against neo-liberalism – seems to defend conventional national models (see, notably, Bourdieu and Wacquant 1999). In this chapter I therefore seek to recover Bourdieu’s “lost urban sociology,” the elements of his thinking which allow a more effective and productive engagement with current spatial theory.

A central argument here is that rather than focusing on the concept of habitus (as in the attempt to consider Bourdieu’s legacy for urban studies by Hillier and Rooksbys 2002 and Painter 2000), we need to turn to his field analysis, as a form of inquiry which offers a ways of operationalizing the kind of relational strategies which Doreen Massey (2005) rightly sees as essential to an adequate theory of spatiality. In the first section I therefore situate Bourdieu’s thinking in the longer-term problems that field analysis has encountered in recent years. In the second section I recover Bourdieu’s “lost urban sociology” through a detailed account of how he saw the relationship between field analysis and urban studies at different moments in his career. I concentrate especially on his shift from a more structural to a more spatialized mode of analysis in his later work, and reflect on his interests in a distinctive urban sociology.

**Pierre Bourdieu’s Field Analysis**

Bourdieu’s intellectual project can be seen as involving a battle on two fronts, against positivist sociology on the one hand, and what he saw as the excesses of the “cultural turn” on the other. In seeking an anti-positivist social scientific position, “field theory” became increasingly important to him, as a means of recognizing the complex interplay between social and physical space. Only with the recent translation of his early rural sociology has it become apparent to English-speaking readers that Bourdieu was interested in spatiality at the outset of his research career. In the studies of his home region of Béarn in southwest France, conducted between 1959 and 1960, Bourdieu used a form of “total description” (Bourdieu 2008a: 2) to explore the dilemma of the oldest sons who were unable to marry as farm daughters.
left the countryside, so leaving the men stranded in declining family farms. He sees the ultimate mark of the social deprivation of these men in terms of their fixity, their inability to leave their family homes. The masculinism of Bourdieu’s account is worthy of note here: his concern is explicitly with the parlous situation of the unmarried men, rather than the women who remain ciphers in his work.

His account draws strongly on the organization of rural mobility, which he sees as part of a wider opposition between bourg (town) and hameaux (hamlets or farms) which was being eroded as peasants increasingly shopped and used the local services of the towns rather than rely on their own domestic resources (Bourdieu 2008a: 68). He states that

In traditional society, spatial dispersion was not experienced as distance, because of the strong social density linked to the intensity of collective life. Nowadays, given that collective work and neighbourhood festivals have disappeared, peasant families feel their isolation concretely. (Bourdieu 2008a: 70)

Although peasants become dependent on the services provided by the town, they are culturally distant from, and alienated from it, and hence “at the very centre of his universe, the peasant finds a world in which, already, he is no longer at home” (Bourdieu 2008a: 75). This image of the inability to belong is evocative, and is a forerunner of his concepts of cultural capital which at this time he had not yet developed (see Robbins 2005). He links this tension to the linguistic divide between French-speaking town-dwellers and Béarnese-speaking farmers. He emphasizes how this organization of space is not reciprocal. The town-dweller reacts against the “primitive” peasant, confirming a sense of urban sophistication. But peasants are dependent on the town, and are forced into a deferential acceptance of its power, even whilst acknowledging their own difference from urban life, thus underscoring their own subordination based on fatalism. In this formulation, which is now 50 years old, many recent themes are articulated which have surfaced in the class analysis influenced by Bourdieu’s work (e.g. Skeggs 1997; Savage 2000; Savage et al. 2005a), especially the idea that it is precisely the marginalized who are unable to act collectively to redress their grievances. It is clear that Bourdieu sees this as related to the spatial organization of social relationships.

