
PART III

Reconsiderations

Rethinking, Once Again, the Concept of Class Structure*

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At the core of Marxian class analysis is the claim that class is a fundamental determinant of social conflict and social change. In trying to defend and deepen this intuition, contemporary Marxist theorists have been torn between two theoretical impulses. The first is to keep the concept of class structure as simple as possible, perhaps even accepting a simple polarized vision of the class structure of capitalism, and then to remedy the explanatory deficiencies of such a simple concept by introducing into the analysis a range of other explanatory principles, such as divisions within classes or between sectors, the relationship between work and community, or the role of the state and ideology in shaping the collective organization of classes. The second impulse is to increase the complexity of the class structural concept itself in the hope that such complexity will more powerfully capture the explanatory mechanisms embedded in class relations. Basically, these alternative impulses place different bets on how much explanatory work the concept of class structure itself should do: the first strategy takes a minimalist position, seeing class structure as at most shaping broad constraints on action and change; the second takes a maximalist position, seeing class structure as a potent and systematic determinant of individual action and social development.¹

*I would like to express my thanks to Julia Adams, Ron Aminzade, Robin Blackburn, Sam Bowles, Johanna Brenner, Lisa Brush, Michael Burawoy, Val Burris, Ira Katznelson, Lane Kenworthy, Michael Mann, Scott McNall, John Roemer, Joel Rogers, Ivan Szelenyi, and Philippe Van Parijs for their extraordinarily helpful comments on an earlier draft of this essay.

1. Of course, there is in principle no inherent incompatibility between these two strategies. Indeed, a fully developed class analysis should combine in various ways an elaborated conceptualization of class structure with an account of the interactions of that structure with various kinds of nonclass mechanisms. Nevertheless, in actual practice, most theorists in the Marxist tradition who engage the problem of class analysis have adopted one or the other of these strategies, either using a fairly thin concept of class structure but worrying a lot about the mediations of other mechanisms, or worrying a lot about the problem of class structure and paying relatively little systematic attention to nonclass determinants.

My work on class has pursued this second strategy. In my theoretical discussions of class structure I have been preoccupied with the problem of the "middle class," with elaborating a class structure concept that would give a coherent and systematic theoretical status to nonproletarian employees. My conviction was that conceptually clarifying the structural location of the middle class was essential for understanding the process of class formation in contemporary capitalism. Above all, I felt it was essential for understanding the problem of the formation of coalitions of classes and segments of classes around radical democratic and socialist political projects. This led to the introduction of the concept of "contradictory locations within class relations" and subsequently, the reformulation of that concept in terms of a multidimensional view of exploitation. The theoretical aspiration was that these reconstructions of the concept of class structure would enhance its explanatory power by more adequately representing the complexities of class interests in capitalist societies and, accordingly, making it possible to map more systematically the variations in class structures across capitalist societies and the impact of those variations on processes of class formation.

That aspiration has yet to be fulfilled. While I do feel that progress has been made in the conceptualization of class in the past decade, nevertheless the goal of producing a class structure concept which is at one time theoretically coherent and empirically comprehensive remains elusive. In what follows I will try to lay out a general agenda for the further development of the concept of class structure which, hopefully, will help to bring us closer to this goal.

Section 1 begins the discussion by briefly situating the concept of class structure within the broader agenda of class analysis and examining some metatheoretical considerations that affect the analysis of class structure. In particular, it will be helpful to clarify the distinction between abstract and concrete concepts and between macro- and micro-level concepts of class structure.

Section 2 discusses at a fairly abstract level what is the theoretical object of the concept of "class structure": what is it that classes have in common that justifies calling them "classes." In particular, I will defend the decision to treat objective material interests as the central commonality of class.

Section 3 will then assess the strengths and weaknesses of my two principal solutions to the problem of constructing a concrete map of the class structure of capitalist societies grounded in an account of class interests. The upshot of this discussion will be that neither of these strategies provides a completely satisfactory solution to the conceptual problem of the middle class.

Section 4 will briefly explore the attractions, and limitations, of the

neo-Weberian alternative to the entire enterprise of reconstructing a Marxist concept of the middle class.

Section 5 will then explore a different way of adding complexity to the concept of class structure from those embodied in my various class structure typologies. My work has been based on the view that the central problem to solve is the location of the middle class within the class structure, where class structure is understood as a structure of "empty places" filled by people. Here I want to suggest a different type of elaboration, namely the various ways in which individual lives are tied to such a structure of positions. This will lead to a framework in which the link between individuals and class structures is viewed as organized around three axes: individual class *locations*, class *networks*, and class *trajectories*.

On the basis of these new complexities, section 6 returns to the problem of the middle class. While I cannot offer a new synthesis, I will try to elaborate an agenda of issues and theoretical directions in terms of which such a synthesis might be generated.

1 Class Structure in Class Analysis

The concept of "class structure" is only one element in a broader theoretical enterprise that can be called "class analysis." Other elements include class formation (the formation of classes into collectively organized actors), class struggle (the practices of actors for the realization of class interests), class consciousness (the understanding of actors of their class interests). The task of class analysis is not simply to understand class structure as such but to understand the interconnections among all these elements and their consequences for other aspects of social life.

My discussion in this essay will be largely restricted to the problem of class structure. This is not because I believe that class structure is always the most important explanatory principle within class analysis. It could certainly be the case, for example, that variations in class formations across time and place may be a more important determinant of variations in state policies than variations in the class structures associated with those class formations. Rather, I will focus on class structure because it remains *conceptually* pivotal to clarifying the overall logic of class analysis. To speak of *class* formation or *class* struggle as opposed to simply *group* formation or struggle implies that we have a definition of "class" and know what it means to describe a collective actor as an instance of class formation, or a conflict as a class conflict instead of some other sort of conflict. Elaborating a coherent concept of class structure, therefore, is an important conceptual precondition for

developing a satisfactory theory of the relationship between class structure, class formation and class struggle.²

Underlying this preoccupation with clarifying the concept of class structure is a particular view of the relationship between the problem of *concept formation* and *theory construction*. My assumption is that the explanatory capacity of the theories we construct depends to an important extent on the coherence of the concepts we deploy within them. When concepts are loosely constructed and vaguely defined, then it is much more difficult for the knowledge generated within a theory to have a cumulative character to it. Our capacity to learn both from our explanatory successes and our explanatory failures depends in important ways on the clarity and coherence of the basic categories used within those explanations. This does not imply that we cannot begin to study the world empirically and construct general theoretical explanations until we have a completely coherent inventory of concepts; but it does imply that critical element in the advance of our capacity for theory construction is the elaboration of our basic concepts.

The central thrust of my work on class structure has been to try to produce, within a broadly Marxist theoretical framework, a class structure concept capable of being used in analyses of micro-level processes at a relatively low level of abstraction. Why this preoccupation? It was driven by two overarching questions. First, how can we best explain the empirical variations in patterns of class formation across advanced capitalist societies? Second, under what conditions are class formations likely to embody projects of radical social change? My assumption was that the elaboration of a concept of class structure that was both relatively concrete and specified at the micro level of analysis was necessary to deepen our understanding of the causal relationships among class structure, class formation, class consciousness, and class struggle. More specifically, I felt that any viable democratic socialist politics in advanced capitalist societies must contend with the problem of the formation of durable political coalitions between segments of the "middle class" and the working class. Overly abstract and macro-level concepts of class structure did not seem to provide the categories necessary for exploring the problem of forging such coalitions in the process of class formation. In order to study in a politically relevant way class formation in

2. The assumption here is that the concept of class structure imparts the essential content of the adjective "class" when it is appended to formation, consciousness, and struggle. Class formation is the formation of collective actors organized around class interests within a class structure; class struggle is the struggle between such collectively organized actors over class interests; class consciousness is the understanding by people within a class of their class interests. In each case one must already have a definition of class structure before the other concepts can be fully specified.

advanced capitalism, therefore, I felt it was necessary to produce a class structure concept that was much less abstract than existing concepts and more suitable for micro-level analysis.³

In order to situate this effort at concept formation, it is necessary to clarify what it means to produce a concept at a relatively "concrete" level of abstraction which is directed towards the relatively "micro level" of analysis.

Levels of Abstraction While all concepts are abstract in the sense that they are mental constructions distinct from the "real objects" which they attempt to represent, nevertheless, concepts differ in their degree of abstraction or concreteness.⁴ The meaning of the expression "degree of abstraction" can be clarified by introducing the distinction between "types" and "tokens" in the construction of concepts. The term "token" refers to the individual, concrete instances of some theoretical object—let us say, for example, my pet dog Micah. The term "type," on the other hand, refers to the more general theoretical categories under which this specific token could be classified: golden retrievers, dogs, mammals, animals, living things. Within a given conceptual hierarchy, a more abstract concept is one that constitutes a classification of the variable forms of the less abstract concepts. Thus the concept "dog" is more

3. My initial belief, when I began this work in the late 1970s, was that solving the problem of the middle class was the most important conceptual task in advancing our understanding of class formation in advanced capitalism. I therefore gave priority to this task over, for example, examining the institutional conditions for class compromise as in the work of Adam Przeworski, or the impact of changing forms of the labor process on working-class formation, as in the work of Michael Burawoy, or the political conditions for the collective organization of labor, as in the work of Joel Rogers. While I continue to believe that solving the conceptual issues in class structure analysis is important, I no longer feel that this provides the key to understanding the more general problem of variations in class formation and possibilities for the creation of radical coalitions. For discussions of class formation that do not emphasize class structure, see Michael Burawoy, *The Politics of Production* (London: Verso, 1985) and "Marxism without Microfoundations: A Review of Adam Przeworski's Work," *Socialist Review* (1989); Adam Przeworski, *Capitalism and Social Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985) and "Class Production and Politics: A Reply to Burawoy," *Socialist Review* (1989); and Joel Rogers, "Divide and Conquer: Further 'Reflections on the Distinctive Character of American Labor Laws,'" *University of Wisconsin Law Review* (1989), and *Organizing Interests: Post-war US Labor Policy and the Future of American Unions* (working title; forthcoming, Basic Books).

4. In describing a concept as "representing" a real object, there is no implication that it is a simple *reflection* of that object, as in the metaphor of a mirror reflecting reality. Concepts are always active mental constructions, produced through a set of practices by people attempting to understand the world. While to a greater or lesser extent these constructions are constrained by the real objects which they attempt to represent—that is, if the world were different, the concepts which attempt to represent the world would be different—they are never simple reflections of those objects. For a discussion of this kind of "realist" approach to the status of concepts, see *Classes*, pp. 20–24.

abstract than the concept "golden retriever" (because a golden retriever is one of many types of dog), but less abstract than the concept "mammal." In these terms, within a given conceptual hierarchy, concrete concepts are nested within abstract concepts.

It is important to emphasize that a more "abstract" concept is not *less real* than a more concrete concept, at least in the sense of attempting to identify real causal mechanisms. To describe my pet dog Micah as a mammal is to identify causal mechanisms that are just as real as those mechanisms captured by the description "golden retriever." Depending upon the specific theoretical question one is asking, the appropriate level of abstraction of the type-concepts used in the answer will vary, but in each case they are attempts at specifying explanatory mechanisms.⁵

Within the Marxist tradition, at the most abstract level, the concept of class structure attempts to differentiate distinct modes of production, for example capitalism and feudalism. More concrete concepts, accordingly, attempt to capture the ways in which the class structures vary over time and place within a given type of society.⁶ One of the central objectives of my work on class structure has been to generate a concept capable of mapping in a nuanced way concrete variations in class structures across capitalist societies.

Micro/Macro Levels of Analysis The distinction between micro and macro concepts refers to the level of aggregation of social phenomena to which the concept refers. As a macro-level concept, class structures are meant to describe a crucial property of whole societies. When Marxists say, for example, that the private ownership of the means of production acts as a powerful constraint on potential policies of the state, they are generally making a macro-structural argument about the effects of the capitalist class structure on state institutions.⁷ As a micro-level concept,

5. Far from being "less real" than concrete concepts, there is a certain sense in which for many explanatory problems it is often the case that the causal mechanisms identified by more abstract concepts can be thought of as more "fundamental" than the mechanisms identified by more concrete concepts. Thus, the mechanisms defined by the concept "dog" are more fundamental than those defined by the concept "golden retriever" in explaining a wide range of empirical properties of the specific token, Micah, where "more fundamental" means determining the limits within which the more concrete mechanisms operate.

6. In terms of the use of *words* in discussions of class structure and levels of abstraction, sometimes Marxists use the expression "social relations of production" to refer to the mode of production level of abstraction, and reverse the term "class structure" for more concrete levels of analysis. Thus a (concrete) class structure consists of combinations of (abstract) relations of production, but the term "class structure" is not itself applied to the more abstract level. This is parallel to the distinction between elements and compounds in chemistry: compounds are specific combinations of elements. In the present discussion I will use the term "class structure" to refer to the theoretical object of the structural analysis of classes at whatever level of abstraction.

on the other hand, class structures define a set of "locations" filled by individuals. To be in a class location is to be subjected to a set of mechanisms that impinge directly on the lives of individuals as they make choices and act in the world. There is some debate, as we will see in section 2 below, over what is most salient about these micro-mechanisms attached to the locations within class structures: should they primarily be thought of as determining the material interests of individuals? or shaping their subjective understandings of the world? or determining the basic resources they have available to pursue their interests? In any event, to develop a concept of class structure at the micro level of analysis is to elaborate the concept in terms of such mechanisms that directly affect individuals within class locations.

The micro-macro distinction should not be confused with the abstract-concrete distinction. While it often seems that micro-analysis is more concrete than macro-analysis—since it deals with apparently concrete entities, "individuals"—one can perfectly well develop very abstract concepts for dealing with micro-analyses (as is often done in rational-actor models) or quite concrete concepts for dealing with macro-analyses (as occurs in many historical-comparative analyses of institutional development).

The Marxist concept of class structure has traditionally been constructed most systematically as a highly abstract macro-structural concept. Class structures were defined in terms of models of pure modes of production (slavery, feudalism, capitalism, communism) and used to understand the broad, macro-structural dynamics of social development. This is not to say that Marxists have failed to engage in concrete or micro-level class analyses. However, typically the class structure concept deployed in such analyses has tended to be directly imported from the more abstract macro-structural arena with relatively unsystematic amendments to make it suitable for concrete, micro-analysis.

The overarching objective of my work on the concept of class structure has been to elaborate this concept in ways that would enhance its analytical power both in concrete analyses and in micro-analyses. The goal was to generate a repertoire of class structure concepts that could be used both for comparative historical and institutional analyses of

7. To describe this as a macro-structural claim does not imply that the explanation of the relationship between class structure and state policies can be adequately developed strictly at the macro level of analysis. The actual working out of this relationship undoubtedly would involve at least some reference to the micro circumstances of state policy makers, capitalist investors, workers, and other actors within this structure of relations.

variations in the class structures of capitalist societies and for the analysis of the impact of class on the lives of individuals within those societies.

This concern with elaborating a class structure concept at the micro level has led some critics to see my work as embracing principles of "methodological individualism."⁸ This is, I think, an incorrect judgment. While much of my work has been concerned with elaborating the concept of class structure in such a way that it enables us to analyze, in a relatively fine-grained way, the diverse ways in which individual lives intersect class structures, I have never argued that class structures are *reducible* to the properties of individuals, which is an essential claim of methodological individualism.⁹ If Marxist class analysis is to advance, it is essential that it develop what is sometimes called "micro-foundations," but this does not imply that all of the causal processes in class theory can be adequately represented at the level of individuals and their interactions. The task is to understand the ways in which macro-structural contexts constrain micro-level processes, and the ways in which the micro-level choices and strategies of individuals can affect macro-structural arrangements. To accomplish this task requires developing class structure concepts at both the macro and micro levels of analysis.

In attempting this kind of task, one must decide how unified a conceptual field one should try to achieve. One aspiration is to establish a set of rules for producing new concepts such that the micro and macro concepts and the abstract and concrete concepts are theoretically integrated under a common logic. In this approach, while the specific class structure concept one adopts will depend upon the kind of question one is asking—one might use a simple polarized class structure concept for understanding the epochal dynamics of capitalism as a mode of production and a highly differentiated class structure concept with contradictory class locations for the analysis of coalition formation within class struggles in advanced capitalist societies—the different class structure concepts are all integrated within a unitary conceptual logic. Alternatively, and more modestly, one can adopt a more eclectic and pragmatic strategy which is willing to acknowledge that different kinds of class concepts may be more or less appropriate for different explanatory

8. For examples of this kind of critique, see G. Carchedi, "Classes and Class Analysis," in this volume, and Paul Kamolnick, *Classes: A Marxist Critique* (Dix Hills, New York: General Hall, 1988).

9. The core of methodological individualism is not simply the concern with micro-analysis, but the claim that macro-phenomena are in principle fully explainable by micro-mechanisms (or, equivalently, that macro-phenomena are reducible to micro-phenomena). For a critique of this claim, see my essay with Elliott Sober and Andrew Levine, "Marxism and Methodological Individualism," *New Left Review*, no. 162 (1987).

tasks. It could be the case, for example, that Weberian class concepts work best for micro-analyses or concrete analyses of institutional variations across capitalist societies, whereas Marxist concepts work best for the analysis of broad epochal transformation.¹⁰

My ambition has been to achieve as high a level of theoretical integration among these various class structure concepts as possible, on the assumption that if such integration is achieved then the explanatory capacity of Marxist class analysis would be enhanced. This means that I have attempted, if not always completely consciously, to apply systematic rules to the derivation of new class structure concepts from the abstract concepts at the core of Marxist theory. As we shall see in more detail in section 3 below, the basic strategy I adopted for moving from the abstract to the concrete is to see concrete class structures as consisting of different combinations of the class relations defined within abstract class structure concepts. Thus, for example, we can abstractly define the class relations of capitalism and feudalism and then describe a concrete class structure as a particular form of combination of these abstractly defined relations. The basic strategy I have used for developing a more differentiated micro concept of class structure has been to elaborate the ways in which class relations are embodied in specific *jobs*, since jobs are the essential "empty places" filled by individuals within the system of production. The traditional assumption of Marxian class analysis is that every location in the class structure was in one and only one class. In contrast, I have argued that individual jobs can, in different ways, have a multiple, and sometimes even contradictory, class character.

Taking these two rules together in principle provides a way of linking the abstract macro concept of class structure rooted in the analysis of

10. In a personal communication on an earlier draft of this paper, John Roemer argued that it was probably hopeless to generate a general definition of class structure that would be appropriate for all explanatory tasks: "I think you take a somewhat Platonic stance in this paper, which I think is unnecessary or a bit naive. That is, your presupposition is that either (1) there does exist a perfect definition of class, and each of your two proposals is but an imperfect approximation to it, or (2) there does not exist a perfect definition of class, in which case Marxist theory is fundamentally flawed. To the contrary, I would argue that it is probably the case that there exists no perfect definition of class (perfect in the sense of performing 'correctly' in all applications), yet the Marxist insight of thinking in terms of class is a great one. . . . The cost of taking this viewpoint is that there is no automatic way of deciding whether the Marxist tool is better than Weberian theory, for example; for the latter too must be viewed as a tool that performs well in some cases and not in others. One must simply ask which tool seems to perform better on the most important jobs." In Roemer's view, then, there is no particular justification for believing that a unified class structure concept is possible, or at least that it will have more explanatory power than a collection of rather distinct class concepts deployed for specific explanatory purposes.

modes of production to the concrete and micro concept of class structure rooted in the analysis of individual lives. In the actual elaboration of my conceptual strategies, however, I have not been able to sustain such a neat and coherent conceptual space. In various ways, as we shall see, arbitrary elements have entered the analysis—arbitrary in the sense of not being tightly derived from the abstract concept itself.

In what follows I will try to reflect on the successes and failures of this attempt at generating Marxist concepts of class structure that are both more concrete and more oriented to micro-level analyses than the traditional mode of production class structure concept. This assessment, hopefully, will point the direction towards further elaborations.

2 What Do Classes Have in Common That Make Them Classes?

Class structures, for most Marxists anyway, are thought to designate real mechanisms, causal processes that exist independently of the theorist. The concept of class is not meant to be simply an arbitrary, analytical convention invented by the theorist. To define a class, therefore, is to make a claim about the nature of these mechanisms.¹¹ Mechanisms are effect-generating processes.¹² To identify a mechanism is to give an account of the way it produces specific kinds of effects. One crucial aspect of the theoretical content of the concept of class, therefore, concerns the specification of the kinds of direct effects that class structural mechanisms are thought to produce.

11. Two methodological points need to be made here. First of all, what is at issue here is not the use of the word "class," but the status of the concept itself. The use of words is obviously a matter of convention. The claim here is that the theoretical concept designated by that word is meant to designate a real mechanism. In this sense, the definition of the concept class structure can be *incorrect*, not simply *unhelpful*. Second, I am not claiming that the only legitimate kind of concept in social theories is one which attempts to represent real mechanisms in this way. For certain analytical tasks, strictly conventional, heuristic concepts may be entirely appropriate.