In this early work, the concept of field is absent. Indeed, Bourdieu’s early interest in field analysis, originating in the early 1970s, appeared to mark a break with this interest in the organization of space. In the early formulations, such as that in The Rules of Art and in papers published in the early 1970s (Bourdieu 1994), the concept has two, somewhat contrasting sources of appeal. Firstly, it allowed him to retain elements of the structural analysis which he had championed during the mid-1960s whilst ditching what he saw as its problematic “objectivist” baggage. This affiliation is especially clear in his 1976 lecture where he laid out, for the first time, elements of his field analysis, in a form which echoed Althusserian structuralism:

Fields present themselves synchronically as structured spaces of positions (or posts) whose properties depend on their position within these spaces and which can be analysed independently of the characteristics of their occupants (which are partly determined by them. (Bourdieu 1993b: 72)
Secondly, the concept of field allowed him a means of taking on the positivist methodology of Lazarfeld, who, as he explains in his *Sketches towards an Autobiography* (Bourdieu 2008b), he had battled with during the 1960s as he developed his first cultural analysis. Rather than seeking to delineate the power of “causal” variables, Bourdieu saw fields as a means of delineating social relationships through their spatial organization, where he became interested in using multiple correspondence analysis, a method developed in the 1960s by the French mathematician Jean-Paul Benzecri, which located individuals and variables as co-ordinates in geometric space. This was the method which he took up in *Distinction* as a means of demonstrating the opposition between “high” and “low” culture, and between the cultural practices of “intellectuals” and “industrialists,” through the use of visual maps and diagrams (see Bennett et al. 2009 for a recent example in the British case).

Bourdieu notes in *Distinction* that:

> The mere fact that the social space … can be presented as a diagram indicates that it is an abstract representation, deliberately constructed, like a map, to give a bird’s eye view … Bringing together … positions which the agents can never apprehend in their totality and in their multiple relationships, social space is to the practical space of everyday life, with its distances which are kept or signalled, and neighbours who may be more remote than strangers, what geometrical space is to the “travelling space” of ordinary experience. (Bourdieu 1985: 169)

This evocation of “neighbours who may be more remote than strangers” emphasizes all too clearly how Bourdieu saw his field analysis, originating out of his structuralist thinking, as an anti-humanist strategy for breaking from any determinism implied by physical or geographical space.²

A similar concern to map out abstract field relations is evident too in the papers on aspects of the artistic and literary fields which were collected in English in 1993 under the title of *The Field of Cultural Production* (Bourdieu 1993a). Although diverse in focus, ranging from abstract theoretical statements to case studies of Flaubert and Manet, the emphasis is constantly on seeing fields as defined by position taking, “spaces of the possible.” In none of these studies are actual urban examples given. This invokes apparently a-spatial analyses, one which appears to leave space as taken for granted, a backdrop to social action.

However, it is interesting that, in his later work, Bourdieu returned to the relationship between social and physical space in a rather different register. Influenced by his working through of phenomenological sociology (most clearly demonstrated in *Pascalian Meditations* [2000]), as well as by his fieldwork of the 1980s reported in *The Weight of the World* (1999), and also by the example of his collaborator, the urban sociologist Loic Wacquant, we can detect a reorientation of the concept of the field, in which the properties of social space are partly inferred from the analysis of physical space, and in which an interest in the relationship between the social and spatial is of greater analytical interest.

Some of Bourdieu’s later work retains the formalist field analysis which is evident in his writings from the 1970s (e.g. Bourdieu 2005), but there is also a new concern to reflect on the nature of physical space. The reasons for this move become more explicit in *Pascalian Meditations*, where he notes how certain properties of social space are derived from physical space.
Just as physical space, according to Strawson, is defined by the reciprocal externality of positions ... the social space is defined by the mutual exclusion, or distinction, of the positions which constitute it ... Social agents, and also the things insofar as they are appropriated by them and therefore constituted as properties, are situated in a place in social space. (Bourdieu 2000: 134, italics in the original)

Bourdieu here invokes the irretrievably corporeal nature of both physical and social space, the way that shapes on the ground are associated with the organization of fields and the distribution of capital. This marks a return to the spatial sensibility which is evident in The Bachelors' Ball, but which subsequently disappears in his early formulations of field analysis. This renewed interest in physical spatiality is clearly articulated in The Weight of the World.

As bodies (and biological individuals), and in the same way that things are, human beings are situated in a site (they are not endowed with the ubiquity that would allow them to be in several places at once), and they occupy a place. The site (le lieu) can be defined absolutely as the point in physical space where an agent or a thing is situated, “takes place,” exists: that is to say either as a localization or, from a relational viewpoint, as a position, a rank in an order (Bourdieu 1999: 123).

This insistence is now part of Bourdieu's concern to demonstrate that fields matter concretely, that the relational power struggles they illuminate cannot but be marked in the urban landscape itself. This is a different emphasis to the apparently a-spatial structuralism of his earlier conception of field. He now argues that this process of “translation” is also one of “naturalization,” in which the conflicts and tensions which his field analysis reveals abstractly are occluded to social agents because of the way they are mundanely marked on physical space. Processes of misrecognition are thereby associated with the way that social categories become naturalized through being embedded in fixed, physical, devices. Thus, physical space is the concretization of social space.

Bourdieu's thinking here is probably related to the interview testimonies collected as part of The Weight of the World, many of which told stories of suffering integrally related to people's accounts of how they are fixed in deprived locations. He thus returns to the tension between spatial fixity and mobility which he first examined in the later 1950s. Whereas, in his field analysis of Distinction, the powerful and the powerless could be detected as occupying different “zones” of social space, he becomes more aware that seeing fields in these terms, as if the powerful and disadvantaged are two competing rugby teams each with their own formation on a fixed pitch, is problematic. It overstates the ability of the powerless to form a coherent team at all. Returning to his more fluid conceptions of spatial organization evident in his youthful rural sociology, he now recognizes that “the lack of capital intensifies the experience of finitude: it chains one to a place” (Bourdieu 1999: 127).

Anticipating the arguments of Zygmunt Bauman (1998) and Manuel Castells (1996), he identifies the tension between the mobility of the powerful and the fixedness of the disadvantaged as integrally related to the difficulties of imagining change. In this analysis, the ability to have “a place of one's own” becomes almost a precondition for social existence (again, a return to the concerns of his earlier rural sociology). Thus, in his invocations of the problems of living in Jonquil Street, Bourdieu talks about how urban decline is associated with de-industrialization and how this loss of place is itself related to the racism and fragmentation of urban experience.
Throughout this book, Bourdieu deliberately refuses to abstract the nostalgic accounts of his respondents from their physical location. In his cameo introductions to collections of interviews, he deliberately starts by sketching the physical environment from which the accounts were generated (e.g. Bourdieu 1999: 6, 60).

It is this concern with how social space is both modeled on spatial exclusion, yet also shapes the urban landscape by differentiating between those with, and those without, the capacity to place themselves, which Bourdieu (2001) develops in his last substantial study, *The Social Structure of the Economy*. In developing an analysis of the housing market which is explicitly critical of the assumptions of neoclassical economics, Bourdieu seeks to establish how forms of capital are implicated in the very organization of the housing stock (see, further, Wacquant 2008). His stress now is on how housing is “doubly linked to space” in that it is necessarily built uniquely in a given location and is also subject to distinctively local markets, yet also how it is produced by universalizing market forces. He goes onto insist on the need for local analyses, where the local is not seen as a manifestation of “larger” processes, but where the dynamic between universalizing forces which range over physical space, and local particularity, are central. Bourdieu now goes beyond his earlier emphases on how different zones figure as habitats for those with different amounts of capital. Rather, he seeks to deconstruct the distinction between “center” and “periphery” by seeing these terms as themselves the product of, and themselves at stake in, the organization of the field itself. Here, the ability of the bureaucratic state to define itself as located outside any particular site, as conveying universal value, is fundamental to its ability to constitute itself as a powerful agent within the field. He further insists, however, that the necessarily located existence of actual people striving for decent housing prevents any simple implementation of a universalized plan.