12. To say that mechanisms are effect-generating processes does not imply that mechanisms invariably generate *empirically observable* effects. Since, to use the formulation of Roy Bhaskar, the world is an open system consisting of many distinct mechanisms operating simultaneously, it is always possible that the presence of one mechanism can block the effects of another. This does not deny that mechanisms can be viewed as effect-producing processes (or, in Bhaskar's terminology, as *event*-producing processes), but simply that the effects never appear as discrete events in our empirical observations. Our observations (which Bhaskar refers to as "experiences") are always constituted by concatenations of many intersecting events. To identify a mechanism is therefore to identify an effect-producing process which will have a tendency to be embodied in one way or another in empirical observations, but the actual empirical realization of that tendency may depend upon a variety of other contingencies. See Roy Bhaskar, *A Realist Theory of Science* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1975), and *The Possibility of Naturalism* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1979) for an elaboration of this conception of mechanisms.

While it is a commonplace in the Marxist tradition to say that class structures are defined by the "social relations of production," and specific classes within that structure are defined by their location within those social relations, there is much less agreement on which of the various effects generated by the relations of production are the most central to the concept of class. If the social relations of production constituted a simple mechanism which generated a single kind of effect, then this problem would not arise. But the concept "social relations of production" encompasses a complex set of interconnected mechanisms which generate a variety of effects, and there is no general agreement about how these are linked to the concept of class structure. One of our first tasks, therefore, is to try to sort out the kinds of effects that are generally seen as giving theoretical content to the concept of class structure.

Clarifying this issue is important both for understanding how the concept of class structure figures in class analysis in general and for our specific task of producing a more concrete, micro-level concept of class structure. The broader explanatory objectives of class theory hinge on an adequate understanding of the effect-producing mechanisms constituted by class relations. The concept of class figures in the explanations of many sorts of phenomena: state policies, social conflict, wars, ideologies, illness, voting behavior, etc. In each case, the explanatory power of class depends upon the immediate effects class mechanisms are thought to produce. For example, when we say that class structures figure in the explanations of state policies there is always, at least implicitly, a claim that class structures directly generate effects—perhaps material interests of key actors, perhaps consciousness, perhaps resource constraints on alternative strategies—which in turn explain (in conjunction with other mechanisms) state policies. Even if the actual explanation of policies involves many other factors and many contingencies, so that policies cannot be *reduced* to class, there must still be some rudimentary claim about the necessary effect-producing mechanisms of class in order for class to figure systematically in the explanation.

Clarifying the nature of the effect-producing mechanisms implicated in the concept class structure is also important for the project of elaborating a more differentiated repertoire of class structure concepts. If we want to construct a class structural concept at a lower level of abstraction than the perfectly polarized structure of class relations within pure "modes of production," it is necessary to have an explicit account of these effect-producing mechanisms, since it is only in terms of such mechanisms that we can evaluate the consistency of the new concrete concepts with respect to the more abstract ones. Without an explicit account of these mechanisms, we would be unable to know whether our

more concrete concepts were indeed concrete *class* structure concepts or, perhaps, concrete concepts of some other more abstract theoretical object (such as stratification categories or occupational groups). In order for the attempt at building the more concrete class structure concept to be coherent with the more abstract concept, an explicit understanding of the mechanisms identified with class structure is essential.

In these terms, Marxist treatments of class structure can be seen as emphasizing one or more of three types of effects: material interests, lived experience, and capacities for collective action. While theorists generally do not use precisely this language, implicit in most elaborations of the concept of class structure is one or more of these kinds of class-generated effects. In each case, these effects are seen as directly generated by class structural mechanisms as such and, therefore, as providing the basis for the theoretical relevance of the concept of class. This does not mean, it must be stressed, that class by itself is thought to explain subjective understandings of material interests, or the forms of consciousness rooted in lived experience or the actual struggles of collectively organized actors. These empirical phenomena, like all empirical phenomena in a complex "open system," to use Roy Bhaskar's formulation, will be shaped by the joint operation of many distinct mechanisms, not simply class structural mechanisms.¹³ What is being claimed, however, is that to the extent that class is explanatory of empirical phenomena, it is explanatory by virtue of the way class mechanisms generate material interests, or lived experiences, or collective capacities.

I will argue that of these three possible bases for the specification of class mechanisms, material interests provides the most coherent basis for the elaboration of concrete, micro-level concepts of class structure. Before explaining why I feel this is the case, it will be useful to briefly examine the logic of each of these positions.

2.1 *Material Interests*

Class is sometimes viewed as an answer to the question "Who gets what and how do they get it?" The social relations of production determine a set of mechanisms through which people obtain access to material resources and the social product which is produced using those resources. Two critical kinds of material interests are bound up with these mechanisms: first, interests with respect to *economic welfare*, and second, interests with respect to *economic power*. Before discussing each

13. See Bhaskar, *A Realist Theory of Science*.

of these, a brief comment on how I will use the term "interests" is needed.

Intrinsic and Instrumental Interests In the analysis of interests it is important to make the distinction between what can be called *intrinsic* and *instrumental* interests. Intrinsic interests refer to the ends of actions, the goals that one is trying to accomplish through particular strategies. Instrumental interests, on the other hand, refer to interests organized around the necessary means for accomplishing those ends. Thus, for example, a particular level of consumption can be thought of as an intrinsic interest—it is a goal sought for its own sake; whereas improving one's market position for the acquisition of income is an instrumental interest.

In discussions of class interests the primary concern is instrumental interests. Take the question of economic welfare which we will discuss below. In terms of the *ends* specified by economic welfare—high standards of living, lower toil (unpleasant work), more leisure, etc.—there is no basic difference in the interests of individuals within different classes. Everyone, regardless of class, has an intrinsic interest in improving economic welfare. When we look at instrumental interests, on the other hand, there are big and systematic differences across classes. To improve their economic welfare, workers have to engage in quite different strategies, both as individuals and as members of a collectivity, from capitalists. The claim, for example, that workers have an interest in socialism whereas capitalists have interests opposed to socialism, means (among other things) that socialism constitutes a reorganization of society within which the welfare of workers would be improved while the welfare of capitalists would decline. Individuals in both classes have the same interest with respect to welfare as such, but they differ in their instrumental interests with respect to the means of realizing this interest. The interests which are most relevant for understanding the differences among classes, therefore, are these kinds of instrumental interests.

Economic Welfare Economic welfare, in this context, is not equivalent to income or consumption. Rather, it refers to the total package of toil–leisure–income available to a person. Thus, to say that people have an "objective interest" in enhanced economic welfare, does not mean that they have an objective interest in more consumption as such, but simply that, all other things being equal, they have an objective interest in having superior trade-offs between toil–leisure–consumption. If given the choice between a package of 8 hours of toil plus 8 hours of leisure plus \$40 of income and 6 hours of toil plus 10 hours of leisure plus \$50

of income, then the latter package is an objective improvement in economic welfare.

To say that people within a given class share common interests with respect to economic welfare does not mean that they all, necessarily, have the *same* level of actual economic welfare. Some workers may be relatively affluent, others may be poor. Indeed, it is quite possible for people with the same level of income to have quite distinct and even opposed class interests, if the income is generated through different mechanisms. Workers and petty bourgeois farmers may have very similar levels of income, but quite different class interests. Class interests with respect to economic welfare are determined by what a person must do to achieve a given economic welfare, that is, by the welfare-generating mechanisms, not by the outcome itself. To talk about common class interests, then, means that people in a given class, by virtue of their relationship to the underlying mechanisms embedded in the social relations of production, objectively face the same broad structure of choices and strategic tasks when attempting to improve their economic welfare—that is, the package of toil–leisure–income available to them.

Economic Power The social relations of production do not simply distribute, through a set of mechanisms, economic welfare to individuals; they also distribute a crucial form of power: control over the surplus product.¹⁴ While there are many difficulties in a precise definition of the surplus product since much of it may take the form of earned incomes, loosely we can define the surplus product as that part of the total social product that is left over after all of the inputs into production (both labor power and physical capital) have been reproduced.¹⁵ The control of the surplus product fundamentally determines

14. In an earlier draft of this paper I had restricted the discussion of material interests entirely to the problem of interests in economic welfare. This was in keeping with the thrust of my argument in *Classes* in which exploitation was defined, following Roemer, in terms of the causal interdependencies of the welfare of exploiters with the deprivations of the exploited. Joel Rogers (personal communication) pointed out that this preoccupation with individual material welfare missed one of the central aspects of class structures, namely the way they shape what he would call *political* interests, namely interests over the control of economic power resources. While in other contexts (such as the analysis of state policies in capitalist societies) I have emphasized this issue, it was largely absent from my specific discussion of class structure.

15. The difficulty in the specification of the “surplus” arises because of problems in defining the “costs of reproduction” of labor power. These costs certainly cannot be equated with actual employee incomes, since for reasons we will discuss in section 3.1 below, the wages and salaries of certain categories of employees embody appropriations of parts of the surplus product.

the nature of economic investments and consequently the form and character of economic development. Because of the centrality of investments to a broad range of social goals, the control over the surplus can also be considered a central mechanism constraining social and political alternatives in general.¹⁶ As many commentators have stressed, the private, capitalist control over the surplus imposes a pervasive limit on the potential exercise of democratic political power in a capitalist society.¹⁷

As in the case of the argument about interests with respect to economic welfare, class interests with respect to economic power are based on the underlying mechanisms which determine access to the surplus, not simply on the outcomes themselves. In early capitalism, for example, a feudal lord and a capitalist could control the allocation of the same amount of surplus, but since their ability to appropriate this surplus is rooted in different mechanisms of appropriation (feudal rents and capitalist profits) they would have different class interests. In a complementary manner, the class interests with respect to economic power of serfs and workers would be different. More controversially, a similar argument can perhaps be made about the mechanisms underlying the appropriation of surplus by credentialed professionals, corporate managers, and state officials in contemporary capitalism. In any case, the central point here is that material interests are bound up with basic questions of social power and not merely individual economic welfare.

This dimension of the commonality of class interests is particularly salient for the problem of linking macro and micro levels of class structure analysis. The kind of economic power generated by the control over the surplus affects the overall, macro-structural development of a society, not simple the fate of the individual who exercises that power. Since the core of the explanatory project of macro-level class analysis centers on large-scale processes of institutional change, understanding

16. In neoclassical economics it is argued that capitalists do not actually have any meaningful *power* with respect to the allocation of investments, since they are driven by competition to invest in the most profitable way. That is, their apparent control of the surplus is really illusory. If any actor has real power in this system, it is consumers, who by their market choices dictate where investments will move. Two things are worth noting in this approach: first, since consumers vote with dollars—one dollar, one vote—it would still be the case that exploitation would enhance the economic power of exploiters by virtue of their purchasing power. Exploiters would have many more votes in the market than would workers. Second, since exploiters have control over the decision of whether to consume or invest the surplus they appropriate, this too represents an exercise of power. Workers do not have that choice. Thus *even if* we adopt the highly questionable view that the decisions about *where* and *how* to invest are totally determined by “the market,” nevertheless the appropriation of the surplus by capitalists constitutes an appropriation of power as well.

17. See, in particular, the elegant statement of this argument in Joshua Cohen and Joel Rogers, *On Democracy* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986).

the problem of economic power derived from class structures at the micro level of analysis is potentially of considerable importance.

Material Interests and Exploitation In Marxist theory, these two kinds of material interest—interests in securing the conditions for material welfare and interests in enhancing economic power—are linked through the concept of *exploitation*: exploitation defines a set of mechanisms which help to explain both the distribution of economic welfare and the distribution of economic power. That is, by virtue of appropriating the surplus, exploiters are able both to obtain much higher levels of economic welfare (by consuming part of the surplus) and to have much higher levels of economic power (by retaining control over the social allocation of the surplus through investments). For the exploited, economic welfare is depressed by virtue of having surplus appropriated from them, and economic power drastically curtailed by being excluded from control over the allocation of the surplus.¹⁸ Exploitation generates both deprivations and powerlessness, and material interests are structured around both of these. Within Marxism, therefore, to say that what members of a class hold in common is a common set of material interests is to argue that they have common interests with respect to the process of exploitation.¹⁹

Marxism is not the only theoretical tradition which sees the essential commonality of classes as rooted in common material interests. The Weberian concept of members of a class sharing common “life chances” based on their common market capacities, for example, is a specific way of grounding classes in common material interests. As in the Marxist

18. It should be noted that the arguments here do not depend upon the labor theory of value for its theoretical power. The value of the surplus product may or may not be determined by the amount of socially necessary abstract labor time embodied in it, and yet the control over that surplus can give people enhanced material welfare and social power.

19. It is worth noting that John Roemer's analysis of exploitation, which as many of the essays in this book have stressed has played an important role in my analyses of class structure in *Classes*, focuses exclusively on the first of these interests—interests in material welfare. He is not concerned with the way systems of exploitation constitute the basis for economic power, but simply for distributional outcomes. It is for this reason that, in the end, Roemer is able to argue that perhaps we should forget about exploitation as such and simply focus on the issue of the relationship between unjust distributions of resources and unjust distributions of welfare outcomes. (For this argument, see John Roemer, “Should Marxists Be Interested in Exploitation?,” *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, vol. 14, pp. 30–65 (1985)). In his view nothing is really added to the analysis by identifying the causal mechanisms involved in this relationship as “exploitation,” since the *moral* indictment revolves entirely around the issue of the unjustness of the initial distribution of assets. If, however, we see the problem of interests in economic power as central to class analysis, then it is hard to see how the concept of exploitation can be so marginalized since this economic power is based on the appropriation and control of the social surplus.

concept, it is not the common “life chances” (economic welfare) as such which defines common class membership, but a common relationship to the market capacities which generate such life chances. In the Weberian approach, there are as many classes in a society as there are types of market capacities that generate common life chances.

Where the Marxist and Weberian concepts of class sharply diverge is that Marxists, but generally not Weberians, analyze the linkage between class and material interests through the concept of *exploitation*.²⁰ Within the Marxist tradition, members of a class do not simply share a common attribute—common material interests—but those interests are relationally linked in a specific way to the interests of other classes through exploitation. Relationally defined classes, in these terms, do not simply have *different* material interests, as in the Weberian tradition: they have *opposed* material interests. While Weberians would certainly acknowledge that there are many circumstances in which class actors subjectively *perceive* their interests to be opposed to those of other actors, this perception cannot be traced back to any inherent antagonism of interests, but must be explained in terms of the particular construction of cultural meanings in the society.²¹

The objectively antagonistic character of the material interests of classes helps to explain, Marxists generally argue, why class structure should be associated with class conflict: if the material interests bound up with classes are inherently opposed to each other, then it would be expected that the divisions between structurally defined classes would have a tendency to be the basis for cleavages between conflicting groups. To be sure, this need not imply the inevitability and universality of class conflicts—a variety of social processes can block the translation of exploitation into collectively organized conflict. And it does not preclude the possibility of class *compromises*—stable institutional

20. Of course, there are theorists identified with the Weberian tradition who do talk about exploitation. Anthony Giddens and Michael Mann are notable examples. When they do so, I would argue, they are talking in a Marxian voice. This is particularly true for Giddens who has argued (personal communication) that in spite of the fact that everyone considers him a prime example of a neo-Weberian sociologist, he sees his work as at least as indebted to the Marxist tradition as to the Weberian. Giddens's views on exploitation and class are much more clearly laid out in his recent work, especially *A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982) than in his earlier work directly on class theory, *The Class Structure of the Advanced Societies* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973). See also Michael Mann, *The Sources of Social Power* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

21. The absence of a concept of exploitation and control over the surplus from the Weberian concept of class has also meant that most Weberians have treated the material interests linked to class structures exclusively in terms of the problem of the market-based acquisition of individual incomes. Characteristically, the problem of the linkage between class structures and social power has not been a systematic concern.

arrangements in which mutual concessions are made.²² But it does provide a nonarbitrary theoretical grounding for the expectation that class structures shape class conflicts.²³

Interests, Trade-offs, Strategies The concept of interests, even when circumscribed as “material interests,” is by no means unproblematic or uncontested. In recent years Marxists and others have become increasingly suspicious of claims concerning the “objective” interests of actors, interests which supposedly exist independently of the subjective understandings of those interests held by the actors themselves. To say that members of a class share common material interests, therefore, seems to imply that theorists know what is good for the people in a class—what is in their “true” interests—better than they do themselves.

This kind of criticism, however, really misses the theoretical point of the claim that common material interests constitute the critical commonality of class. To say that a group of actors share common material interests shaped by the social relations of production is to say that *they objectively face similar dilemmas and trade-offs in the pursuit of economic welfare and economic power*. Once again: it is not the distributional outcomes of welfare or power as such which define the critical commonality of class interests, but the common material conditions which shape the available choices and strategies with respect to those outcomes.

The expression “available choices and strategies” in this formulation can refer to choices faced by individuals in a class *as individuals* or to choices they face as potential members of organized collectivities. Thus, as an individual, to be a capitalist means that economic welfare depends upon extraction of surplus labor from workers, technical innovation, successful investment strategies, market competition with rival capi-

talists; as an individual, to be a worker means that economic welfare depends upon successfully selling one’s labor power to a capitalist and competing with other workers for better jobs. But both workers and capitalists also face distinctive structures of choices with respect to the collective pursuits of economic welfare. Workers, for example, face choices between various individualist market strategies (via training, promotions, geographical mobility, etc.) and various kinds of collective strategies (unionization, revolutionary politics, etc.). And, of course, they face the choice of participating in various kinds of ongoing collective strategies from which they might benefit or being a free-rider on the actions of others. To describe members of a class as sharing common material interests, therefore, suggests that they share common dilemmas with respect to collective action as well as individual pursuit of economic welfare and power.²⁴

Now, in these terms to talk about the common material interests of workers is not to make a claim about which of the actual potential choices listed above are “best” for workers as individuals. No claim is being made, for example, that for any given worker it is objectively in their interests to pursue unionization strategies rather than geographical mobility strategies to advance their economic welfare. Rather, what is being claimed is that by virtue of being workers (that is, by occupying similar locations with respect to the relations of exploitation) they face broadly similar structures of trade-offs with respect to these kinds of choices.²⁵

These kinds of choices and trade-offs rooted in the conditions for the pursuit of economic welfare can be defined both within the “game” of

22. The view that the material interests of workers and capitalists are inherently antagonistic, however, does imply that a class compromise is a compromise; it does not obliterate the conflicts of interests, but contains those conflicts within bounds due to reciprocal (if asymmetrical) concessions.

23. Because Marxists regard the interests of classes as inherently antagonistic, they are committed to a much stronger set of predictions than are Weberians. For Marxists it is clear that if a society is characterized by class exploitation, then it would be surprising if no regular conflicts were observed between the allegedly antagonistic classes. The absence of systematic conflict, therefore, would imply the presence of some powerful mechanism which prevents the interest mechanisms from generating empirical conflicts. For a Weberian, on the other hand, since the interests specified by classes are merely different, not inherently conflictual, there are no particular general expectations one way or the other about the patterns of conflicts that will be associated with class divisions. In principle Weberians would be no more surprised by the presence of class conflict than by its absence in capitalism. As I will argue in section 4 below, the capacity to be surprised by one’s observations is one of the strengths of Marxist class theory relative to its Weberian rivals.

24. To use the language of rational actor models, members of a class share common free-rider problems with respect to the collective pursuit of material interests. Thus, part of what capitalists have in common by virtue of being capitalists is an interest in increasing the free-rider problems for workers while decreasing them for capitalists, whereas part of what workers have in common by virtue of being workers is an interest in decreasing free rider problems for workers while increasing them for capitalists. It might be noted that this is essentially equivalent to what Nicos Poulantzas means when he says that the essential capitalist character of the capitalist state is constituted by the state’s effects on organizing capitalists (overcoming their free-rider problems) and disorganizing workers (increasing their free-rider problems). See Nicos Poulantzas, *Political Power and Social Theory* (London: Verso, 1973).

25. The qualifying expression “broadly similar” obviously begs a number of difficult questions. How similar do the structure of choices have to be to be counted as “similar”? Workers in secondary labor markets or workers who are oppressed minorities may, for example, face different trade-offs and dilemmas (different structures of choices) from various other categories of workers. Does this mean that they are in a different *class*? It is essentially on the basis of such differences in material interests, for example, that some feminists have argued that female workers are in a different class from male workers. While such arguments are important and deserve serious consideration, I will not address them here.

capitalism and with respect to the choice between the game of capitalism and socialism. That is, to occupy a class location within capitalism is to face specific strategic alternatives within the capitalist game as well as to face strategic trade-offs with respect to struggles over the basic property relations of capitalism. In classical Marxism, where the class structure was conceptualized primarily at the abstract level of the mode of production as a game involving only two actors—workers and capitalists—there was a high level of congruence between the analysis of interests within the game of capitalism and the analysis of interests over which game was being played. The class forces lined up in the same way in both analyses. This was one of the central reasons why Marx and other classical Marxists felt that the intensification of class polarization and struggles within capitalism tended to enhance the possibility of class struggle over capitalism itself.