What we now see, therefore, is that the capacity to define one’s actions transcend the local as a central political battle. Here his concern to criticize neo-liberal markets is rooted in a resistance to its universalizing procedures, as well as a recognition that simply defending local particularity will fail to grasp the wider processes at work. Through this reformulation of field analysis, Bourdieu’s thinking has certain resonances with that of Latour (who is also concerned with the contingent formation of immutable mobiles which are thus able to constitute themselves as “obligatory points of passage”). Latour’s emphasis on an associational sociology which is premised on the flatness of the social world and which refuses to privilege social forces as being of ontological importance has its counterpart in Bourdieu’s insistence that power resides in the capacity to constitute itself as above location. In what follows, I want to argue further that elements of this form of field analysis can be elaborated in a way which allows these issues of mobility and intensity to be taken up in an empirically effective way.

**The Radicalization of Field Analysis**

We have seen how, in his later work, Bourdieu spatializes his conception of field through seeing space itself as an object of contestation rather than as a given. My final suggestion here is that elements of complexity theory – which are already current in urban theory – can be reconciled with Bourdieusian field analysis in a way which might be empirically productive in developing urban analysis.
Contemporary urban theory largely starts from Henri Lefebvre’s (1990) insistence on the constructed nature of social space, which in his case is linked to a Marxist insistence on the power of capitalism to produce “abstract space.” Lefebvre’s Hegelian analysis lacks a concept of field relations, and thereby proves problematic in recognizing how contestation takes place, other than through the invocation of the role of artistic _avant gardes._ This weakness is linked to historicist elements of Lefebvre’s thinking, whereby capitalist forces have their own efficacy within an “expressive totality.” More recent theorists have emphasized relationality – the reciprocal relations between different groups, objects, sentiments, and ideas – as central to urban theory, and it is this which makes Bourdieu’s field analysis, which is also concerned with relationality, so potentially appealing. The most challenging attempt to elaborate conceptions of power within urban thinking has been from those drawing on the increasingly influential social theory of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, in which conceptions of spatiality, or “geophilosophy,” are vital (see, generally, Amin and Thrift 2002; Massey 2005; Gandy 2005). Deleuzian social theory is often seen as concerned to overcome dualisms between the human and technical, through its insistence on the “desiring machine” and the “body without organs” (see for instance Gandy 2005). Deleuze’s starting point is immanence, the importance of thinking beyond existing concepts, through recognizing the process of “becoming” as one which breaks from structure and form. This emphasis on the figure of the rhizome allows a critical perspective on the arboreal metaphor which characterizes linear thinking. This rhizomatic thinking seems different to Bourdieu’s advocacy of the field, yet I want to suggest some unexpected parallels.

Although concerned with “de-territorialization,” Deleuze also addresses the importance of “re-terroritrialization,” the way that intense processes become (literally) sedimented and etched into physical features. This insistence is also linked to his differentiation between smooth (intense) space and striated (marked) space (on which see also Osborne and Rose 2004). They claim not that fluidities and mobilities somehow eradicate the importance of territoriality, but rather that fixed location can be seen as the sedimented product of intensive flows.

The first articulation chooses or deducts, from unstable particle flows, metastable molecular or quasi molecular units (substances) upon which it imposes a statistical order of connections and successions (forms). The second articulation establishes functional, compact, structures (forms) and constructs the molar compounds in which these structures are simultaneously actualized (substances). (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 46)

The challenge, then is to radicalize field analysis to recognize the tensions between intensive and extensive, smooth and striated, space. As De Landa puts it, in elaborating Deleuze and Guattari:

A space is not just a set of points, but a set together with a way of binding these together into _neighbourhoods_ through well defined relations of _proximity_ or _contiguity._ In our familiar Euclidean geometry these relations are specified by fixed lengths or distances which determine how close the points are to each other … there exist other spaces, however, fixed distances cannot define proximities since distances do not remain fixed. A topological space, for example, may be stretched without the neighbourhoods which define it changing in nature. (De Landa 2002: 22)
This involves reading fields as de-centered processes, involving intensities and dynamic features, in ways which might cut against a focus on key (“arboreal”) variables or determinants. Here localization cannot be taken as given but is itself subject to field processes. This is close to the way that Wacquant defines a field as “relational configuration endowed with a specific gravity which it imposes on all the objects and agents which enter into it” (Wacquant 1992: 17). These concerns suggest new strategies for urban analysis. Rather than assume, along with Bourdieu and Wacquant (1999), that fields are contained within national boundaries, we might more usefully explore how struggles over scale are part of field dynamics, and that situated urban case studies might be better able to probe these issues.

Conclusions

During the last three decades, leading urban theorists have rightly argued for the need for a de-centered urban sociology, one which does not reify the urban or assume fixed territorial boundaries. They have then faced the problem of retaining space and place as significant categories of analysis when such fluidities are held to be of defining importance. One result, usually unintentional, has been to make it unclear how urban studies inform analyses of the kinds of persistent and deepening inequalities which mark the current urban landscape.

I have argued here that we can best deal with this impasse through invoking, and radicalizing, a tradition of field analysis which recognizes how power operates through abstraction from location, and which is attentive to the resulting dialectic of de- and re-territorialization. I recognize that my yoking of Bourdieu’s field theory with Deleuze and Guattari’s social thought and aspects of complexity theory is unusual, and might even be regarded as perverse. Yet I hope to have at least intimated that there is the potential of radicalizing field analysis so that we do not read it as relying on the invocation of fixed positions in geometric space. We can read diagrams not as representational maps, but as indicators of flows and forces. We are thus in a position to be able to use such methods to think about “a language of forces, densities, potentialities, virtualities” (Amin and Thrift 2002: 81) in a way which avoids a return to a purely linguistic or textual formulations. Through linking these concerns also to Bourdieu’s own remarkable corpus of work, we can explore how to avoid abandoning concerns with inequality and social division. Rather than treating class, gender, and other social inequalities as variables, we can instead see them as processes in flux. Through examining the clustering, sifting, and sorting of people, objects, and identities in physical and social space, through investigating the mechanisms which allow some to move more freely than others, and also through examining the clustering and patterning of actions, we have the potential for enriching contemporary urban theory and recharging our understanding of social inequality.

Notes

1 For the sociological debate, see for example Scott et al. 2000; Savage et al. 2005b; Bottero 2005. An interesting example of this lack of engagement is Jamie Peck’s (2005) powerful
critique of Florida’s idea of the “creative class,” which makes trenchant points about Florida’s misunderstanding of urban dynamics, but does not discuss how class itself should be conceptualized.

2 See further on this, Martin’s (2003: 29) comment that “a field theory is not simply a spatial model – while a field is, as Bourdieu (1993a: 72) says, a structured set of positions, and positions can often be understood in spatial terms … not all sets of relative positions can be understood as a conventional space (since ‘distances’ may not work according to spatial logic).”

3 He discusses the “naturalization effect” produced by the long-term inscription of social realities in the natural world. Thus historical differences can seem to have arisen from the nature of things (we need only think of the “natural frontier”). This is the case, for example, with all the spatial projections of social difference between the sexes (at church, in school, in public, and even at home) (Bourdieu 1999: 124).

4 “The perfectly commendable wish to see things in person, close up, sometimes leads people to search for the explanatory principles of observed realities where they are not to be found (not all of them, anyway), at the site of observation itself. The truth about what happens in the ‘problem suburbs’ certainly does not lie in these usually forgotten sites that leap into the headlines from time to time” (Bourdieu 1999: 181).

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