Once we move to more concrete and micro levels of analysis, however, and give specificity to the variations in class locations within capitalist class structures, the picture is no longer so simple. As we shall see, the terrain of material interests constituted by the class structures of concrete capitalist societies is not perfectly polarized, and there is not a simple relationship between the concrete matrix of material interests of actors constituted within the game of capitalism and the interests over what kind of game should be played.

2.2 Lived Experience

Some Marxists have questioned the adequacy of grounding the concept of class in material interests. Interests, it is argued, are causally efficacious only when they are embodied in the subjective understanding of actors. Theorists can define whatever they like to be the “material interests” of a class, but the people in a class will act on those interests only to the extent that they become actual, subjective preferences. Common material interests, therefore, only become part of the commonality of class membership if they generate a set of systematic experiences that actively shape subjective understanding.²⁶

In these terms, common lived experience becomes the central, abstract content of the commonality of class membership. Instead of seeing class as an answer to the question “Who gets what and how?” it is seen as an answer to the question “Who does what and why?” The social

26. To use the idiom of rational actor models, the analysis of material interests focuses on the *feasible set* of alternatives facing actors (that is, the mechanisms which determine the trade-offs they face in pursuing material welfare and power), whereas the analysis of lived experiences focuses on the *preference ordering* of actors over this feasible set.

relations of production, in these terms, impose a set of practices on people within those relations. Those common practices systematically generate common experiences, which in turn are the basis for a common set of understandings about the world.

In the abstract model of the pure capitalist mode of production with a polarized relation between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, there are three critical lived experiences which it can be argued constitute the commonality of the working class. First, and most obviously, there are experiences of being forced to sell one's labor power in order to survive. Showing up at the factory gate, being unable to reproduce oneself without entering the labor market, does not simply define a set of material interests of actors, but a set of experiences as well. Second, and perhaps more controversially, within production itself there is the experience of being dominated, bossed around, within work. Under a set of production conditions in which the critical task for employers is to extract surplus labor from their employees—to turn labor power into effective labor—experiences of domination will be an inherent aspect of the class relation itself.²⁷ Third, the inability of workers to control the allocation of the social surplus also generates a certain kind of lived experience—the experience of powerlessness in the face of social forces that shape one's destiny. In all of these cases, the critical issue is not the material interests as such which result from these practices, but the experiences, and associated subjectivities, which they generate.

In a way quite parallel to the linkage between material interests and exploitation, these aspects of lived experience are closely tied to the concept of *alienation* in the Marxist tradition. When Marx discusses

27. John Roemer has argued forcefully in several places that it is possible to construct a model of something like capitalism in which there is no coercion at the point of production, and thus, he argues, domination within production should not be seen as an inherent aspect of capitalist class relations. To make this argument, however, he has to assume that workers agree to perform a given amount of actual labor (effort) within work and that they do not “cheat” on this contract. Under this assumption, cheating is a deviation from the model that occurs at a lower level of abstraction (as is the case, for example, in cheating within exchange relations among capitalists). The counter-argument to Roemer's position, with which I agree, is that what Roemer is calling “cheating” by workers is inherent in the capital-labor relation by virtue of the antagonistic interests and asymmetries of that relation and is therefore not a problem that only enters at a lower level of abstraction. In the case of cheating among capitalists, because of the essential symmetries in the exchange relation, there is no reason to believe that the cheating is not also symmetrical (that is, each capitalist cheats from the other), and thus cheating need not enter the specification of the exchange relation itself. This is not the case for the performance of labor effort within the labor process. Being told what to do within the labor process and then being monitored sufficiently to see that you do it is therefore built into the capital-labor relation itself. For Roemer's views on these issues, see John Roemer, “New Directions in the Marxian Theory of Class and Exploitation,” *Politics and Society*, vol. 11, no. 3 (1982).

alienation in the context of an analysis of what he calls human "species being," he argues how the loss of control over one's labor and over the product of one's labor generates a set of experiences that pervasively dominate one's life. Both exploitation and alienation are rooted in the same relational properties of production, but one is centered primarily around the material interests and the other the life experiences generated out of those practices.

An objection might be raised against this characterization of working-class lived experiences on the grounds that this is a largely *male* characterization. Feminists have correctly pointed out that the lived experience of women in the working class is in many respects distinctively different from that of men. In the present context, this issue is particularly striking for full-time working-class *housewives*, whose lived experience of class is clearly not adequately characterized by saying that they are "forced to sell their labor power in order to survive" or that they are "bossed around within production."²⁸ Only with respect to the broader experience of powerlessness with respect to the control of the surplus can men and women in the working class be said to share essentially the same "lived experiences," and even here there are probably significant gendered aspects to the experiences in question.²⁹ Because the lived experiences of women and men are so systematically different within the working class, it is not possible—the argument goes—to construct a meaningful "gender-blind" concept of class experiences.

This objection, I think, is not really to the characterization of the lived experiences linked to classes within the abstract capitalist mode of production as such, but rather to the theoretical legitimacy of that abstract concept itself. What is being questioned is the possibility of formulating an adequate abstract concept of class structure that identifies class mechanisms as such without simultaneously incorporating a gendered dimension in the conceptualization. The objection is thus to the very attempt at producing a gender-blind concept of class—that is, a concept that can be specified independently of any specification of gender mechanisms.

This set of claims, I believe, collapses the different levels of abstraction at which the problem of class structure and its effects can be analyzed: while it is legitimate to insist on the importance of gender for understanding and explaining the *concrete* lived experiences of people, it

28. This objection was raised by Barbara Laslett (personal communication).

29. A similar kind of argument could be constructed around the racial or ethnic dimensions of lived experience, or, for that matter, any dimension of lived experience that is linked in one way or another to class (for instance, age).

does not follow from this that gender must be incorporated in the *abstract concept* of class itself. To insist on this incorporation amounts to a denial of the very existence of distinct class and gender mechanisms. The implication is that we should abolish *both* of these concepts altogether and replace them with a single, fused concept, which perhaps could be called "clender" (class-gender). In such an approach people within clender categories may share common lived experiences, but these experiences cannot in any analytically coherent way be disaggregated into the effects of class mechanisms and gender mechanisms; they are the effects of clender mechanisms as such. *If* one believes that this is unlikely to be a useful way of conceptualizing the complex relationship between class and gender, then at this level of abstraction it becomes necessary to define class independently of gender and seek to understand their interactions rather than to merge them into a single, unitary concept.

Within a Marxist class structure concept, at the level of abstraction of the pure capitalist mode of production, there are no "housewives" or "male breadwinners" (but, equally, there are no *male* breadwinners as such). At this level of abstraction, therefore, it is impossible to specify the crucial differences in lived experiences of men and women in the working class that is generated by the concrete *intersection* of class relations and gender relations. In this specific sense, the concept of class is "gender blind" at the level of abstraction of modes of production. This does not mean, it must be stressed, that the concrete analysis of classes that deploys this concept need be gender blind. One can certainly study the ways in which concrete class structures are shaped by the forms of gender relations in the society, for example, or the ways that class and gender jointly shape forms of consciousness and collective action. But within this conceptual framework, gender relations, in general, should not be packed into the abstract concept of class itself.³⁰ I will thus, throughout this discussion, continue to assume that one can legitimately identify a set of lived experiences associated within abstractly defined common locations within class structures.

As in the case of interest-based concepts of the commonality of class, experience-based concepts are found in a variety of theoretical traditions besides Marxism. Most notably in contemporary social theory,

30. There could be special cases in which at the level of abstraction of mode of production gender relations might appropriately be considered a dimension of class structure. This could be the case, for example, in what is sometimes described as a "kinship mode of production" in which the essential social relations of production are constituted in part by gender. In such a situation it might not be possible to even describe the relations of production independently of the gender relations themselves.

Pierre Bourdieu's theory of class relies heavily on such an approach.³¹ Bourdieu attempts to elaborate a view of class around the dual concepts of class *habitus* and *capital*. A class habitus is defined by a set of common *conditions* in everyday life which produce common *conditionings* experienced by people and which, in turn, generate a common set of internalized *dispositions* to act in particular ways. These dispositions range from *tastes* (the central preoccupation of Bourdieu's book, *Distinction*) to receptivities to particular ideological appeals and calls to action. In Bourdieu's analysis, a class habitus is not simply constituted within the workplace, but in community, schools, families and other institutions as well. These institutional settings generate lived experiences (conditionings) over the life cycle which reinforce certain modes of thought and action and undermine others. The decisive criteria which distinguish classes are thus not reducible to differences in their material interests (based on their control over different kinds of capital in Bourdieu's analysis), but must include differences in their habituses as well.

Anthony Giddens's analysis of class structure also puts considerable emphasis on the role of lived experience in the constitution of classes. For Giddens, classes are the outcome of a process through which economic *categories* (which he does not want to consider proper classes) defined by market capacities are transformed into collectivities sharing common lived experiences. He refers to this process as "class structuration." As in Weber's analysis, the location of people in the market—whether they own property, skills, or mere labor power—determines a set of material interests. These material interests, however, are insufficient to constitute "classes." In order for these economically determined categories to become classes, there must be some process by which the lives of people with those interests become structured around those interests. This can occur through a variety of mechanisms: restrictions on inter- and intragenerational mobility across economic categories provide a basis for the transmission and "reproduction of common life experiences;"³² the technical division of labor, especially between manual and nonmanual labor, generates a set of distinctive working conditions which define a common set of work experiences; authority relations generate experiences of command and obedience;

31. See especially, Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984); "The Social Space and the Genesis of Groups," *Theory and Society*, vol. 14, no. 6 (1985), pp. 723–44; and "What Makes a Social Class?," *Berkeley Journal of Sociology*, vol. 22 (1987), pp. 1–18.

32. Giddens, *The Class Structure of the Advanced Societies* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), p. 108.

and distributive outcomes create common experiences of community and living conditions. To the extent that these various processes of structuration overlap and correspond to the "objective" divisions of market capacities, then distinctive classes will be constituted in a class structure.³³

One of the most explicit statements of this general approach in the Marxist tradition is found in E.P. Thompson's well-known discussion of class in *The Making of the English Working Class*:

I do not see class as a "structure," nor even as a "category," but as something which in fact happens (and can be shown to have happened) in human relationships. . . . And class happens when some men, as a result of common experiences (inherited or shared), feel and articulate the identity of their interests as between themselves, and as against other men whose interests are different (and usually opposed) to theirs. The class experience is largely determined by the productive relations into which men are born—or enter voluntarily.³⁴

While the category "interests" does enter into Thompson's statement, it is treated as a subjective category conceptually subordinated to the commonality of experiences rooted in common conditions of work and life. It is around these common experiences that the concept of class revolves.

2.3 Collective Capacity

Commonalities of interests and experiences are certainly the principal ways that Marxists ground the concept of class. But there is a third way

33. Similar kinds of arguments are made by other theorists commonly regarded as working in the Weberian tradition. David Lockwood, in *The Blackcoated Worker* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958), builds a class structure concept around the dual dimensions of "market situation" and "work situation." The market situation dimension follows fairly closely the traditional Weberian account of market capacities based on different kinds of property (capital, skills, labor power). The theoretical status of the "work situation" dimension is somewhat less clear, but it seems that it is meant to tap the ways in which common working conditions are linked to common identities, presumably via the kinds of workplace experiences such conditions generate. It is at least partially on this basis that Lockwood argues that routinized white collar jobs are in a separate class from manual workers, even if under certain circumstances their material interests are essentially the same. Similar kinds of arguments are made by John Goldthorpe in his various analyses of the service class. See especially his essay, "On the Service Class: Its Formation and Future," in Anthony Giddens and Gavin McKenzie (eds), *Social Class and the Division of Labour* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 162–85.

34. E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), pp. 9–10.

which, while usually deployed in combination with one of the first two, is also important. The essential commonality of a class is sometimes seen as derived from its potential capacity for collective action. In particular, one of the central properties of the working class, it is often claimed, is that it has the potential capacity to organize collectively to overthrow capitalism and transform the social relations of production into socialism. In this view, the social relations of production do not merely distribute material interests or the pattern of lived experiences across classes; they also distribute a range of resources which underlie the potentials for collective action. For a category of agents to truly constitute a class they would have to at least have the potential capacity to organize society in their interests.

For Marx, the peasantry in mid-nineteenth-century France was not really a class precisely because it lacked any capacity for this kind of systemic collective action. In his view, while peasants may have shared common material interests and conditions of life (and thus, by implication, common experiences), they were so atomized and fragmented that they could not constitute a collectivity capable of transformative struggle. They were, in his words, like a sack of potatoes, remaining discrete individuals even when grouped together.³⁵ The working class, on the other hand, was seen by Marx to have this capacity for collective transformative struggle for two main reasons: first, workers were the direct producers of society's wealth and thus they collectively possessed the necessary knowledge to organize social production; and second, the concentration and centralization of capital generated by capitalism brought masses of workers into contact and interdependency with one another which generated the kind of solidarity and organizational capacity needed to challenge capitalist power.

Occasionally one does find this kind of argument outside of strictly Marxist approaches to class. Alvin Gouldner's analysis of the "New Class" in capitalist societies, and Ivan Szelenyi's and George Konrad's analysis of Eastern Europe intellectuals, both treat the *potential* for becoming a ruling class as an essential element in the claim that intel-

35. Marx, of course, may have been wrong in this judgment about the collective capacity of peasants. The point here is that he used the criterion of collective capacity as a way of distinguishing a full-fledged class from what might be called a proto-class. If we use the classical Marxist distinction between a class-in-itself (a class structurally defined) and a class-for-itself (a class collectively organized for struggle), then Marx is saying that a class-in-itself only exists even as a *class-in-itself* if it has the potential of becoming a class-for-itself.

lectuals should be treated as a class in the first place.³⁶ In more Marxist analyses, this same kind of argument is sometimes used to justify the claim that routinized office workers and unproductive laborers should not be considered to be working class: while they may share certain basic interests with workers, some theorists claim that they are not part of the collective capacity to transform and organize society, and thus they are not properly part of the working class as such.

2.4 *Levels of Abstraction and the Commonality of Class Locations*

At the highest level of abstraction of class analysis, all three of these effects of class relations are credible candidates for the essential criteria defining the commonality of class locations. At the level of abstraction of the capitalist mode of production, one can make plausible arguments that there is a certain kind of commonality of material interests, lived experiences, and capacities for collective action that are generated directly by the social relations of production as such. That is, the social relations of production in the capitalist mode of production directly determine certain critical aspects of interests, experiences, and capacities of actors defined by those relations. For the working class, for example, we can say that their location within capitalist social relations of production analyzed at the most abstract level directly determines:

1. a set of material interests opposed to those of capitalists by virtue of the relation of exploitation between them;
2. a set of common lived experiences bound up with selling labor power, being dominated within the labor process and being excluded from control over the social surplus;
3. a set of collective capacities for struggle rooted in the interdependencies among workers within the labor process and the centrality of workers to the overall process of social production.

If we were exclusively interested in analyzing capitalism abstractly as a mode of production, then we could probably treat the concept of class structure as built simultaneously around all three of these commonalities (although we might still want to give interests and experiences a logical

36. See George Konrad and Ivan Szelenyi, *Intellectuals on the Road to Class Power* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Jovanovich, 1978), and Alvin Gouldner, *Intellectuals and the Rise of the New Class* (New York: Seabury Press, 1979).

priority over capacities within the concept of class structure).³⁷ The problem occurs when we try to move to lower levels of abstraction, particularly when we want to do so in a way that is analytically powerful at the micro level of analysis.

When class is analyzed at a relatively concrete, micro level of analysis there is no longer necessarily a simple coincidence of material interests, lived experience and collective capacity. As theorists who see lived experience as the pivotal issue in class analysis stress, the lived experiences of workers within the production process (let alone within the society at large) cannot be derived even in a complex way simply from their location within the abstractly defined relations of production as such. The same can be said for collective capacities. This means that when we specify the social relations of production at a relatively concrete, micro level of analysis, people occupying a common location within those relations will nevertheless have different lived experiences and collective capacities.³⁸

37. Even at this abstract level of analysis, the capacity dimension of class analysis should be conceptually subordinated to the interests and experiences dimensions. Unless we have specified the interests of actors and their subjective understandings of the world, it makes little sense to describe their capacities to act as *class* capacities. Capacities to act are always relative to a set of interests and motivations, and these are derived from the first two dimensions. In order to even describe a class capacity as an instance of *working-class* capacity one must have a logically prior specification of the interests and/or experiences which define workers as workers. Interests and experiences thus have a logical priority over capacities.

38. In classical Marxism there was a general belief that at the concrete level of analysis these three conceptual foundations for class structure analysis had an historical tendency towards convergence for the working class in capitalist society: the category of agents sharing common material interests by virtue of capitalist exploitation progressively came to share increasingly profound common lived experiences by virtue of the progressive homogenization and proletarianization of working conditions, while at the same time their capacity for collective action was enhanced by the increasing concentration and centralization of capital. The structural boundaries of material interests, lived experience and collective capacity at the concrete and abstract levels of analysis thus had a tendency to increasingly coincide in the course of capitalist development.

Relatively few Marxists today accept this vision of the trajectory of capitalism and its implications for the analysis of class structure. Instead of becoming ever more polarized, the class structure appears to be becoming increasingly complex and differentiated, with an accompanying differentiation of material interests among employees. The lived experiences of employees both within production and outside of production have if anything become increasingly heterogeneous, rather than homogeneous. And the capacity for revolutionary transformation has become sufficiently problematic, at least in developed capitalist societies, that it seems hard to treat it as a decisive criterion of class structure analysis, even aside from the problem of the disjuncture between interests and experience. Whatever else one might want to say about the class structures of advanced capitalism, there does not seem to be a powerful tendency for simultaneous, overlapping polarization in terms of material interests, lived experiences and capacity for transformative struggle.

In light of this failure for interests, experiences and capacities to coincide at the concrete level of analysis, class theorists face several choices. One possibility is to simply abandon the concept of an objectively given class structure altogether. This is essentially the position of Adam Przeworski, particularly in some of his more recent writings.³⁹ Classes are not structured prior to struggle; they are strictly the effects of the strategies of collectively organized actors, especially political parties. While those strategies may themselves be conditioned by the legacies of past struggles and by a host of structural properties of the society—political institutions, legal institutions, property relations—they are not conditioned by the distribution of people into an objectively given class structure as such. The “objectively” defined working class—whatever be the specific definition of that class—has no more “natural affinity” to support the socialist party than any other category of agents.⁴⁰

Few class analysts have followed Przeworski’s lead in categorically rejecting the concept of class structure. Most class theorists continue to believe that objectively constituted class relations are important for understanding material interests and/or lived experiences and/or collective capacities, and our theoretical task is to figure out appropriate ways of conceptualizing these relations.

A second general strategy for contending for the concrete non-coincidence of class interests, experiences and capacities would be to escalate the complexity of the concept of class structure at the concrete level of analysis by retaining all three aspects of the commonality of class location but allowing them to vary independently of each other. We

39. In Przeworski’s earlier writings on the working class, he seemed to suggest that classes had a structural foundation that existed independently of the strategies of parties and other collective actors. Thus, for example, in his initial essay on social democratic voting, he defends the adoption of a narrow definition of the working class as manual industrial wage-earners, not simply because this was the view of socialist party activists, but also because this definition reflected a line of real division in the society: “But the specific definition also involves a bet on our part: a hypothesis that the line of sharpest divisions, of interest and values, lies between narrowly defined manual workers and other wage-earners” (*Capitalism and Social Democracy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1985), p. 105). In the final version of this argument, appearing in his coauthored book with John Sprague, *Paper Stones* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), this claim to an objective status of the manual/nonmanual divide is dropped, and class definitions are viewed strictly as the outcome of the strategic choices of collective actors.

40. If one were to follow this line of thought in a completely consistent manner, then the *empirical* affinity of the working class for socialist and other progressive political orientations would be seen simply as the cumulative effect of the historical trajectory of ideologies, programs, and strategies of party elites. Since parties from the start mobilized “workers” on the basis of a discourse of class, parties today are to a greater or lesser extent constrained by the legacies of these past ideologically driven practices of mobilization.

could then define a kind of three-dimensional class structure space consisting of: class-interest structure, class-experience structure, and class-capacity structure. At the mode of production level of abstraction these three dimensions coincide: agents defined with respect to the class interest dimension of class structure also share common class experience and class capacity. At the lower levels of abstraction, the overlap of the three dimensions declines thus allowing for a much wider array of structural "locations" defined by the disjunctures between interests, experiences, and capacities.

This solution to the problem of the concrete noncoincidence of interests, experiences, and capacities adds such complexity to the concept of class structure that it risks adding more confusion than clarification. But there is an additional reason why I do not think it is a viable general strategy for dealing with these problems, at least at the current state of our theoretical knowledge: while there are a range of strategies for deriving concrete material interests from the abstract concept of class relations, I know of no parallel way of deriving concrete lived experiences and collective capacities.

As we shall see in section 3, on the basis of material interests, there are a number of specific analytical strategies for producing class structure concepts at lower levels of abstraction from the pure mode of production. For example, concrete class structures can be treated as specific combinations of different modes of production (or, equivalently for present purposes, types of production relations or types of exploitation). Within such a concrete class structure concept, different specific class locations and the material interests associated with them, are defined by the intersection of these multiple production relations in jobs filled by individuals.

I know of no comparable analytical strategy for producing a concrete concept of class structure built around collective capacities and lived experiences. One might try to construct such a strategy in a way analogous to the strategy based on interests just described. One could argue, for example, that there are distinctive forms of collective capacity or lived experience linked to each type of production relation, and thus the commonality of the class locations formed by the intersection of production relations is defined by a collective capacity or lived experience emerging out of the separate capacities/experiences associated with each relation taken separately. Such a strategy, however, seems implausible at best, and in any event, to my knowledge no one has even attempted constructing such a derivation of concrete experiences and capacities from abstract relational categories. For the moment, therefore, the only coherent way that I know of to generate systematically concrete concepts of class structure from the abstract concept of mode

of production is via the category of material interests.⁴¹

This conclusion should not cause great dismay to theorists for whom the category of lived experience is seen as central to understanding social conflict and social change in class analysis. First of all, this conceptual strategy does not mean that lived experience has been banned from the concept of class structure altogether (let alone from class analysis in general). Lived experience is still an integral part of the *abstract* concept of class structure, and thus remains embodied in the concrete concepts as well (since they are all nested within the abstract concept). The point is that whereas the concrete, micro-level concepts of class structure attempt to embody a more complex and differentiated mapping of the material interests of actors than the abstract concept, they retain the relatively thin understanding of their lived experiences associated with the more abstract concept.⁴²

Second, to reiterate a point already made, to say that concrete concepts of class structure can most systematically be built around exploitation and material interests does not in any way prejudice the *explanatory* importance of material interests relative to lived experience

41. It should be noted that this argument in favor of deriving concrete class structure concepts on the basis of material interests is somewhat different from the one I offered earlier in reply to Johanna Brenner's criticisms (see pp. 210–11). There I argued that since the lived experiences of workers were drastically different in different times and places, it seemed implausible to build a map of class structure on a logic of commonalities of such experiences, whereas it was possible to build such a map around material interests. It now seems to me that while my conclusion may have been justified, my arguments were not entirely on the mark. In the earlier argument against a concrete lived-experience based concept of class structure I was assuming a quite rich profile of lived experiences—one that included all of the diverse experiences generated by the practices of actors within production analyzed at a relatively low level of abstraction (since it is only at a concrete level that, for example, workers in Japan, South Africa, and the United States are distinguishable). The analysis I offered of material interests, in contrast, was based on arguments about mechanisms of exploitation analyzed at the highest levels of abstraction of class structure analysis. If the material interests of workers had been analyzed at the same level of abstraction as experiences, then they would also have been characterized by considerable contingency and heterogeneity (due to the specific circumstances of jobs, geographical location, industrial sector, not to mention things like race and gender). The real issue, then, is the extent to which we can construct a concrete concept of class structure based on material interests that is systematically derived from the more abstract concept, whereas we cannot do this for lived experiences, at least at the present stage of theoretical development.

42. That is, in the concrete micro-analysis of the working class, the lived experiences that we attribute to them directly by virtue of their *class* location are based on the abstract concept of class structure. No new complexity in the analysis of experiences is systematically added by moving to the more concrete and micro-analysis of class structure as such (although, of course, a rich array of new elements can enter the concrete analysis of lived experience by virtue of other principles besides class structure). In the case of material interests, by contrast, the concrete analysis embodies a much more complex picture of the matrix of these interests than is found in the abstract analysis.

or collective capacity. It could be the case, for example, that the most important cause of variations in the degree of militancy of working classes across countries is variations in their collective capacity for struggle or variations in the lived experiences within production, not their material interests as such. If anything, the identification of class *structure* with exploitation and material interests would facilitate discovering this conclusion (assuming, of course, that it is correct) since it acknowledges the independent explanatory potential of experience and capacity.⁴³

Finally, in practice theorists who see lived experience as the pivotal category for class analysis generally do not narrowly tie lived experience to the relations *of* production. Thus, the kinds of lived experiences which they emphasize are not really candidates for inclusion in the concept of class structure as such anyway. For example, Michael Burawoy argues that the critical kinds of lived experiences that shape class consciousness of workers are determined by the social relations *in* production, rather than the social relations *of* production. In particular, they are generated by what he calls the political apparatuses of production which shape the forms of competition among workers and interactions with bosses on the shop floor.⁴⁴ Or, to take another example, Ira Katznelson places the ongoing lived experiences of workers at the core of his analysis of class formation. But for him the critical complex of experiences centers on the interrelationships between work and community, between the experiences workers have on and off the job. While the social life of working-class communities may be shaped in various ways by the social relations of production, they are not part of, or derivable from, those relations, and thus do not constitute part of class structure as such.⁴⁵ In terms of these kinds of analyses of lived experience, the decision to build the concrete, micro-level concepts of class structure around the problem of material interests does not in any way marginalize their central theoretical concerns.

I will therefore follow a general strategy of trying to elaborate the concept of class structure at a more micro and concrete level of analysis on the basis of the linkage between material interests and the social relations of production. I will try to do so in a way that is consistent with the more abstract concept of class structure as embodying lived experiences and collective capacities in addition to material interests, but these

43. It should be also noted that building the concrete concept of class structure around the dimension of material interests does not prejudice the relative explanatory importance of aspects of lived experience generated by mechanisms other than class (gender, race, nationality, etc.).

44. See Burawoy, *The Politics of Production*.

45. See Ira Katznelson, *City Trenches* (New York: Pantheon, 1981).

will not directly be the basis for the production of the more concrete micro concepts.

3 Attempts at Building an Adequate Map of the Class Structure

The decision to ground the production of concrete concepts of class structure in an account of relationally generated, antagonistic class interests is only a point of departure. A wide variety of specific strategies for actually elaborating the substantive content of such a class concept and developing an explicit set of criteria for class structural analysis are consistent with such a decision.

In my own work I have explored two different general approaches to this problem. These can be referred to as the *contradictory locations* approach and the *multidimensional exploitation* approach.⁴⁶ Both of these strategies are attempts at providing a positive theorization to the category "middle class" within an essentially interest-based framework. Each of these solutions, in my judgment, has attractive features to them, but—alas—each has serious problems as well. In what follows I will very briefly outline the central arguments of each approach and lay out their central weaknesses and strengths. I will then discuss the apparent attractiveness of neo-Weberian solutions and explain why I feel they do not offer a cogent alternative.

3.1 The First Solution: Contradictory Locations

Most class structure concepts are built on the unstated premiss that there is a one-to-one mapping between "locations" in a class structure (the places filled by human individuals) and "classes" themselves: every location is in one and only one class. In capitalist society this implies that everyone must be located in the working class, the capitalist class, the petty bourgeoisie or, perhaps, some entirely "new" class (appropriately called by some theorists, therefore, the "New Class"). The concept of contradictory locations within class relations was an attempt at breaking with this assumption: some locations in a class structure might be in two or more classes simultaneously. Managers, for example, could be understood as simultaneously in the working class and the capitalist class: they

46. In *Classes* I referred to both of these strategies as involving contradictory locations: "contradictory locations within *class* relations" for the first strategy, and "contradictory locations within *exploitation* relations" for the second. In the present context, the discussion will be facilitated by using the expression "multidimensional exploitation" for the second strategy.

were in the working class insofar as they had to sell their labor power in order to obtain their livelihood; they were in the capitalist class insofar as they dominated workers within production. And since the class interests of workers and capitalists were inherently antagonistic, a dual class location that combined these two classes was dubbed a “contradictory location within class relations.”⁴⁷

How can it be that a concrete location in a class structure can be simultaneously in two classes? Within a relational concept of class, class locations are positions-within-relations. In order for it to make sense to see a “location” as simultaneously in two (or more) “classes”, therefore, it must be the case that class relations themselves are multidimensional or multifaceted.

In order to understand this claim, it is necessary to clarify briefly what I mean by the term “social relation.” What is related within a social relation is not, strictly speaking, either a set of “positions” or a set of actual people as such, but rather a set of *practices*: social relations link practices to each other. The capital-labor relation defines a systematic relation between the practices of capitalists and workers within that relation. Conceptually, we cannot even define the practices of capitalists without reference to their connection to the practices of workers: capitalists *employ* workers who *sell* their labor power to capitalists. The verbs “employ” and “sell” designate relational practices in that they imply interacting practices of distinct agents. While for simplicity it is often useful to refer to social relations as binding together the people within the relation, this should be understood as a somewhat elliptical way of talking about the interactions among their practices.

To talk about the multidimensionality of a relation, therefore, is equivalent to talking about the multidimensionality of the practices structured within that relation. What we call the “capital-labor relation” should thus be viewed as a package of relational practices. In these terms, then, managers would occupy the bourgeois location within one aspect or dimension of these relational practices and the proletarian location within another.

That was the basic intuition underlying the conceptual strategy of contradictory locations. I elaborated this intuition in a variety of somewhat different ways.⁴⁸ These differences are not particularly important in the present context. The common thread was the view that the

47. At roughly the same time as I was elaborating the concept of contradictory class locations, G. Carchedi was working on essentially the same underlying insight in his functional definition of the new middle class as being constituted by the simultaneous presence of the “functions” of capital and of labor. See Carchedi, *The Economic Identification of Social Classes* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977).

48. For a specific review of the development of the concept, see ch. 2 of *Classes*.

concept of “class relation” had two primary dimensions: property or ownership relations and possession or control relations. The former was linked to the concept of exploitation; the latter to the concept of domination. Managers occupied a capitalist location within control relations (that is, they dominated workers), but a working-class location within ownership relations (that is, they sold their labor power to capitalists).

This framework emerged as a specific solution to the problem of managers in the class structure. It was subsequently modified to try to accommodate the problem of professionals, experts, and credentialed specialists and technicians of various sorts. How should these kinds of jobs be located within a class structure? Unlike managers, they did not directly control workers, and thus could not easily be placed in the capitalist location on the domination dimension of class relations. By the logic of the concept of contradictory locations they thus did not seem to be simultaneously in the capitalist class and the working class. And yet, at least at an intuitive level, it did not seem appropriate to consider such jobs as simply an integral part of the working class.

The solution I came up with was to consider these class locations as simultaneously working class and *petty bourgeoisie*. This means that, rather than being a contradictory location *within* a given “mode” of production” (that is, within capitalist relations of production), they were a contradictory location that combined elements from two distinct kinds of production relations: capitalist relations and what is sometimes called petty commodity production relations. That is, expert/professional employees were petty bourgeois in so far as they had direct control over their *own* labor process (self-direction or autonomy within work), but were proletarian in so far as they had to sell their labor power to an employer in order to work. For want of a better expression, I called such positions “semiautonomous employees.”

Finally, to complete the picture, small employers were characterized as a contradictory location that combined petty bourgeois and capitalist relations. Like the petty bourgeoisie they were direct producers working alongside their employees, but like capitalists they were exploiters of workers.

This first strategy of building a class structural concept capable of systematically handling the “middle class” has a number of attractive features. First, it is a strongly relational concept. The definitions of different class locations—both fundamental classes and contradictory locations—are all specified in relational terms. This is especially clear in the case of managers. But even for semiautonomous employees, the attempt was made to define the distinct social relations of petty commodity production and then incorporate this into the definition of their class location.

Secondly, while the concept of contradictory location was built around the interest-logic of class relations, it also suggested a particular set of experience-generating mechanisms linked to class. Domination and autonomy are aspects of work settings that are closely tied to daily experiences within production. The concept of contradictory locations thus managed to capture at a lower level of class structure analysis at least the thin notion of lived experience embodied in the more abstract concept. If we want the concept of class to provide a basis for linking material interests and lived experiences, then this particular strategy of analysis provides at least some foundations for this endeavor.

Finally, the idea of contradictory locations introduced into class analysis a desirable kind of explanatory indeterminacy. One of the purposes of trying to develop a more refined class structural concept was to facilitate analyses of the relationship between class structure and class formation, in which class formations were not seen as simply derivative of class structures. What was needed, then, was a class structural concept which systematically allowed for other causal factors to play a role in the translation of class structures into class formations. The concept of contradictory locations helps to open up this theoretical space. Since many locations in the class structure have dual (and even contradictory) class logics, this implies that their translation into class formations will be contingent upon social processes which mobilize action around one or another of these poles. This gives a theoretically specific, rather than just an ad hoc, role for political and ideological determinants of class formation.

Nevertheless, in spite of these strengths, the concept of contradictory locations quickly ran into difficulties. I will briefly mention only three of these here:

1. *Domination and exploitation* While in the rhetoric of the concept of contradictory locations, exploitation is treated as the basic interest-generating mechanism within class structures, nevertheless it does not actually enter into the specification of the class map in a very systematic manner. In practice the central novel categories of the analysis—managers and semiautonomous employees as contradictory locations within class relations—are both defined exclusively in terms of *domination* relations, not exploitation as such. This is not to deny that domination relations are an essential aspect of class structures in the Marxist tradition. But the analysis of domination should be systematically linked to exploitation, whereas in the development of the concept of contradictory class locations domination had effectively displaced exploitation.

2. *The state* The concept did not offer a satisfactory way of dealing with the problem of the state in the analysis of capitalist class structures. This had two practical implications. First, the criteria used to define managers and semiautonomous employees within the capital-labor relation were simply applied to state employment with no modification or justification. Given that classes are supposed to be defined within distinctive types of social relations of production, it was at best a weakness of the framework that state employment was simply amalgamated to capitalist relations. Second, the lack of systematic elaboration of the problem of classes within the state also meant that the framework was unable to define the specificity of classes in post-capitalist, “state socialist” societies. Given that the concept of contradictory locations was meant to provide a general strategy for studying class structures in different kinds of societies, some way of dealing with the problem of class in such societies was needed.

3. *Operationalizations* At a practical level, it was exceptionally difficult to operationalize for empirical research one of the contradictory locations that figured in the general conceptual framework: the category “semiautonomous employees”. Autonomy within the labor process proved to be an extremely elusive concept; all attempts at operationalizing it had a suspiciously gradational (rather than relational) quality to them, and none of these attempts seemed reliable. Of course, operational difficulties need not invalidate an abstract concept, but they do tend to generate skepticism about the adequacy of the conceptualizations. At a minimum they undermine the usefulness of the conceptualization for the concrete investigation of class structure which was, after all, one of the central reasons for developing the new concepts in the first place.

3.2 *The Second Solution: Multiple Exploitations*

Given these conceptual problems, and a deepening sense that I could not effectively pursue my empirical research without resolving them, I attempted in various ways to elaborate an alternative general strategy. The steps in this initial rethinking the concept of class structure have been discussed thoroughly elsewhere, so I will not go into the details here.⁴⁹

The basic idea of the new solution has been discussed a variety of times earlier in this book: different “modes of production” are based on

49. See *Classes*, ch. 3.

distinctive mechanisms of exploitation which can be differentiated on the basis of the kind of productive asset the unequal ownership (or control) of which enables the exploiting class to appropriate part of the socially produced surplus. Building on the work of Roemer, I distinguished four types of assets, the unequal ownership or control of which constituted the basis of distinct forms of exploitation: labor power assets (feudal exploitation), capital assets (capitalist exploitation), organization assets (statist exploitation), and skill or credential assets (socialist exploitation).⁵⁰ While pure modes of production can be identified with single forms of exploitation, actual societies always consist of different forms of combination of the different mechanisms of exploitation. This opens up the possibility that certain locations in the class structure are simultaneously exploited through one mechanism of exploitation but exploiters through another mechanism. Such positions, I argued, constitute the "middle class" of a given society. In capitalism the key instances of such locations are managers (who are capitalistically exploited but organization exploiters) and experts (who are capitalistically exploited but skill/credential exploiters).⁵¹

At the time I formalized this second strategy for solving the puzzle of the middle class, I felt that it had a number of theoretical advantages over the earlier concept of contradictory locations within class relations.

First, unlike in the earlier concept, exploitation-based interests occupy center stage. Claims about different mechanisms of exploitation are systematically deployed to define locations within a class structural matrix. While it was still the case that I never attempted to directly operationalize exploitation as such—the class map is built around relations to exploitation-generating *assets* rather than exploitation *per se*—nevertheless, exploitation was the organizing principle for the overall class structural analysis.

Second, the new formulation has a much stronger connection to the general Marxist theory of history, historical materialism, than did the earlier framework. The structural typology on which the class structure map was based had a clear standing within a general theory of the historical trajectory of social forms. The "sequence" feudalism–capitalism–statism–socialism could be characterized as a *logical* sequence of successive eliminations (or at least marginalization) of

50. For specific definitions of each of these forms of exploitation, see this volume, pp. 14–22.

51. Note that in the new framework, managers are not simultaneously in the bourgeois class and the working class, as in the original conceptual solution; rather, they are simultaneously in an organization-asset exploiting class and in the working class. They are not part of the bourgeoisie at all.

specific forms of exploitation.⁵² This conceptual typology also gave the problem of the middle class a distinctive historical cast: the middle class of a society dominated by one mode of production was the principal contender for being the dominant class in the subsequent mode of production. The emergent bourgeoisie was the pivotal middle class of feudalism and the managerial-bureaucratic "class" is the central middle class of capitalism.

Third, it seemed that this new formulation also coped with the problem of the state more effectively than the original contradictory locations approach. At least it became possible to identify a specific form of exploitation (organization exploitation) and associated class relations with what is sometimes called a "statist mode of production."

Fourth, I initially thought that the shift from a domination-centered to an exploitation-centered concept of class structure avoided the messy operational problems that had been generated by the concept of "semi-autonomy." Rather than trying to situate professionals and experts in the class structure via the slippery concept of their self-direction within work, they were now situated with respect to their capacity to appropriate the surplus due to their monopoly of certain skills, particularly when this monopoly was legally certified through credentials.

Finally, as a kind of fringe benefit from this reconceptualization, the new class concept provided a particularly nuanced empirical map for studying the relationship between class structure and class formation. In the case of capitalist society, by introducing three distinct dimensions of the class structure—dimensions based on capital assets, organization assets and skill assets—the picture of class structure can become quite differentiated. The proliferation of concrete structural "locations" within this map allows for a much more subtle empirical investigation of the ways in which people within these locations become collectively organized into class formations.⁵³

These seemed like substantial theoretical gains, and thus, while I recognized from the start that there were problems with the new

52. This is a logical sequence rather than an historical one, since there is no pre-supposition that actual societies must pass through these forms in a rigid, linear fashion. "Stages" can be skipped, and, perhaps, the actual order could be altered. If, for example, capitalism is restored in certain state socialist societies, one might interpret this as a reversal of two elements of the logical sequence.

53. Once it is no longer assumed that there is a one-to-one relationship between class structure and class formation—that is, that class structures impose limits on class formations but do not determine unique outcomes—then there is a considerable empirical pay-off for having a highly disaggregated picture of the class structure itself, since this allows for a more fine-grained description of the different ways in which these differentiated structural positions are actually formed into collectively organized coalitions.

concept, I enthusiastically reoriented my empirical work around it.⁵⁴ It now seems to me that these problems are more significant than I originally realized. In particular, I would stress the following issues, some of which have been brought up in certain of the essays in this book:

1. *Skill exploitation* As I already indicated in my discussion of skill exploitation in Chapter 5 of this volume, there is a basic conceptual problem in treating surplus appropriation rooted in the ownership of skills or credentials as "exploitation" which does not exist for capitalist or feudal exploitation. An employee in a capitalist firm who has a high level of scarce skills (that is, skills which are scarce relative to their demand on the market), whether or not that scarcity is institutionalized through credentials, performs labor, and thus contributes to the social surplus.⁵⁵ When such an employee appropriates part of the social surplus through wages that are above the costs of reproducing labor power, the most natural way of describing the outcome is that this person has been able to appropriate part of the surplus which he or she produced. That is, instead of saying that this employee is an exploiter of unskilled labor power as is posited in the skill-exploitation concept, it would make more sense to say that they are simply *less* exploited by capitalists.

Of course, it could happen that certain credential holders are able to appropriate so much surplus that they become, in fact, net exploiters: they could retain all of the surplus which they produce and appropriate surplus from others. The problem is that since this appropriation remains entirely contingent upon the actual performance of labor by the credential holder, there is no simple way of distinguishing those credential holders who are real exploiters from those who are simply "privileged" by virtue of being less exploited than other employees.

This problem with skill exploitation is not simply the result of the fact that the "level" of skills varies more or less continuously (although this gradational quality to the distribution of the asset in question certainly adds to the problem). Imagine a world in which capital assets were normally distributed, with many employees owning nontrivial amounts of capital. While this would certainly affect the overall shape of the class

54. In *Classes* I wrote a section called "Once again, Unresolved Problems" in an effort to try to clarify the problematic aspects of the multiple-exploitations approach. At the time I treated these problems as unfinished tasks.

55. I am ignoring the problem of "unproductive" labor within the framework of the labor theory of value in this discussion, because it is not relevant to the analytical points being made. Even if one accepts the labor theory of value and the accompanying concept of unproductive labor, the issues raised here would still apply for credentialed *productive* labor.

structure, it would not pose the conceptual difficulties of skill assets since the income derived from the sheer ownership of capital inherently constitutes an exploitative transfer, that is, it involves the appropriation of surplus produced by others.⁵⁶ In this imaginary world, since many capital owners also perform labor and therefore contribute to the surplus as well, it may be difficult in some cases to ascertain whether or not a given capital owner is a *net* exploiter. It could happen, for example, that in some situations an owner of capital produces more surplus as a laborer than she or he appropriates as a capitalist. Nevertheless, even in such unusual and ambiguous situations, the capitalist in question is still unambiguously a *capitalist* exploiter by virtue of the transfers linked to capital ownership. It would therefore make sense to describe such a person as a capitalist exploiter by virtue of owning capital, and capitalistically exploited by virtue of selling labor power. In contrast, in the case of skill exploitation, one cannot distinguish the mechanism through which the individual appropriates their own surplus and the surplus of others.

Another way of stating this problem with skill exploitation is that the idea of credential or skill-based classes is less relational than the idea of capital-based classes. Knowing that a person owns capital intrinsically sets that person into a social relation with workers. That is, their practices as an owner of capital are inherently linked relationally to the practices of workers. This is true whether the capitalist in question is an actual employer (in which case the social relation in question is a quite direct linkage between employer and worker) or merely a rentier coupon-clipper owning stocks (in which case the relation between capitalist and worker is mediated through a series of other relations).

In the case of skill owners, there is not necessarily an inherent social relation that binds them to the unskilled in the required way. The possession of a skill or credential may help to constitute a distinctive kind of social relation with employers, reflected in the description that skill holders are "less exploited" than the unskilled, but this does not necessarily imply a social relation built around antagonistic material interests with the unskilled themselves. Such antagonisms *may* exist, of

56. This is not a completely watertight specification of exploitation, since it is possible to define certain specific conditions in which the appropriation of surplus via the ownership of capital might not be properly considered exploitation. Thus, for example, if workers' pensions are invested in shares in corporations, and if workers actually had ownership rights to those shares once they retired—suppose they could sell them and keep the "capital gains"—one might want to treat the flow of income to the workers derived from such ownership as a recuperation of past exploitation rather than exploitation in its own right. For present purposes, however, I do not think that such complications need to be introduced.

course, but they are not inherent in the relations that define owners of skills/credentials as such. Thus, credentials are a relatively ambiguous basis for defining a *class* relation, at least if we want the concept of class to be built around relations of exploitation.

2. *Capitalist managers and statism* One of the implications of the multiple exploitations view of the middle class which has aroused the most skepticism concerns the alleged interests of managers within capitalism. If it is correct to claim that managers are simultaneously exploited by capitalists and yet organizational exploiters, then it follows that in principle they should have an objective material interest in the elimination of capitalist exploitation and the creation of a society within which organizational exploitation was the primary basis of class relations.⁵⁷ That is, it was claimed that there was an objective basis for managers to be anticapitalist and prostatist. What is more, this objective interest in statism should increase as one moves up managerial hierarchies, as the control over organizational assets becomes greater.

This characterization of managers flies in the face of most historical evidence. Undaunted, I argued that the obvious support of capitalism by managers in general, and by top managers and executives in particular, reflected the strength of capitalist "hegemony." Hegemony, in these terms is a situation in which one class is able to materially link the interests of other classes to its own. Above all, a hegemonic class attempts to tie the interests of potential rival classes to its interests as a way of neutralizing their latent opposition. In the case of managers this is accomplished through the organization of managerial careers and the

57. In a personal communication, Philippe Van Parijs points out that even if managers were properly described as organization exploiters, it does not necessarily follow that they should empirically be anticapitalist. He writes: "Roemer's exploitation criterion explicitly abstracts from the incentive effects of various types of production relations. Managers as a class may be capitalistically exploited (because of a below-average capital endowment) and yet lose out if capital assets were equally distributed if it turned out that the system would perform less efficiently (even after the transition period). The most powerful explanation of the managers' antisocialist alliance with capitalists, however, is probably that even if the total surplus were not to drop as a result of introducing [socialism], and even if, *as a class*, managers would (or might) then have a stronger hold on that surplus, there is a greater (or even greater) uncertainty as to whether, *as individuals*, their lot will be improved, because the demise of the people who granted them their organizational assets is likely to jeopardize their possession of these assets, and hence their sharing in whatever benefits the managerial class may gain from the change." While I think Van Parijs's comments are well taken, nevertheless since one of the main reasons for producing concrete class structure concepts was to facilitate the analysis of class formation, the staunchness of the opposition of managers, especially high-level corporate managers, to either statist or socialist organizations of production, does undermine the credibility of conceptualizing them as organizational-asset exploiters.

ability of managers to buy their way into the bourgeoisie (through investments, stock ownership, etc.). Such strategies, however, do not obliterate the latent conflicts of interest, but merely contain them within narrow limits. Under conditions of sustained capitalist crisis in which the material basis for this hegemonic integration of management declined, I argued, an anticapitalist statist politics of management could become an historical possibility.

This kind of argument sounds very much like special pleading. While it is not unthinkable that historical circumstances could arise in which managers in general would adopt a statist critique of capitalism, this possibility seems like a weak basis for understanding the essential class character of managers in capitalism itself.

In these terms, the original intuitions of the concept of contradictory class locations seem much sounder. In that framework it was quite natural that managers should have strong tendencies towards a pro-capitalist ideological orientation, and that these tendencies should increase as one moved toward the top of managerial hierarchies. Managers were theorized as simultaneously in the capitalist class and the working class, the balance between these two poles shifting towards the former as one moved up the hierarchy. Within this conceptual field, top managers and executives, therefore, would be expected to be resolutely procapitalist because they are fundamentally part of the bourgeoisie with only minor contradictory elements in their class location.

3. *Organizational assets and the state* One of the appeals of the multiple exploitation approach was that it provided a more satisfactory way of incorporating state employment within a class structural analysis. In a "state mode of production," the state was seen as the site of the concentrated control over organization assets. The material basis of exploitation in a statist society, therefore, was conceived as the monopoly over organizational assets by the state bureaucratic class.

Whatever one thinks about this as a characterization of class and exploitation in state socialist societies, it does not in the end solve the problems of the analysis of state employment within capitalism generated by the concept of contradictory locations. As mentioned above, the original concept of contradictory locations essentially fused class locations in the state and private sectors. Above all, it treated "domination" (or authority) as a determinant of class location irrespective of the institutional site of that domination. The concept of organizational asset exploitation is guilty of precisely the same problem. In the map of class locations in capitalism, no account whatsoever is made of the institutional site of the organizational assets controlled by managers. Manager/bureaucrats in the state and in capitalist corporations are

treated as situated in identical ways within the class structure because they bear a similar relation to their class-defining asset, organizational resources.

4. *Operationalizations* One of the reasons for shifting away from the concept of contradictory locations was the enduring problems of operationalizing the concept of "semi-autonomy." In the end, however, this problem has simply been displaced on to the categories of skills and credentials, which are, if anything, more difficult to operationalize in a consistent and theoretically meaningful way. There are two basic problems. First, as is often noted, it is very difficult to elaborate unambiguous criteria for the "level" of skill associated with different jobs. Should this be measured by the training time necessary to competently perform the job? By the cognitive complexity of the job? By the level of formal credentials required for the job?

Second, even if we solve the first problem, this would merely give us criteria for differentiating labor power in terms of the amount of skill embodied in it; it would not help us in specifying the actual productive *asset* capable of generating exploitation. Skills become the basis for exploitation only when they are monopolized sufficiently to allow the skill owner to appropriate surplus. (And even then, as pointed out above, much skill-based surplus appropriation should not be regarded as exploitation.) Without clear criteria for distinguishing the relevant levels of skill assets, it is quite ambiguous how these levels could be translated into class categories. Skill levels vary in a more or less continuous manner, and thus in the absence of a social relation linked to these assets, this introduces an inherent arbitrariness in using skill assets as such as a basis of defining class "locations."

It might seem that this operational problem in the use of skills as a basis of a dimension of the class structure would be reduced, or even eliminated, if we restrict the concept of skill assets to formally *credentialed* assets. Credentials certainly are more dichotomous than skills and they have more the character of a property right. And credentials also have a clear relational quality to them, since the institutions of credentialing have the effect of systematically excluding people from certain labor markets. Credentials thus do constitute the basis of a relation between the credentialed and uncredentialed.

Nevertheless, there are two serious problems with the use of credentials as the operational criterion for skill-based class relations. First, there are so many different kinds of credentials, and credentialing systems vary so significantly across countries, that the problem of arbitrariness in operationalization is not really solved by replacing skills with credentials. At the operational level, there is no clear criterion available

to distinguish credentials that are constitutive of a class division from those which are not. Second, even if we could consistently compare credentials across labor markets and across countries, the basic problem of distinguishing the appropriation of one's own surplus from exploitation would remain. Credentials thus may be a useful way of defining certain kinds of labor market *privileges* (the privilege of being less exploited), but they do not solve the operational problems with skill exploitation in general.

Taken individually, responses to each of these problems are possible. Taken together, they seriously challenge the conceptual coherence of the proposal to analyze the class structure of capitalist societies as a multi-dimensional matrix rooted in capitalist, organizational, and skill exploitation.

4 The Weberian Temptation

Given these difficulties with the concepts of class structure built around contradictory class locations and around multiple exploitations, there are several broad choices about how to proceed. First, we could retain the abstract, simple polarized concept of class structure but abandon the project of trying to develop a repertoire of more concrete, micro-level Marxist class concepts derived from it. We could decide, for example, that the Marxist concept of class structure is analytically powerful for understanding the overall macro-dynamics of capitalist societies in general, but that we cannot systematically derive from this abstract concept a concrete concept of class structure capable of explaining variations in such things as state policies or individual consciousness.⁵⁸ Abandoning the goal of producing a micro-level, concrete concept of class structure, then, would open the door to a more eclectic choice of concepts for such micro-level problems. One could, for example, adopt

58. This position would be close to that argued for in Uwe Becker's essay in this book (see Chapter 4 in this volume). He argues that "the structural antagonism between labor and capital" is perhaps the most systematic and universal source of cleavage and struggle in capitalist societies, and thus clearly deserves to be given explanatory *importance* (although not, in his judgment, *primacy*) in the analysis of the universal dynamics of capitalism. But he rejects the claim that class *locations* have any particular explanatory force, or that variations in capitalist class structures have necessarily any particular theoretical importance in explaining variations in the *histories* of capitalist societies (as opposed to the universal, abstract dynamic tendencies of capitalism in general). This is equivalent to arguing for the importance of the abstract concept of class structure while rejecting the usefulness of corresponding concrete, micro-level class structure concepts.

Weberian class concepts for the analysis of variations in individual consciousness while retaining the abstract, polarized Marxist concept for understanding the structural dynamics of capitalism.

This response to the dilemmas of producing a satisfactory concrete, micro concept of class structure, might, in the end, be the best one can do; but it threatens to undermine the overall explanatory aspirations of Marxist theory. Even though I am critical of the attempt by methodological individualists to reduce all macro phenomena to micro explanations, nevertheless it seems to me that the explanatory force of the abstract, macro-level Marxist concept of class would be greatly compromised if it was unconnected to corresponding micro-level concepts, concepts that are closely tied to the lives and conditions of individuals. And it also seems to me that the explanatory potential of Marxist theory is undermined if its core concepts, in particular class, are only useful for understanding the long-term, epochal dynamics of social change, but not the variations across capitalist societies. If Marxist class analysis is to be theoretically powerful and politically useful, then it seems necessary to continue the attempt at forging concepts at the concrete, micro-level of analysis that are consistent with the more abstract concepts.

A second possible response to the conceptual problems we have been discussing is to retain both the abstract class structure concept and the concrete derivations from that concept, and decide simply to live with a certain level of conceptual incoherence. After all, all conceptual frameworks (in sociology at least) if pressed too hard reveal inconsistencies and weaknesses, and Marxist theories of class are no exception. If one wants to do empirical work on class, then at some point one has to suspend the preoccupation with the reconstruction of foundational concepts and get on with the business of studying the world, and this generally requires a tolerance for a certain degree of conceptual ambiguity and inconsistency. This does not mean abandoning altogether the project of eliminating such inconsistencies; one can still try to forge new conceptual solutions, either by way of a synthesis of previous ideas or through the introduction of new conceptual elements. But it does mean adopting a certain pragmatic attitude toward research and not waiting until all conceptual problems are resolved. This is essentially the response I have adopted to these enduring conceptual problems in my empirical projects.

There is, however, a third possible response. One can decide that these conceptual issues have been so persistent and apparently intractable that they probably reflect deeper problems in the larger theoretical framework of which they are a part. Rather than continue struggling with the problem of constructing an adequate Marxist concept of the

middle class in capitalist societies, therefore, these problems might call into question the general Marxist theory of class itself. Before turning to a discussion of a range of new amendments to my previous conceptualizations in section 5, therefore, it is worth considering this more drastic remedy to the problems we have encountered, namely abandoning Marxist class analysis altogether.

Many of the conceptual difficulties bound up with the problem of the middle class within a Marxist framework appear to vanish within the Weberian tradition of class analysis. While of course there are still plenty of problems of operationalization within Weberian class structure analysis—the concepts of “market situation” and “work situation” which are used by Weberians such as John Goldthorpe both pose significant problems of operationalization and measurement—nevertheless, the category “middle class” does not pose the same kind of conceptual difficulties for Weberians that it does for Marxists.⁵⁹

Why is this so? Weberians have an easier time than Marxists in forming a concept of the middle class because in the Weberian tradition the concept of class structure is relieved of three theoretical burdens which must be contended with in one way or another within a Marxist framework:

1. *Class, mode of production, and the theory of history* For Weberians, the concept of class structure does not have to be linked to an abstract concept of “mode of production.” Classes within the Weberian tradition are viewed as categories of stratification specific to market societies, and thus there is no need to develop a general schema of class analysis that applies across different kinds of economic systems. And further, as a corollary of this, the concept does not have to figure in any general theory of history for Weberians as it generally does for Marxists. Even when, as often occurs today, Marxists reject the general Marxist theory of history—historical materialism—they nevertheless generally remain committed to a class-based *structural typology* of historical variations. Thus, even without the strong claims of historical materialism, the Marxist concept of class is under the theoretical constraint functioning within a typology of historical forms of variation

59. John Goldthorpe, in *Social Mobility in Modern Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980, pp. 39–42), for example, makes the following distinctions in developing his class structure concept: “high grade” versus “low grade” professionals; “higher-grade technicians” versus “lower-grade technicians”; managers in large versus small establishments; nonroutine versus routine nonmanual employees in administration and commerce. In each case there are difficult problems in defining nonarbitrary criteria for operationalizing these distinctions. Nevertheless, the conceptual status of these distinctions poses no difficulties within the overall class structure concept.

of class structures. The absence of this constraint for Weberians means that the specific problem of conceptualizing classes in capitalist society does not have to meet any criteria of coherence with the analysis of class structures of precapitalist or postcapitalist societies.

2. *Exploitation and antagonistic classes* While the Weberian concept of class is relational (it is grounded in the problem of economic exchange relations), it is not based on an abstract model of polarized relations. In principle, then, Weberians can admit an indefinite number of additional classes besides workers and capitalists without having to postulate any underlying conflicts of material interest. All that is necessary is that a given class be characterized by a distinctive work situation and market situation, or, more broadly, by distinctive economically conditioned "life-changes" (to use a favorite Weberian expression). Marxists, on the other hand, have to produce concepts of specific class locations that are congruent with the underlying antagonistic logic of class relations based in exploitation. This does not mean that every distinction among class locations in a concrete, micro-level concept has to itself be polarized to some other distinction; but it has to somehow be systematically embedded in an analysis of such polarized, exploitative class relations.

3. *Ambitiousness of the theoretical ordering of concepts* The Weberian concept of class, at least as it has been elaborated by contemporary neo-Weberians, does not attempt to specify and defend a systematic hierarchy of conceptual elements. There is no attempt, for example, to articulate a conceptual ordering of the problems of material interests, lived experiences, and capacities for collective action in the specification of class structures. This means that Weberians can deploy a variety of different kinds of criteria for defining aspects of class structures in a rather ad hoc manner without embarrassment. Weberians typically argue that class positions are defined by common work situations and market situations, but there is no attempt to construct a logical decomposition of these two concepts or to order them in a systematic way. Weberians are nearly always silent, for example, on the question of whether two jobs which share a common market situation but different work situations constitute divisions *within* a single class or *distinct* classes. The lower level of aspiration of conceptual and theoretical integration within the Weberian tradition compared to the Marxist tradition, therefore, facilitates taking a rather pragmatic, empirical attitude towards the introduction of specific distinctions in a class structure analysis without worrying too much about the implications for a larger theoretical structure.⁶⁰

The absence of these three theoretical constraints makes it much easier to locate categories like professionals, technical employees, and managers in the class structure. It is sufficient, for example, to demonstrate that the marketable skills of these categories gives them distinctive economic advantages in the labor market. No conceptual difficulty is posed by the fact that ownership of skill assets does not correspond to any distinctive polarized social relation between skill owners and non-owners. All that is necessary is that skills (or, in principle, any other attribute) constitutes the basis for distinctively enhanced economic opportunities within exchange relations.

In a similar fashion, Goldthorpe argues that certain properties of work situations are the basis for the class structural differentiation of what he terms the "service class" from the working class.⁶¹ He argues that such characteristics as exercising managerial authority or having a great deal of discretion, autonomy, and responsibility on the job means that the employer-employee relation must involve high levels of *trust*. This trust element, in turn, means that instead of a simple employment contract, the employment relation is constructed as a "service relation," the critical element of which is the centrality of *prospective rewards* rather than simply current remuneration. Primarily because these elements of the work situation systematically enhance economic opportunities (in the form of stable careers), they constitute the basis of a distinctive class, the "service class."⁶²

60. Val Burris, in a personal communication, suggests that the relatively low level of aspiration for theoretical integration of the distinct elements of class theory in the Weberian tradition is due to certain general properties of Weberian theory: "(1) as a theory of social *action*, the Weberian theory is absolved of having to specify structural forms of causation; (2) because Weberian theory is unabashedly *multicausal* and rejects the primacy of class relations, it is not forced to pack so much into its concept of class; (3) because Weberian theory focuses on *exchange* relations, it deals with phenomena that are closer to the empirical level of lived relations as compared with the production relations that Marxists must reconstruct theoretically." For a further discussion of these themes, see Val Burris, "The Neo-Marxist Synthesis of Marx and Weber on Class," in *The Marx-Weber Debate*, edited by Norbert Wiley (London: Sage Publications, 1987), pp. 67-90.

61. Goldthorpe, "On the Service Class", *op. cit.* pp. 167-70.

62. There are places where Goldthorpe seems to suggest that it is the possession of power and responsibility as such, rather than the way in which such power-holding constitutes the basis for a distinct kind of employment relation, that provides the rationale for treating the service class as a distinct class (for example, Goldthorpe, *Social Mobility in Modern Britain*, pp. 39-40), but generally he seems to stress the ways in which work situations generate distinctive kinds of market situations (see especially "On the Service Class", pp. 170-71). Other writers (for instance, Lockwood, *The Blackcoated Worker*; Giddens, *The Class Structure of the Advanced Societies*) using a similar set of concepts suggest in various places that the workplace *experiences* of actors under these different work situations also differ systematically and constitute part of the justification for treating these differences in work situations as the basis for class structural differences.

The service class, defined in this way, is constituted around a distinctive kind of employment relation with superordinate employers (capitalists, corporate boards, the state). Within this definition, there is nothing inherently antagonistic about this relation, and certainly there is no implied *inherent* antagonism between the service class and non-service class employees.⁶³ Of course, conflicts, perhaps even explosive conflicts, may empirically occur among these classes, but the concept of class itself is based simply on a notion of distinctive *differences* in material interests and conditions among classes, not inherent cleavages.

Given the fact that the middle class is so much easier to contend with in a Weberian framework, the question clearly arises: Why not simply jump ship and adopt the Weberian approach? Frank Parkin, for one, has argued that an impulse in this direction is implicit in the efforts of neo-Marxists to grapple seriously with problems of class analysis:

The fact that these normally alien concepts of authority relations, life-chances, and market rewards have now been comfortably absorbed by contemporary Marxist theory is a handsome, if unacknowledged, tribute to the virtues of bourgeois sociology. Inside every neo-Marxist there seems to be a Weberian struggling to get out.⁶⁴

Once you adopt a fairly differentiated Marxist class concept of the sort I have advocated, then in practice there is not actually all that much difference in the nature of the empirical class structure “variables” that are generated in neo-Marxist and neo-Weberian frameworks: after all, both acknowledge in one way or another that differences in property, skills/credentials/autonomy and authority are bases for differentiating locations in the class structure. If you compare Goldthorpe’s seven-category class structure schema (or the more elaborate eleven-category schema that contains a range of subclass divisions) with my analysis of class structure in terms of multiple-exploitation mechanisms, for example, you will find that in practical empirical terms the contrast is not great.⁶⁵ Therefore, given that there is not all that much empirical difference between many neo-Marxist and neo-Weberian class maps, and given that the conceptual problems are greater within Marxist

63. Indeed, there is no inherent social relation of any sort between the service class as a general category and nonservice class employees. Sometimes there exists an authority relation linking these two, but not invariably. The relationship between the service class and the working class is basically understood via the distinctive differences in their respective relations to their employers rather than a relation which directly binds them to each other.

64. Frank Parkin, *Marxism and Class Theory: A Bourgeois Critique* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), p. 25.

theory, why not, then, just opt for the Weberian approach?

If the *only* reasons for adopting a Marxist approach to the concept of class structure was the practical usefulness of the categories derived from the conceptual framework for micro-level empirical analyses of class, then there would be little reason to choose it over a range of neo-Weberian alternatives. The reason for adopting a Marxist strategy, then, has to rest on a commitment to the theoretical constraints that Marxist theory imposes on class analysis. More specifically, unless one sees the value of embedding the concept of class structure in an abstract model of modes of production in which classes are fundamentally polarized around processes of exploitation, then there would be no reason to accept the difficulties this abstract framework generates for the concrete analysis of classes.

My personal commitment to these constraints is grounded in three broad considerations: one political or normative, one theoretical and one methodological.

First, *politically*, the Marxist tradition broadly understood continues to provide, in my judgment, the most comprehensive and compelling theoretical framework within which to understand the possibilities for and obstacles to emancipatory social change. While a range of rival frameworks for radical social theory have emerged in recent years, none of these has yet achieved the level of analytical power for understanding

65. For an extended discussion of the differences between these two schemas, see Gordon Marshall, Howard Newby, David Rose, and Carolyn Vogler, *Classes in Modern Britain* (London: Hutchinson, 1988). One comment on this book is in order. It was written by members of the British research group in the Comparative Project of Class Structure and Class Consciousness. The heart of the book is an attempt at empirically comparing various properties of my class concepts and that of Goldthorpe. While there is a great deal that is of interest in this book, it suffers from a relative inattention to the difference between problems in the *operational choices* made by different theorists, and disagreements in the conceptual categories themselves. Thus, for example, they criticize my conceptual map of classes on the grounds that I have allocated certain people—such as a skilled machinist with a subordinate apprentice—into “managerial” class locations who should be properly classified as workers (as they are in Goldthorpe’s framework). This may be a valid criticism, but it is simply a criticism of an operational criterion adopted in my research, not of the conceptual issues differentiating the two approaches. In terms of managerial authority, Goldthorpe and I share virtually the same conceptual criterion: in both cases the issue is real (not merely nominal) participation in the making of significant organizational policy decisions (the exercise of authority in Goldthorpe’s case; the control over organization assets in my case). In my empirical work, because of my specific analytical objectives, I was particularly concerned with avoiding incorrectly describing a manager as a worker, and thus I deliberately adopted a “generous” set of operational criteria for defining managerial locations. This may have been a bad operational decision, but it does not reflect conceptual differences between my approach and Goldthorpe’s. If one wants to compare two conceptual frameworks empirically, it is essential that the comparison rigorously distinguish such operational problems from the conceptual problems at issue.

large-scale processes of social change as that offered by the Marxist tradition.⁶⁶

Second, *theoretically*, if one wants the concept of class structure simultaneously to figure centrally in analyses of both epochal social change and systematically structured social conflict within given types of society, then something very much like these conceptual constraints is necessary. To borrow a metaphor from rational choice theory, the ambition of Marxist theory is to link systematically an account of conflict within a given type of game to an account of the fundamental shifts from one kind of game to another. If class structure is to figure in such a theory, then it will need to be subjected to the kinds of conceptual constraints indicated above.

Finally, *methodologically*, I believe it is generally better to try to develop and reconstruct specific concepts within a clearly specified set of constraints than to do so in the absence of rigorously elaborated constraints. The Weberian tradition is generally characterized by quite ad hoc and diffuse conceptual specifications. While these may be grounded in certain abstract understandings of human action, they are not systematically derived from a general theory of society and its development. The choice between Marxist and Weberian concepts of class, therefore, is not strictly speaking a choice between concepts with equal theoretical standing. As Charles Camic has noted, the choice between Marxist and Weberian approaches is not really between two theories of society, but between a theory and nontheory.⁶⁷

The implication of this methodological point about the status of class concepts within the Marxist and Weberian traditions is that the choice between these concepts cannot be reduced to a simple choice between their "explanatory power" in any given empirical setting. As a general metatheoretical proposition one would expect that in any given particular empirical context, it is easier to construct empirical categories that are highly correlated with what one is trying to explain when the

66. To avoid misunderstanding, two points of clarification are needed to this statement. First, the claim is about the Marxist *tradition*, defined in an ecumenical fashion, not about any particular theoretical position within that tradition. Second, the claim is not that this tradition provides the most fruitful framework for analyzing every question of relevance to radical projects of social change, but simply that it provides the best overall framework for the general problem of understanding the obstacles to and opportunities for emancipatory transformation. Thus, for example, the Marxist tradition probably does not—and perhaps can not—provide adequate tools for understanding many of the important issues bound up with gender oppression. As a result, for the study of gender some kind of linkage between Marxism and feminism is essential. Nevertheless, in my judgment Marxism remains the most comprehensive and productive general framework for developing macro-structural theory of large-scale emancipatory possibilities.

67. Personal communication.

theoretical constraints on such constructions are relatively weak than when they are strong. This is precisely what gives "empiricism" as a strategy of concept formation such appeal: the researcher is relatively free to modify definitions and to juggle concepts (the categories of observation and analysis) in response to the specific exigencies of any given empirical analysis without worrying about violating any theoretical constraints on concepts. In these terms, the Weberian tradition of class analysis is relatively more "empiricist" than the Marxist tradition.⁶⁸ The problem, of course, is that at the end of the day it may be much less clear what one has really *learned* cumulatively from such empiricist exercises beyond the predictions and observations of the specific analysis, since the categories deployed are not orchestrated within an elaborated, more abstract framework. If we want to gain knowledge not simply *about* a particular empirical problem, but *from* that problem, it is crucial that the concepts used in the analysis be as integrated into a general conceptual framework as possible.

These comments should not be interpreted as a devious way of getting a Marxist approach to class analysis "off the hook" of having to demonstrate its empirical power. If indeed it is the case that Weberian categories are consistently better predictors of micro-level empirical phenomena—for example, individual class consciousness, or variations in individual economic welfare, or propensities to participate in specific patterns of class formation—then this would be a challenge for a Marxist approach.⁶⁹ It would then be incumbent upon a defender of class analysis within a Marxist framework to try to explain these Weberian-generated results within the theoretical constraints of Marxism. One

68. I am treating empiricism in this context as a variable tendency: different analyses can be more or less empiricist—that is, operating under more or less strictly imposed theoretical constraints. The opposite pole of empiricism is thus theoreticism. I should also note that my comments here do not constitute a generalized critique of empiricism: there are contexts in which relatively empiricist analyses may be productive. In general in the practice of research I think it is desirable to cycle back and forth between relatively empiricist and relatively theoreticist modes of analysis.

69. I do *not* think that the case for the empirical superiority of Weberian categories for micro-level analysis has been proven. For reasons cited in footnote 62 above, in the one case where there has been a sustained, systematic empirical comparison of my own class structure concepts with that of a prominent neo-Weberian, John Goldthorpe, there are sufficient methodological problems in the empirical strategy that it is hard to draw any definitive conclusions. In any case, even in that comparison, the differences in the two approaches were not very striking empirically. Other less extensive cases of empirical comparisons between neo-Marxist and neo-Weberian class concepts have also not found dramatic differences in the brute "explanatory power." See, for example, W. Johnston and M. Ornstein, "Social Class and Political Ideology in Canada," *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology*, vol. 22, (no. 3), pp. 369–95; David Livingstone, "What Class? What Consciousness?" (unpublished manuscript, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, 1989).

hypothetical possibility, for example, might be something like the following:

Let us introduce a distinction between the process of class formation under conditions of stable social reproduction in democratic capitalism and under conditions of systemic capitalist crisis. Under the first of these conditions, categories of economic actors become collectively organized on the basis of divisions of *immediate* material interests—divisions defined entirely within the “rules of the game” of capitalism; under the second set of conditions, social categories have a much higher probability of becoming organized around “fundamental interests,” interests defined in terms of what game is to be played. Now, the kinds of distinctions in market situations embodied in Weberian class concepts do define divisions within immediate interests among sellers of labor power. Under conditions of stable reproduction, then, these are likely to become more salient as bases of social differentiation and collective organization. In short: Weberian class categories will have greater micro-level explanatory power under conditions of stable reproduction than under conditions of generalized economic crisis.

Other theoretical strategies for incorporating Weberian empirical results within a Marxist theoretical framework could also be entertained: these empirical findings could, perhaps, be treated as generated by the particular institutional organization of bargaining arrangements (as in the literature on corporatism), or as effects of the particular strategies of political parties (as in Przeworski’s analyses of social democracy). In each of these possible lines of theoretical argument, the empirical observations generated within Weberian class analysis would be taken seriously rather than simply dismissed out of hand. The task of Marxist class analysis, then, would be to explain the “conditions of possibility” of the Weberian patterns.

A critique of empiricism is thus not equivalent to a critique of empirical research or of empirically grounded knowledge. The point is simply that the task of adjudicating between alternative general approaches to class analysis—alternative “paradigms,” as they are sometimes called—is an arduous one, and cannot be reduced to the simple task of testing predictive power in a concrete empirical setting.

Weberian solutions, therefore, do represent a way of avoiding the conceptual knots generated by trying to conceptualize the middle classes within the Marxist tradition. But these solutions are purchased at the price of lowering the ambitiousness of one’s theoretical aspirations and abandoning the attempt at consistency with the conceptual framework—Marxism broadly conceived—that remains the most coherent general approach to radical, emancipatory social theory. Sticking with that framework, however, creates headaches; since the conceptual knots won’t disappear and cannot be indefinitely avoided by evasion, new

efforts at untying them must be attempted. In what follows I will present some of the elements which may facilitate such an attempt.

5 New Complexities

Recall the basic task at hand: to produce a more differentiated repertoire of Marxist class structure concepts capable of being used effectively at concrete, micro levels of analysis. In this enterprise, the problem of the middle class has loomed large, both because of the conceptual difficulties it poses for attempts at rendering more concrete the abstract, mode of production concept of class and because of its salience in the micro-level processes that affect class formation.

Each of my previous strategies of constructing a comprehensive concept of class structure was built around a specific analytical principle: the notion that a given location in a class structure could be simultaneously in two or more classes (strategy 1) and the notion that a given location could be situated with respect to more than one mechanism of exploitation (strategy 2). In each case I tried to build a differentiated map of the class structure on the basis of a single principle. I cannot at this point offer a third general strategy of this sort which will dissolve the anomalies and difficulties of the previous two. Indeed, it is not obvious that the proper way to proceed is to search for a new, unitary principle for solving the puzzle of the middle class(es).

The structural problem of the middle class, however, is not the only important issue involved in elaborating a concrete, micro-level concept of class structure. In this section I want to explore a number of new complexities that bear not only on the problem of understanding the middle class, but on the problem linking class structures to individual lives in general. In section 6, then, we will return to the problem of the middle class and see how these new complexities may help to clarify its class character.

In the past, all of my work on class structure has treated class structures as sets of relationally defined “locations” filled by individuals, in which a location was basically equivalent to a “job.” The class structure was thus essentially a relational map of the job structure. The underlying premiss of the analysis, as discussed in section 2 above, was that the nature of the material interests of *individuals* could be derived from an account of the social relations of production in which their *jobs* were embedded. The kind of complexity I introduced in order to generate a more differentiated map of class structures, therefore, was entirely preoccupied with the complexities of the relations in which jobs were embedded.

I now want to introduce a different sort of complexity. Without abandoning the centrality of work and production to the specification of class structures, I think the simple linkage of *individuals-in-jobs* to *classes* needs to be modified in several ways. First, some recognition needs to be taken both of the fact that individuals may occupy more than one formal job, and, furthermore, that class-based material interests may not be associated with "jobs" as such. Second, the description of class structure needs to include what I will call "mediated class locations," locations that are derived from various kinds of social networks rather than directly from individual participation in the relations of production. And third, an analysis of class structure must take account of what can be termed the *temporal dimension* of material interests, especially as these are tied to careers. As we shall see in section 6, each of these new complexities can help to understand the problem of the "middle class."

5.1 Multiple Locations

Virtually all discussions of class structure, including my own, assume that individuals occupy one and only one location in the class structure. While I have argued that some locations have a dual class character, I have nevertheless still assumed that individuals occupy unique locations.

There are two contexts in which this description is clearly inadequate. First, and most obviously, many people have more than one job. While in the United States, most people with second jobs are in jobs with the same class character as their "primary" job, this is certainly not the case in all times and places. In contemporary Hungary, for example, the large majority of second jobs are petty bourgeois (self-employed) whereas primary jobs are overwhelmingly employees of the state.⁷⁰

The second context in which individuals can be thought of as occupying multiple locations is, I think, of more general importance for understanding the American class structure. Rather than having two proper jobs, many people are both owners of capitalist property (and accordingly receive some of their income as returns on capitalist investment) and are employees in a job. This situation is most notoriously the case for high level executives in large corporations, whose income comes both from direct salaries as employees of the corporation and from

70. According to Robert Manchin of the Institute of Sociology in Budapest while less than 5 percent of all Hungarians in the labor force are self-employed in their primary job, over 75 percent of all Hungarian households receive some income from self-employment. This is, needless to say, vastly higher than the corresponding figures in the United States.

stockholding in the corporation. But more generally, there is a fairly wide spectrum of people who are employees in jobs with sufficiently high pay that they are able to convert some of their employment earnings into capitalist property through investments and savings. In many cases, of course, such investments are trivial and only marginally shape the material interests of the individual. The United States is certainly far from the fantasy of a "People's Capitalism" in which share ownership is so widespread that the distinction between owners and workers begins to wither away. Nevertheless, for certain segments of the employee population, particularly managers and professionals, the ability to turn surplus income into capital can become a significant part of their class situation. These kinds of situations define a specific kind of complexity in the class structure, since certain people may occupy a different location in the class structure through their jobs and through their investments. Work and property ownership can be uncoupled.⁷¹

5.2 Mediated Class Locations

The second new complexity to the map of class structures concerns the various ways the class interests of people are conditioned by social relations other than their direct relation to the process of production (either through their jobs or their personal ownership of property). I will refer to this dimension of the class structure as "mediated" class locations in contrast to the "direct" class locations embodied in an individual's immediate job and personal ownership of productive assets. The most crucial example of these relations are those embedded in kinship networks and family structures, but in certain contexts the relation to the state can also constitute the basis for a mediated class location.

For certain categories of people in contemporary capitalism, location in the class structure is entirely constituted by mediated relations. This is most clearly the case for children. To say that children in a working class family are "in the working class" is to make a claim about the ways in which their class interests are shaped by their mediated relations (through their families) to the system of production, rather than by their direct location. Mediated class relations also loom large in understanding the class interests of housewives not in the paid labor force, the

71. Under certain circumstances, home ownership may also begin to function like a capitalist investment, if the rapid increase in housing prices gives the owners a substantial equity which they are able to use for investment purposes. Real estate speculation by workers is certainly not unheard of in the contemporary United States and, when it occurs, it should be treated as a specific kind of change in their class location.

unemployed, pensioners and students.⁷² In each of these cases an adequate picture of their class interests cannot be derived simply from examining their direct participation in the relations of production.

A class structure at the concrete level of analysis, then, should be understood as consisting of the totality of direct and mediated class relations. This implies that two class structures with identical patterns of direct class relations but differing mediated relations should be considered structurally different. Consider the following rather extreme contrast for purposes of illustration:

Class Structure I In 66 percent of all households, both husband and wife are employed in working-class jobs and in 33 per cent of households both husband and wife are co-owners of small businesses employing the workers from the other households.

Class Structure II 33 percent of the households are pure working-class households, 33 percent have a working-class husband and a small employer wife and 33 percent have a small employer husband and a working-class wife.

For a strict adherent of the view that class structures are constituted exclusively by the individual's direct relation to the means of production, these two class structures are the same: 66 percent working class, 33 percent small employers. If, however, class structures are defined in terms of the combination of direct and mediated class locations, then the two structures look quite different: in the first structure, two-thirds of the population is fully proletarianized (that is, both their direct and mediated class locations are working class); in the second structure, only one-third of the population is fully proletarianized.⁷³

72. To say that mediated class relations are particularly salient in understanding the class location of full time housewives is not to prejudge the question of whether or not the gender relations between husbands and wives should be considered a form of "class relations." While I do not think that this is a useful way of understanding gender relations within families, even if one adopts this view, it would still be the case that mediated class relations would be salient for housewives. The class locations of a housewife married to a capitalist and a factory worker are not the same, even if their status as a "domestic worker" itself constitutes a gender-based class location. For a more extended discussion of the relevance of the concept of mediated class locations for understanding the class location of "housewives" and married women in the paid labor force, see my essay, "Women in the Class Structure," *Politics and Society* (March, 1989).

73. Examples like this are not entirely fanciful. It is quite conceivable that in a Third World country one could have two communities in which the same proportions of the labor force were engaged in proletarianized wage labor activities and in self-employed subsistence peasant agriculture, but in which these corresponded to entirely different patterns of household proletarianization.

The concept of mediated class relations is particularly relevant for the analysis of class and gender.⁷⁴ More specifically, it provides a way of approaching the problem of the interconnection of gender relations, family structure, and class. In conventional sociological discussions of social classes, as recently reaffirmed in a controversial paper by John Goldthorpe, the family, rather than the individual, is treated as the fundamental "unit" within class structures.⁷⁵ The class location of that family unit, in turn, is generally determined by the class location of the job of the "head of the household"—typically, the "male breadwinner." This has the effect of deriving the class locations of all family members, including both housewives and wives in the paid labor force, from the class locations of husbands.

The basic rationale for this conception of families and class structure involves two interconnected claims. (1) All members of a family share essentially the same material interests, since families constitute units of pooled income and consumption. Thus, even if different family members bring income into the family through different class-based mechanisms, these differences are homogenized via the pooled consumption of the family unit. (2) In the determination of the material interests of the family as a whole, the husband's market capacity has overwhelming importance, not simply because at any single point in time the income derived from that capacity is generally much higher than that derived from the market capacity of the wife, but also because over time the material welfare of the family will be maximized if it gives precedence of the husband's job class over that of the wife. An economically rational family, therefore, will generally act as if its class interests were identical to that of the male breadwinner.⁷⁶

Both of these arguments have been subjected to considerable

74. The problem of the relationship between class structure and gender relations is not, by any means, simply a question of mediated class relations. At least four other theoretical issues are of considerable importance: (1) the role of gender mechanisms in sorting people into class relations; (2) the ways in which gender mechanisms can constitute the basis for systematic *divisions within* classes; (3) the problem of the causal effect of gender relations and gender conflicts on the form and development of class structures (and of class structure and conflict on gender relations); and (4) the conditions under which gender relations as such could be considered a specific type of class relation. Marxism traditionally has a much easier time contending with the first two of these issues than the last two. In any case, in the present context I will only directly address the problem of mediated class relations.

75. John Goldthorpe, "Women and Class Analysis: In Defense of the Conventional View," *Sociology*, vol. 17, no. 4 (1983), pp. 465-88.

76. Whatever criticisms one might want to bring against this view, it is important to note that it is *not* an inherently antifeminist view. One could argue, for example, that it is the institutions of male domination which generate the great disparities in market capacities of men and women and which, in turn, make it rational for men and women within individual families to give precedence to husbands' jobs over wives'.

criticism.⁷⁷ As a result, for a range of reasons which I will not review here, many people have objected to the simple identification of the class location of wives with that of their husbands. And yet, it also seems inappropriate to reduce the class of either husbands or wives in a family simply to their direct job class: should a school teacher married to a factory worker be seen as in the same class location as a fellow teacher married to a corporate manager or a capitalist? If the goal of the elaboration of a micro-level concept of class structure is to understand the impact of class structures on the material interests of individuals within that structure, and on this basis contribute to our understanding of their likely behavior, then some kind of differentiation between these two teachers is necessary.

The concept of mediated class locations provides one way of accomplishing this. The class location of husbands and wives should be treated as a function of both their direct class location and their mediated location. This means that in certain respects they can be viewed as sharing a common class location and in other respects as having—potentially—different class locations. The overall “class interests” of individuals, then, is formed out of some kind of weighted combination of these direct and mediated locations. This opens the door for a new sort of “contradictory location within class relations”: contradictory combinations of direct and mediated locations.

Under different social conditions, the precise way in which direct and mediated class locations are linked in the lives of individuals will vary. For example, one might expect the mediated class location of married women to have greater weight than their direct class location in shaping their overall class interests when wives are particularly dependent economically on their husbands (because of larger gender-based labor market differentials and an absence of significant nonwage income support for women from the state) and when there is a low rate of divorce (and thus a high probability that the economic fate of wives is closely tied to that of their husbands). In contrast, lowered economic dependency and/or high rates of divorce should increase the relative weight of direct class locations on the overall material interests of

77. For critical commentaries on Goldthorpe's views, see A. Heath and N. Brittain, “Women's Jobs Do Make a Difference: A Reply to Goldthorpe,” *Sociology*, vol. 18, no. 4 (1984), pp. 475–90 and M. Stanworth, 1984, “Women and Class Analysis: A Reply to John Goldthorpe,” *Sociology*, vol. 18, no. 4 (1984), pp. 161–9. Goldthorpe responds to these attacks in “Women and Class Analysis: A Reply to the Replies,” *Sociology*, vol. 18, no. 4 (1984), pp. 491–9. For a general assessment of the debate, see my essay, “Women in the Class Structure,” *Politics and Society*, vol. 17, no. 1 (1989).

married women. In each case, however, the full specification of a person's micro-level location within a class structure requires an account of such mediated relations as well as the more conventional direct locations linked to jobs.

5.3 Temporal locations

One common objection to the kind of structural class analysis I have pursued is that it treats locations in an excessively static manner.⁷⁸ Imagine the following extreme case: a large corporation requires that all of its managers spend two years at various jobs on the shop floor doing the ordinary nonmanagerial work of the workers in the corporation. After two years they begin performing their proper managerial tasks. In such a case it would certainly be silly to say that during the initial two years these individuals were in the working class. Their performance of typically working-class tasks was simply part of the career structure of these managerial locations. Or, to state the matter more abstractly, there is a systematic temporal dimension to their class location.

The problem of this temporal dimension of class structures is particularly salient when one treats material interests as the central commonality of class locations. The concept of “interests” is inherently a forward-looking concept: to talk about interests is always to imply something about future states, not simply present configurations. Two individuals in identical working-class jobs in terms of statically defined relational characteristics would have very different material interests if one was certain to be promoted into a managerial position and one was certain to remain for life in a working-class position.⁷⁹

Typically, analyses of the temporal dimension of class structures treat

78. This objection specifically to my approach was first raised by A. Stewart, K. Prandy, and R.M. Blackburn, *Social Stratification and Occupation* (London: Macmillan, 1980, pp. 271–2). They criticize my allocation of people into a working class and a managerial class on the basis of the authority relations of jobs, since a significant number of white collar workers so classified will eventually be promoted to management as a normal part of their careers.

79. Even if one regards lived experience as the critical commonality of class location, the temporal dimension of class remains important. One's subjective experience of the present is conditioned in part by one's anticipations of the future, and thus knowledge of career trajectories will not only affect material interests in the present but also lived experiences. To take a simple example, in certain large law offices it may be the case that in terms of the actual tasks being performed, the work of an experienced paralegal employee and a junior lawyer might not be that different. Nevertheless, they clearly face dramatically different career trajectories, and this will affect their immediate experience of what in other respects are similar duties.

this problem as one of *intragenerational* "mobility."⁸⁰ The suggestion in such a characterization is that individuals "move" from one location to another, and thus the locations are definable independently of the movements. If, however, specific jobs are embedded in *careers*, and certain kinds of careers cross class lines, then it probably does not make sense to treat such movements as mobility at all. The managers in the prior example did not experience "mobility" from the working class into the managerial class; they participated in a managerial career in which they progressed from the early career stage to the mid-career stage in an orderly fashion. They were always in the "managerial class."

This line of discussion suggests that in analyzing the temporal dimension of class structures it is important to distinguish between class careers and mobility between careers. This is a distinction which is often made in sociological discussions of *occupational* careers but has generally been exceedingly difficult to operationalize empirically. This difficulty stems from the fact that many "careers" are not nearly as orderly or determinate as the example of managers cited above. Individuals in specific jobs face a given *probability* of promotion across class lines, but the probability may be far less than certainty. It is therefore often difficult empirically to differentiate a situation in which an individual simply progresses through the stages of a given career from a situation in which a person moves across careers. Or, to put the matter somewhat differently, there may be a certain degree of *temporal indeterminacy* in the class location of people.

The issue of the temporality of class locations applies to mediated class locations as well as direct class locations. In particular, it may be useful to understand the class location of married women as partially determined by what might be called their "shadow class", the class location they would occupy in the case of dissolution of their marriage, either through divorce or widowhood.⁸¹ Since the shadow class for

80. To be somewhat more accurate, this kind of analysis by sociologists usually concerns *intragenerational occupational* mobility rather than *class* mobility as such. The issue under discussion, however, could just as easily apply to occupations: can an occupation be statically defined by a specific cluster of tasks and responsibilities within the technical division of labor or is it necessary, in some cases at least, to include a temporal ordering of tasks in the definition of an "occupation"? Such a temporally ordered occupation is often called a "career."

81. Johanna Brenner (in a personal communication) suggested that the concept of "shadow class" could be usefully deployed for certain categories of small employers and petty bourgeois. Because of the very high levels of bankruptcy in small businesses, many petty bourgeois and small employers may have a working-class "shadow class" and others a professional-employee "shadow class." The "location" of petty bourgeois in the class structure thus has a critical kind of temporal indeterminacy to it which should be important for their role in processes of class formation.

married women is frequently different from their current mediated class, this suggests that there is at least some temporal indeterminacy in the mediated class locations of many women, particularly given the relatively high rates of divorce. A fully elaborated account of class structure would need to take this kind of temporality into consideration.

For present purposes, the central point of all of this is that the class location of certain *jobs* cannot adequately be determined simply by looking at the relational properties of the job itself at one point in time. This is a particularly salient issue in establishing the class character of many professionals and credentialed experts, since it is frequently the case that the careers of such individuals normally take them on a trajectory of increasing responsibility and authority and increasing opportunity for actual capitalist property ownership (as discussed in 5.1 above).

It is, of course, an empirical question how much these temporal issues actually affect the overall character of the class structure in any given society. Most jobs are not part of well-ordered careers, and it seems likely that most careers are largely contained within a given class location. Nevertheless, for certain specific kinds of occupations, the temporal dimension of class may be essential for understanding their location in the class structure.

6 Back to the Middle Class

With these new conceptual elements in hand we can return to the problem of the "middle class." I will focus on the three categories that have provoked much of the discussion: professionals and experts; managers; and state employees.

6.1 Professionals and Experts

In many ways, experts and professionals of various sorts, particularly when they are not directly part of managerial hierarchies, constitute the category which has caused me (and others) the most persistent difficulty in formulating a coherent Marxist class structure concept. As indicated in section 3 above, neither of the solutions I have offered is entirely satisfactory. The skill exploitation approach is based on the problematic claim that the surplus appropriated by skill/credential owners necessarily constitutes exploitation of others, and this undermines the relational character of the class category built around skills. The semiautonomous employee solution does involve relations—since semiautonomy is only definable within a relation of domination—but

these relations no longer seem bound up with questions of material interests and antagonism in the characteristically Marxist way.⁸²

Lurking behind both of these solutions is the basic assumption that the *jobs* filled by experts or professionals (and perhaps other types of highly trained "mental labor") are not "really" in the working class. In some sense or other they are "middle class" and thus a conceptual justification for identifying their nonworking class location is needed. In a sense, the undertheorized intuition that credentialed experts were not in the working class provided the motivation for the attempt at "discovering" the conceptual criteria (semiautonomy and/or skill exploitation) that would validate this intuition.⁸³

This is a powerful intuition and has certainly served as the backdrop for my efforts at solving the "problem of the middle class." Let us for a moment relax this assumption and resist the underlying intuition by examining the implications of an alternative view, namely that in and of themselves, *jobs* filled by credentialed professional or expert non-managerial employees are in working-class locations in the class structure. With this claim as a point of departure, what I will argue, then, is that the basis for considering nonmanagerial professionals and experts as potentially part of the middle class is not a relational property of their jobs as such, but rather certain properties of the temporal dimension of professional work.

Three considerations are particularly important in this regard. The first concerns the capacity of professionals and experts to capitalize their income. As I argued earlier in the discussion of skill exploitation, holders of scarce skills, especially when these are legally certified through credentials, can be viewed as generally able to appropriate a "rent" component in their wage. Since the major institutional mechanism for reproducing such rents are credentials, I will refer to these as "credential rents," to distinguish them from the more general concept of "employment rents."⁸⁴ Whether or not one wants to describe this rent as "exploitation," it does constitute a component of income above the costs of reproducing the labor power of the skill-holder. This is equivalent to saying that what I previously called "skill exploiters" command discretionary income.

82. The logic of the category semiautonomous employees thus closely resembles Goldthorpe's *service class* in which professionals/experts are pictured as having a distinctive kind of social relation with employers (autonomy, trust, service relation) quite different from the proletarianized capital-labor employment relation.

83. There are a variety of other ways of playing out this intuition. For example, Nicos Poulantzas, in *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1975), argued that mental labor was itself a form of domination of workers and thus placed professionals and experts outside of the working class.

In and of itself, such credential rents constitute a specific kind of labor market privilege and thus could be considered the basis for distinguishing among *strata* within the working class. This might in fact be an appropriate way in general of defining "strata" within a relational class theory: strata are differentiated by varying *degrees* of exploitation within a common location in the social relations of production. Strata within the bourgeoisie, accordingly, depend upon the amount of surplus they appropriate; strata in the working class, by the amount of discretionary income they earn through various kinds of credential rents.

When such rents are organized in careers in such a way that they are relatively large and increase over time, then they generate a significant capacity for individuals to convert these credential rents into capitalist property: income-producing real estate, stocks, bonds, etc. To the extent that the ownership of such capitalist property begins to constitute a significant source of future income, then the privileged "worker" in question begins to occupy a distinctive kind of contradictory location within class relations. Both in terms of interests in material welfare and in terms of interests in material power, professionals who accumulate significant savings and investments begin to share material interests with capitalists. In my initial class structure analysis, managers were characterized as "simultaneously capitalist and worker" because they occupied jobs in which they were dominated by capitalists while at the same time they dominated workers. The new kind of contradictory location we are now examining can also be considered simultaneously in the capitalist class and in the working class, but in this case the duality of the class location comes from simultaneously owning capitalist property and selling labor power.

The second temporal issue in the class analysis of professionals and experts concerns career trajectories that move into managerial hierarchies. To the extent that it is a normal part of an orderly professional career that most professionals eventually become supervisors and

84. The concept of "employment rent" has been given a precise elaboration within a Marxist context in recent papers by Sam Bowles and Herbert Gintis. See especially Sam Bowles, "The Production Process in a Competitive Economy: Walrasian, Neo-Hobbesian and Marxian Models," *American Economic Review*, vol. 75, no. 1 (1985), pp. 16-36, and Sam Bowles and Herbert Gintis in "Contested Exchange" (*Politics and Society*, forthcoming). They demonstrate that *all* employed people, even under conditions of a pure competitive market equilibrium wage, receive at least some "employment rent" in their wages, where this is defined as a component of the wage above what Walrasians would call a "market clearing wage." The rents discussed here that are embodied in "skill exploitation" constitute a different kind of rent—a rent derived from the capacity of skill holders to restrict the supply of skilled labor power. It should in general be viewed as an additional form of rent above the employment rent described by Bowles and Gintis.

managers within the organizations in which they work, then it might be appropriate to consider those professionals and experts that are *outside* of the managerial hierarchy as nevertheless temporally inserted into the middle class. In the United States, roughly 70 percent of all experts are in fact either managers or supervisors. It therefore may be reasonable to treat most nonmanagerial professionals and experts as *premanagerial*. Thus, even if their current jobs are not in managerial contradictory locations, their careers typically are.

The third temporal issue which is bound up with professional careers concerns what might be termed the petty bourgeois shadow class of employees in many professional occupations. This is most clearly the case for the classic "free professions" such as doctors and lawyers, who in many capitalist countries have the relatively open option of self-employment.⁸⁵ In such a situation, the employee doctor is not "forced to sell" his or her labor power in the same sense as is the case for other working-class employees; they choose to sell their labor power over self-employment because it is their preference.⁸⁶ In recent years, the availability of self-employment options has increased considerably for employee-professionals through the expansion of a range of consulting practices. For example, many academics in the United States, and considerably more in certain other countries, earn a significant second income through self-employed consulting on the side. To the extent that such consulting opportunities expand and are regularly available, then, again, they affect the class location even of those employee professionals who do not take advantage of them, since the availability of such consulting opportunities affects the material interests of employee-professional locations in general (that is, it affects the trade-offs and dilemmas faced by people in such jobs).

85. This implies that in a capitalist country where self-employment is not generally a viable option for certain categories of professionals—for example, for doctors in Britain before the Thatcher government—the class location of these employee professionals is affected. Efforts by the Thatcher government to facilitate private practice in medicine potentially affects the class location of all doctors, whether or not they actually become self-employed.

86. There is, even for unambiguously proletarian class locations—unskilled manual workers in manufacturing—a certain ambiguity in the notion that they are "forced" to sell their labor power. As G.A. Cohen argues in his essay, "The Structure of Proletarian Unfreedom," in J. Roemer (ed.), *Analytical Marxism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), this statement cannot be taken to mean literally that each and every proletarian is individually forced to sell his or her labor power, since with sufficient sacrifices and luck, at least some in fact can, as individuals, escape the proletarian condition into self-employment. The point is that this option is not available to manual industrial workers as a class. In the case of some categories of professionals, on the other hand, it may be the case that the option of self-employment is available to as many as want to avail themselves of this alternative.

Given this way of analyzing the class character of professional employment, then even if we do not consider autonomy within work or the ownership of skills/credentials as such as appropriate criteria for differentiating locations within a class structure, nevertheless professionals and experts would generally be considered in "middle-class contradictory locations" by virtue of their capacity to capitalize their income and their career trajectories into managerial hierarchies and viable petty bourgeois options. This way of thinking through the issues, however, introduces a new kind of ambiguity into the analysis of class structures. How should we treat conceptually professionals who consume all of the credential rent in their income? Credential rents generate a *capacity* for acquiring capitalist property, but of course not all individuals who have that capacity will utilize it. Discretionary income can be translated into high standards of living rather than investments.⁸⁷ Similarly, not all professionals or experts in careers that normally involve movement into the managerial hierarchy actually ever become managers. How should we understand the character of their individual class location? Should it be defined by the *characteristic* career pattern of professionals or by the *actual* career trajectory of the individual in question? And, in a similar vein, how should we understand the class location of professionals who opt permanently to be employees?⁸⁸

This may seem like a particularly scholastic issue reflecting the pre-occupations of a professional pigeon-holer. But as in most problems of formal classification, these issues reflect real underlying conceptual problems.

To help clarify this issue it will be useful to recall the discussion of

87. Particularly in employment contexts in which there are very high levels of job security, there is no systematic inherent pressure of "skill exploiters" to capitalize their credential rents. Unlike in the case of entrepreneurial capitalists for whom the imperative to accumulate is inherent in their class location (since investment and accumulation is a necessary condition for their reproduction as capitalists), there is no comparable imperative for high paid employees to accumulate. Their reproduction is not contingent on the capitalization of their income.

88. It is worth noting that this problem of discrepancies between outcomes for individual professionals and the characteristic career structure of professional employment confronts any class theory that treats the category "professional" as having a particular class character. Thus, for example, John Goldthorpe argues that professionals belong in the "service class" by virtue of the responsibilities and authority they have on the job, the prospective rewards that are built into professional careers and the general "service contract" character of the employment relation. While such descriptions may be characteristic of professional employment, there are certainly many specific professional jobs that lack one or more of these properties. Although to my knowledge Goldthorpe never discusses this problem, he in effect attributes class locations to individuals on the basis of the characteristic patterns for their occupations rather than their actual, individual situation.

material interests in section 2 above. In explicating the idea that the commonality of class locations is defined by common relationally determined material interests, I argued that "material interests" should be understood as common material trade-offs and dilemmas in the choices people face concerning material welfare and power. In these terms, working in careers which generate credential rents sufficiently large to enable a person to capitalize their income defines a set of alternatives unavailable to someone whose wages are simply sufficient to cover the costs of reproducing labor power. In a sense, therefore, whether or not the capitalist investments are actually made is a secondary matter; the primary issue is being in a position which makes such investments possible.

Nevertheless, it remains the case that as a result of the actual choices made by individuals in these kinds of careers, their material interests in the future change. Two professionals in identical careers, one of whom has systematically invested discretionary income and one of whom has not, eventually have divergent class interests. Similarly, a professional or expert who fails to ever become a manager (through choice or happenstance) or who chooses never to engage in self-employment is likely to end up with different class interests from a professional who moves up managerial hierarchies or becomes self-employed. In all of these cases we face a problem of what could be termed a degree of *indeterminacy* or *objective ambiguity* in defining the location of individuals in the class structure. To a greater or lesser extent in these cases, class locations are partially indeterminate or ambiguous because they depend not simply upon observable properties of *current* jobs, but upon *future* states (capital ownership, managerial positions, self-employment) linked to those jobs, and these future states depend in part upon contingent choices and events. Thus, in addition to characterizing certain locations in the class structure as "contradictory locations within class relations," it now seems appropriate to characterize some as at least partially "objectively ambiguous locations."⁸⁹

To recapitulate this argument about experts and professionals, one way of thinking about their concrete, micro-level class location is to focus on the temporal dimensions of class structures. In so far as pro-

89. Allowing a certain degree of indeterminacy in the location of professionals and experts in the class structure may help to explain why this category of social actors is frequently characterized by such high levels of internal ideological heterogeneity. Much more frequently than is the case for other segments of the "middle class", nonmanagerial professionals and experts can be found all over the ideological map. The objective temporal indeterminacy of their class location may allow for a variety of relatively contingent social processes that vary considerably among professionals and experts to have a relatively large impact on their ideological orientation.

fessionals and experts can systematically capitalize their surplus income (and thus become capitalist property owners), move into managerial positions in a routine career trajectory (and thus occupy a contradictory class location) and opt for self-employment (and thus become petty bourgeois), then their class location can be considered "middle class." Insofar as there is a certain degree of real temporal indeterminacy in each of these possibilities, then their class location has an objectively ambiguous status as well.

While these kinds of temporal arguments may go a long way towards understanding the nature of the material class *interests* linked to professional and expert employment, nevertheless I am not entirely satisfied that it adequately captures their overall location in the class structure. And, as noted at the beginning of this discussion of professionals, this treatment certainly goes against the intuitions of most Marxists (and, needless to say, non-Marxists as well) in which, quite apart from these temporal issues, the very character of professional employment is seen as nonproletarian.

I think the standard intuition comes from the *lived experience* dimension of class structure analysis, not their material interests as such. To recall the arguments of section 2 above, at the highest level of abstraction the working class is characterized by three fundamental aspects of lived experience derived from their location within the social relations of production: the experience of having to sell one's labor power to live; the experience of being bossed around within work (at least in the minimal sense of being told what to do), and the experiences of basic powerlessness with respect to the allocation of social resources. On each of these dimensions, the lived experience associated with professional employment is relatively nonproletarianized. First, by virtue of viable self-employment alternatives, the labor market has a less coercive aspect for professionals than for most other categories of employees. Second, within the employment relation professionals and experts exert much more control over their own work. And third, because of their career roles in corporations and bureaucracies, professionals are typically much more involved in decisions over the allocation and use of resources than are workers, even if they do not necessarily formally have the power to actually appropriate those resources. With respect to each of these aspects of lived experience, professionals and experts can be thought to be less alienated than fully proletarianized workers, and in this sense they are in the "middle class."

Although I did not define the issues in these terms, my initial characterization of professionals and experts as "semiautonomous employees" occupying a class location that was simultaneously in the working class and the petty bourgeoisie can be viewed as attempting to

define the specificity of their class location in terms of the character of their lived experiences within work, not their interests. Because of the considerable difficulties I encountered in trying to use the concept of "semiautonomous employees" in empirical research I am hesitant to return to it as a basis for understanding the class character of professional/expert work, but it is important to recognize that it more closely corresponds to the underlying intuitions of many people about the class location of experts and professionals than does the argument based strictly on material interests.

6.2 *Managers*

There were two basic rationales for the shift in the treatment of managers as constituting a contradictory combination of capitalist and working-class locations (version 1) to the treatment of managers as organization asset exploiters (version 2). First, the general strategy of analysis of "contradictory locations within class relations" had been called into question because of conceptual problems with the category "semiautonomous employees." Since I was seeking a unitary conceptual strategy to solve the problem of the middle class, the difficulties with the category "semiautonomous employees" seemed to indict the concept of contradictory locations when applied to managers as well. If, however, we no longer try to discover a single strategy capable of simultaneously solving all of the various conceptual problems posed by different categories of "nonproletarianized employees," then it could well be the case that the concept of contradictory locations within class relations is an appropriate way for theorizing managers, while some other strategy is needed for other categories.

The second rationale for the shift away from the concept of contradictory locations for managers was that the introduction of the concept of organizational asset exploitation appeared to make it possible to link the analysis of managers within capitalism to the problem of classes in postcapitalist societies. Since one of the aspirations of Marxist class analysis is to see future forms of society as immanently present in earlier forms, treating the managerial middle class of capitalism as a latent dominant class in a future type of society based on control over organization assets was analytically attractive.⁹⁰ However, this conceptualization only made sense if it could be credibly argued that managers in capitalism, by virtue of their control over the organizational resources of production, had a material interest in a statist organization of production. Without contriving rather unlikely scenarios, this assertion seems implausible at best.

The two reasons I previously advanced for abandoning the treatment

of managers as contradictory locations thus do not seem very compelling. Furthermore, the original conceptual strategy seems to capture much more effectively the distinctive dilemmas that managers face within a capitalist society. Seeing managers as a contradictory location within class relations combining capitalist and working-class practices immediately draws our attention to the ways in which managers are tied to capitalist interests and yet are not an integral part of the capitalist class. This concept also makes it clear why foremen and lower-level supervisors are much more likely to be drawn into coalitions with the working class in struggles, while higher-level managers and executives are much more likely to side consistently with the capitalist class.

While I think the class location of managers is best understood in terms of the original concept of contradictory locations, this does not mean that we should abandon the idea of organizational exploitation altogether. Organization exploitation, like skill "exploitation," generates employment-based rents in the earnings of managers. The rent reflected in organization exploitation, however, is generated by a different mechanism from that associated with skill exploitation. In skill exploitation the central mechanism is that a restriction on the supply of a particular kind of skilled labor power pushes up the equilibrium market wage above the costs of producing that kind of labor power. In the case of organization exploitation, the mechanism revolves around the effective power that managers have within production by virtue of their organizational responsibilities. Because of the difficulty in a purely repressive form of social control of managerial activity, for employers to insure loyalty and responsible exercise of authority, managerial careers have to be structured around systematic wage increases tied to promotion up hierarchies.⁹¹ This hierarchically organized "incentive structure"

90. It should be added, I think, that this conceptualization was also aesthetically seductive. The treatment of the trajectory of history in terms of the progressive shedding of distinctive forms of exploitation in which the middle class of one form of society was the potential dominant class of the successor society had a high level of symmetry and elegance to it. It provided a way of retaining the essential intuitions of the classical vision of historical trajectory in historical materialism while allowing for a much more differentiated map of class structures and historical possibilities.

91. The difference in the mechanism through which managers and professionals appropriate part of the social surplus implies that they will adopt very different strategies in pursuing their class interests. For professionals the pivotal strategy is control over credentials, thus insuring their control over the supply of professional labor power. For managers, credentialism is clearly a secondary strategy. The protection of managerial prerogatives from direct interference by capitalist owners, particularly over the control of the managerial hierarchy itself, is the central way through which managerial surplus appropriation is reproduced. This strategy generally goes under the heading of "bureaucratization". Credentialization and bureaucratization thus constitute distinct strategies, associated with distinct types of contradictory locations within class relations.

generates what can be called "loyalty rents" in wages of managers. As in the case of professionals and experts, this gives managers the capacity to capitalize their income, particularly when their careers involve movements into higher reaches of managerial hierarchies. Indeed, in the case of executives in large corporations, these loyalty rents may become so substantial that the managers in question are capable of becoming full-fledged capitalists through the acquisition of capitalist property. In such cases they really cease to occupy contradictory locations within class relations in spite of their normal status as an "employee" of the corporation.

6.3 *The State*

For Weberian sociologists, state employment in capitalist societies does not pose any particular problems for the analysis of class structures. If classes are fundamentally determined within market relations, and employees enter the state through basically the same kind of labor markets as they enter private employment, then the fact that some people are employed by capitalists and others by the state is largely irrelevant for specifying their class location.⁹²

In contrast, state employment has always posed a serious problem for Marxist class structural analysis. If classes are defined by distinctive forms of social relations of *production*, how should employees within the state be treated in a class analysis? On the one hand, most employees in the state do not own any means of production and have to sell their labor power on a labor market in order to acquire their subsistence. On these grounds, as Weberians would argue, they would appear to be indistinguishable from employees in the "private sector." The problem, however, is that while they enter the labor market with the same kinds of resources as private sector employees, they leave the market for a very different kind of social relation: instead of entering a capital-labor relation, they enter a state-labor relation.

The issue here is not simply how we should understand the class character of the state as a *political* institution. Rather, the issue is how we should conceptualize in class terms the social relations of production within the state. Are there distinctive classes within the state in capitalist

92. It is for this reason that Goldthorpe explicitly rejects the relevance of the site of employment as a basis for divisions in class structures. See p. 170 in John Goldthorpe. "On the Service Class: Its Formation and Future," in Anthony Giddens and Gavin McKenzie (eds), *Social Class and the Division of Labour* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 162-85.

societies? Are the "locations" in the state outside of the class structure? Should the locations in the state simply be conceptually amalgamated with the corresponding classes of capitalism proper?

Most class analyses, whether of a Marxist or non-Marxist inspiration, simply ignore this issue altogether and apply the same criteria for defining class locations for employees in the state and in capitalist employment.⁹³ This is certainly how I have dealt with the issue in both of my class structural concepts: managers in capitalist corporations and state agencies were both treated as contradictory locations combining capitalist and working-class elements in the first concept, and were both treated as part of the middle class by virtue of organizational asset exploitation in the second concept.

When I developed the concept of organization asset exploitation, I hoped that this would provide a vehicle for dealing with the problem of the state and class structure. I argued that the monopolization of organizational assets defined the critical form of class relations in postcapitalist "statist" societies (societies within which the "state mode of production" was dominant). The state, in terms of the system of production, was thus viewed as the most superordinate site for the concentrated control of organizational resources. In capitalism, then, this meant that managers in capitalist corporations and managers in the state were both defined in class terms with respect to the same productive resource—organization assets—which in a postcapitalist society would become the basis for the state mode of production itself. Given this characterization of assets and exploitation, the state as such simply dropped out of the analysis of classes in capitalism.

This does not seem satisfactory. If a Marxist class theory is to respect the theoretical constraints discussed in section 3.3 above, then it is important that the concept of class structure be linked to the more abstract concept of mode of production, and this implies that some explicit conceptual account be taken of the problem of state employment.⁹⁴ One solution, of course, would be simply to argue that employees in the state are not in *any* class location; they are "outside" of the class structure. After all, as was argued in section 5.2 above, there

93. For example, Nicos Poulantzas attempts to define the class character of employees of the capitalist state in terms of the category "unproductive labor". All unproductive laborers, he argues, are part of the new petty bourgeoisie. However, since this argument applies equally well to unproductive laborers in capitalist employment (in banks, commerce, etc.), in the end there is no specificity for the class character of state employment as such in Poulantzas's analysis.

94. Employment in certain other sites—churches, nonprofit organizations, voluntary associations, unions, even political parties—pose similar problems. Here I will only discuss the issue of the state as such.

are many people in capitalist society who do not have a *direct* location in the class structure: children, pensioners, permanently disabled, students, perhaps housewives. State employees—and employees in a variety of other noncapitalist institutions—could be treated in a similar fashion. People within the state might still, of course, have *mediated* class locations through various kinds of social relations which tie them to capitalist production, but they would not be *directly* inserted into the class structure through their own jobs.

Such a treatment of state employees might possibly be appropriate for those people who work in what is narrowly the *political apparatuses* of the state—the taxing authority, the courts, the police, the administrative apparatuses of the executive, the legislature, etc. However, a great deal of what the state does in capitalist societies involves the production and distribution of use-values such as education, health, fire protection, sanitation, transportation, etc. These take place in what could be called the state service sector (or more generally, the state production sector since sometimes the products are actually things, not services). Typically these use-values are produced and distributed in distinctively *noncapitalist* ways in so far as the products and services in question are generally not fully commodified as in capitalist production itself. But this does not make such state activities somehow outside of production.

Once it is recognized that the state is not simply a rule-making and rule-enforcing apparatus, but also a site of considerable social production, then it follows that the social relations within which such production takes place must be considered a variety of social relations of production. If these relations of production in the state involve processes of exploitation and domination, then they constitute the basis for a state-centered class structure.

This line of reasoning leads directly towards the concept of a “state mode of production” (or, at a minimum, state relations of production).⁹⁵ This is not a particularly attractive term, but it seems preferable to the alternative expressions that are sometimes deployed to capture the same idea (such as state socialism or bureaucratic collectivism). If we wish to provide a coherent account of classes constituted within the state, then, we must interrogate this illusive concept.

The concept of a state mode of production is notoriously undertheorized. In my previous work I tried to develop it in a more rigorous way through the analysis of organizational assets and organizational

95. The term “state relations of production” avoids a commitment to the thesis that such relations of production could become the dominant principle of organization of the society at large, whereas the concept “state mode of production” implies that this concept is quite parallel to the capitalist mode of production.

exploitation. That strategy, however, missed what is perhaps the essential feature of a state-centered system of production, namely the role of the state’s coercive capacity to tax or in other ways appropriate the surplus. The state cannot reasonably be viewed simply as a giant corporation in which the material basis of the capacity of “state managers” to appropriate and allocate surplus is equivalent to that of corporate managers. I therefore do not think that the concept of organizational exploitation is a satisfactory way of approaching the problem of state production (even if it remains the case that organizational exploitation occurs within the state as within other complex organizations).

I cannot offer an alternative elaborated concept of the state mode of production. For the moment, therefore, let us operate with a rather simple set of undertheorized descriptions of the basic classes within these state-based relations of production: the dominant class would be defined as those agents in the state who politically direct the appropriation and allocation of the surplus acquired by the state; the subordinate class as those agents who directly produce use-values (goods and services) within the state; and, in a way analogous to contradictory locations in capitalism, contradictory locations inside of the state would be defined as state managers/bureaucrats who control the activity of state workers while being, at the same time, subordinated to the state dominant class.

If we restrict our analysis to class locations defined directly by *jobs*—that is, to “direct” class locations in the terms of section 5.2 above—then these various locations within the state would be viewed as distinct classes from those in the private, capitalist sector. We would have a state working class and a capitalist working class; state contradictory locations and capitalist contradictory locations; etc.

But, as I argued earlier, class structures should not be analyzed exclusively in terms of direct class locations; *mediated* class relations may be equally important in defining the contours of a class structure. I have already briefly noted the importance of mediated class relations for specifying the class location of one particular kind of actor: housewives. A housewife can be viewed as a direct producer within a particular form of production relations, sometimes referred to as “subsistence production” or “domestic production.” In trying to understand a housewife’s location in a class structure, it would, however, be unsatisfactory to simply look at her position within domestic production; her mediated class location via the way in which her household is inserted into capitalist class relations is equally—and perhaps even more—important. Thus, by virtue of mediated class relations, we describe the full-time housewife of a capitalist as in the capitalist class and the full-time housewife of a worker in the working class.

A similar kind of analysis is needed for the specification of the location of state employees in the class structure, although in this case the mediating relations are not generally grounded in family structures. In a capitalist society—that is, a society within which the capitalist mode of production is the dominant form of production relations—a worker in the state is not simply in a “state working class,” but also through various kinds of mediating relations, linked to the capitalist working class. Above all, state workers occupy mediated locations within the capitalist working class via the commodified relations of labor markets. Similarly, the ruling “elite” in the state—the political directorate of state production—is not constituted in capitalist societies as an autonomous state dominant class; it is linked to the capitalist class through a variety of mediating social relations (career trajectories that move back and forth from public to private sectors; the ability of state elites to capitalize surplus income; etc.).

All of these mediated relations can exist with varying degrees of intensity. Different class locations in the state might have differing intensities of mediated links to classes in the private capitalist sector. It might be the case, for example, that in many capitalist societies contradictory locations within the state—middle level, career civil servants, and state officials—have the *weakest* mediated linkages to classes in the private sector. Unlike state workers, they are quite insulated from pressures of the capitalist labor market, and, unlike high level state elites, their careers are much more exclusively contained within the state. It might be expected, therefore, that people in these kinds of class locations within the state would be the most “statist” in their ideological orientation. On the other hand, it would generally be expected that top level state managers and elites in the capitalist state, should have the strongest mediated relations to the capitalist class structure. Without suggesting that the policies of the state can be viewed simply as the result of instrumental manipulations of the capitalist class itself, it would nevertheless in general be expected that the character of the class locations of the directorate of the capitalist state would be heavily shaped by mediated relations to the bourgeoisie.

The intensity of the mediated relations between classes in the state and capitalist sectors could also vary considerably across time and place. At one extreme one might imagine a capitalist society within which, on the one hand, state employment is highly insulated from the pressures of capitalist markets, where state employees have jobs for life in which the wages and working conditions are virtually unaffected by conditions in the capitalist labor market. In such a situation it might be appropriate to consider state workers and private sector workers as being in quite distinct classes. At another extreme, the state can significantly dissolve

the division between state and private employment by imposing conditions of state employment by mimicking private capitalist employment relations within the state, particularly by tying wages of state employees to the capitalist labor market. In such situations, the mediated class location of state workers and private sector workers could be very powerful and largely negate any differences in their direct class locations.

The implication of this analysis of classes within the state is that so long as state employment occurs within a society in which the capitalist mode of production is dominant, one cannot define the class location of state employees exclusively in terms of their locations within state production relations.⁹⁶ To a greater or lesser extent, therefore, state employees occupy a kind of dualistic class location: direct locations within state classes and mediated locations within capitalist relations.⁹⁷

This is, of course, not the only way to treat the problem of class relations within the capitalist state. Many theorists reject the concept of a state mode of production altogether. As a site of *production* in capitalist societies, state production can be treated simply as a peculiar form of capitalist production—one organized by public authority rather than private boards of directors. It is “capitalist” because it obtains its inputs from capitalist markets, it recruits its labor through capitalist markets, it is constrained in myriad ways by the process of private capital accumulation and, with some modification, its employment practices are largely shaped by capitalist practices of hierarchy and control. In this view, just as the household should not be viewed as a residual form of some precapitalist “domestic *mode* of production,” but rather as the domestic sphere of capitalist production, so too state production in capitalism should not be treated as the forerunner of some postcapitalist mode of production, but rather is simply the “public sphere” of capitalist production. Rather than considering class locations within the state as in any way distinct from the class locations of capitalism proper, therefore, they should simply be fused to them.

This alternative view of state-based production relations in capitalist societies should certainly not be dismissed out of hand. Implicitly, at

96. This is essentially what it means to say that the capitalist mode of production is in fact “dominant”: all other relations of production are, through one mechanism or another, integrated with capitalism in a subordinate manner. This does not imply that they have no effects of their own, but simply that their effects always occur within limits imposed by capitalist relations.

97. I refer to this situation as “dualistic class locations” rather than “contradictory locations” because there is no inherent reason why the interests generated by the direct and mediated relations contradict each other.

least, it is the approach which most theorists adopt in practice. Nevertheless, I feel that this view of state employment suffers from a kind of latent functionalism in its assessment of the relationship between state production and capitalist production.⁹⁸ To describe state production as *simply* the public sphere of capitalist production suggests that its logic of development and internal organization is not just *constrained by* capitalism, but is strictly *derived from* the logic of capitalism. That is, there is something called the "logic of capitalism" which is embodied in a number of interconnected spheres of production—domestic, capitalist proper, public/state. The articulation of such spheres, then, would be regulated by some kind of principle of functional integration. Without such a functional principle, it is hard to see how the public sphere of production could be treated as fundamentally capitalist in its character.

This kind of functional derivation of institutional logics has come under considerable criticism in recent years.⁹⁹ Instead of such a functional derivation, it seems to me more plausible to treat the degree to which state production in capitalism is effectively subsumed under a capitalist logic as a variable rather than a constant. Thus, the statist character of state production, and accordingly the noncapitalist character of the class relations constituted within state production, will also vary across time and place. In some instances—perhaps, for example, the United States—it might well be a reasonable first approximation simply to ignore the distinction between state and private employment in the analysis of class structures because state employment is so effectively tied to capitalism, whereas in other cases this might well not be appropriate.

7 Conclusion: Where Does This Leave Us?

I began this essay by arguing for the necessity of producing a repertoire of Marxist class structure concepts capable of effective deployment in concrete, micro-level analysis. The task was somehow to do this while

98. A similar point can be made about the treatment of domestic production as simply the domestic sphere of capitalist production. This characterization suggests that households follow an internal logic of organization of production that is strictly derivable from the logic of capitalism. While there are certainly effects of capitalist production on domestic production—particularly the progressive erosion of the scope of the latter—nevertheless domestic production does not seem reducible to simply a function of capitalism as such.

99. For a specific critique of Marxian versions of functionalism, see Jon Elster, *Making Sense of Marx* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), and "Marxism, Functionalism and Game Theory," in J. Roemer, (ed.), *Analytical Marxism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

remaining consistent with the abstract understanding of class relations in terms of interests, lived experience and collective capacity. The most effective way of doing this, I argued, was to try to generate more concrete, micro concepts of class structure on the basis of material interests and exploitation.

Let me try to summarize the various lessons that can be drawn from this attempt:

1. *Contradictory locations* The "middle class" in capitalist society should primarily be understood in terms of the concept of contradictory locations within class relations. Above all, then, the middle class *within capitalism* is constituted by those locations which are simultaneously in the capitalist class and the working class.

2. *Secondary exploitations* Skill exploitation and organization exploitation (or, equivalently, skill-generated scarcity rents and organization-generated loyalty rents) are probably best viewed as the basis for *strata* within classes rather than for class divisions as such. Such strata, however, can constitute the material basis for the emergence of distinct class trajectories as individuals turn the surplus appropriated through credential and loyalty rents into capitalist investment.

3. *Mediated locations and temporal trajectories* In elaborating a micro-level concept of class structure—that is, a concept capable of understanding the ways in which individual lives are organized through class relations—class locations should not be understood simply in terms of the *direct* class relations within which *jobs* are immediately embedded. Class locations are also structured to a variable extent by mediated relations and temporal trajectories.

4. *Professionals and experts* Temporal trajectories are particularly salient for understanding the class location of professionals, experts and other categories of credentialed labor power since the careers of such occupations frequently involve (1) movement into management, (2) the increasing capacity to capitalize employment rents, and (3) viable options of full-time or secondary self-employment. Such temporal trajectories, therefore, generally place professionals and experts into contradictory class locations (the "middle class") even if at a particular point in time they have not capitalized any of their income and are neither part of the managerial hierarchy itself nor self-employed. However, given the relatively underdetermined character of such trajectories for any given individual, professionals and experts may have, to a greater or lesser degree, what can be called objectively ambiguous class locations. In terms of the lived experience dimension of class

relations, professionals and experts generally experience work in a much less alienated way than workers, and this contributes to the general perception that they are "middle class."

5. *State employees* Mediated relations are particularly salient for understanding the class location of state employees. While their direct class location can be seen as constituted within postcapitalist statist relations of production, to the extent that the conditions of production within the state are dominated by capitalist relations, their class location may be more fundamentally determined by their mediated locations than by their direct locations.

At the core of Marxist theory is an elegant and simple abstract picture of classes in capitalist societies: a fundamentally polarized class structure which constitutes the basis for the formation of two collectively organized classes engaged in struggle over the future of the class structure itself. We have now journeyed far from that simple core. Instead of only two, polarized classes, we have contradictory locations within class relations, mediated class locations, temporally structured class locations, objectively ambiguous class locations, dualistic class locations. Instead of a simple historical vision of the epochal confrontation of two class actors, there is a picture of multiple possible coalitions of greater or lesser likelihood, stability, and power contending over a variety of possible futures. The question, then, is whether this repertoire of new complexities actually enriches the theory or simply adds confusion.

This potential confusion can be reduced if these new complexities are seen as appropriate to different levels of abstraction in the analysis of classes. The appropriate level of abstraction depends upon the nature of the questions being asked. Thus, if one wishes to analyze the implications of epochal differences in class structures, the broad comparisons between feudal class structures and capitalist class structures might be appropriate. A simple two-class model of classes in capitalism—capitalists and workers—might provide the most powerful class map for such an investigation. If, however, one wished to embark on a more fine-grained analysis of the development of class structures within capitalist societies or the variations in such structures across capitalist societies, then invoking some of the complexities we have discussed would become necessary. And if one wanted to attempt a nuanced examination of the effects of location in a class structure on individual consciousness and action, then it would probably be desirable to introduce the full range of complexities that structure the class interests of individuals in time and place.

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