

The Biography of a Concept

Contradictory Class Locations

In this chapter we will examine in some detail the process by which a particular concept for solving the problem of the middle classes in capitalism was produced, the concept of 'contradictory locations within class relations'. This will not be a literal chronological account of the development of that concept, but rather a kind of logical reconstruction of the process. The actual history of the concept was not quite so neat, and the implications of specific innovations were often not fully realized until sometime later. The story, then, is an attempt at revealing the underlying logic of the development of the concept. The emphasis will be on the theoretical structure of the process and the theoretical dimensions of the adjudication of contending class concepts.

Before we embark on this enterprise it will be helpful to discuss briefly certain methodological issues involved in the process of concept formation. A great deal of substantive debate in the Marxist tradition is couched in an idiom of debates over the methodological and philosophical principles which underlie social analysis. Frequently this has the effect of altogether displacing concern with substantive theoretical issues by a preoccupation with epistemological problems. I wish to avoid such a displacement in this book. Nevertheless, I think that it is necessary to lay out as clearly as possible the logic of concept formation that I will be using in the analysis. The purpose of this discussion will not be to explore in any depth the epistemological problem of the status of concepts or the alternative approaches to the problem of concept formation that various theorists have advocated, but rather, simply to make accessible the rationale for the approach that will be followed in the rest of this book.¹

The Logic of Concept Formation

Concepts are produced. The categories that are used in social theories, whether they be the relatively simple descriptive categories employed in making observations, or the very complex and abstract concepts used in the construction of 'grand theory', are all produced by human beings. And this is true regardless of one's epistemological prejudices and methodological predilections, whether one regards concepts as cognitive mappings of real mechanisms in the world or as strictly arbitrary conventions in the imagination of the theorist. They are never simply given by the real world as such but are always produced through some sort of intellectual process of concept formation.

The production of concepts that figure in scientific theories takes place under a variety of constraints. By 'constraint' I mean that in any given situation there is only a limited range of possible concepts that can be produced; while concepts are produced by the human imagination, they are not produced in a completely free and unstructured manner which makes anything possible. To be more specific, the production of scientific concepts operates methodologically under both theoretical and empirical constraints.² First, concepts have theoretical presuppositions. In some instances these presuppositions function as explicit, systematic theoretical requirements imposed on the production of a new concept; in other instances, the theoretical presuppositions act more as unconscious cognitive filters implicitly shaping what is thinkable and unthinkable by the theorist. In either case, such theoretical presuppositions determine, if only vaguely and implicitly, the range of possible concepts that can be produced.

Scientific concepts, no matter how embedded in an elaborated theoretical framework, are never constrained exclusively by theoretical presuppositions. They also face what can be called 'empirically mediated real-world constraints', or simply 'empirical constraints' for short. This cumbersome expression—'empirically mediated real-world constraint'—is meant to convey two things: first, that the constraint in question comes from real mechanisms in the world, not simply from the conceptual framework of the theory; and second, that this real-world constraint operates through data gathered using the concepts of the theory. The constraint is thus empirically mediated, rather than directly imposed by the 'world as it really is'.³ Concepts must not only conform to the conceptual rules and assumptions specified in the theoretical

framework, they must also be used in explanations of various sorts. The fact that a concept is consistent with its theoretical framework does not, in and of itself, establish that it will be capable of an effective role in explanations of any empirical problem using that theoretical framework.

Concepts differ within and across theories in the relative strength of these two constraints on their formation. *Within* a given theory, concepts which are meant to be used directly in empirical observations are in general much more constrained empirically than concepts which figure in the most abstract propositions of the theory. Indeed, the empirical constraints in the most abstract theoretical formulations may become so attenuated that the concepts appear to be strictly logical constructions. On the other hand, in general, the theoretical constraints will tend to become relatively attenuated in the production of concrete concepts. Because of the contingencies that enter theories as you move from the most abstract to the most concrete levels of analysis, there tends to be a fair amount of slippage between the theoretical stipulations of the abstract theory and the specification of concrete concepts used in research.

The variability in the strength of theoretical and empirical constraints *across* theories is equally striking. Some theoretical frameworks take their conceptual presuppositions almost directly from the 'commonsense' categories of everyday discourse. The theoretical requirements for the production of concepts are unelaborated, not subjected to conscious scrutiny and, often, inconsistently applied. The empirical requirements of concepts, however, may be quite rigorously and ruthlessly applied. On the basis of empirical 'findings' concepts may be adopted or their boundaries redrawn or they may even be abandoned altogether. In other theoretical frameworks, the theoretical requirements imposed on the production of concepts are systematic and elaborate, and applied with self-conscious consistency. A powerful critique of a given concept is to show that it is inconsistent with some of these theoretical requirements and that it is therefore not a 'legitimate' concept. Empirical constraints will also operate, but they may do so in a much more diffuse and roundabout way.

It is an achievement of a scientific theory for such theoretical constraints to operate systematically and consciously on the production of new concepts. However, if the imposition of such systematic theoretical constraints runs ahead of the explanatory success of the theory, then the theory runs the risk of 'theoreticism',

that is, of effectively immunizing the theory from the operation of empirical constraints required by the explanatory tasks of the theory. On the other hand, if a theory is organized in such a way that it blocks the development of such self-conscious theoretical constraints, then it is guilty of what is sometimes called 'empiricism'.⁴ If the methodological sins of theoreticism or empiricism are carried to extremes, then the very status of the resulting concepts as 'scientific' may be jeopardized.⁵

When the production of concepts takes place within an established conceptual framework, then in general the process of concept formation is simultaneously a process of *adjudication* between rival concepts. The assessment of the adequacy of a given concept is not simply a question of examining its own consistency with the theoretical requirements of the framework and with the empirical observations of research using that framework. While the presence of theoretical and empirical inconsistencies with a given concept may provide the motivation to seek an alternative, in and of themselves they are generally not a sufficient basis for rejecting a concept. The reason for this is that in the absence of a better, rival concept, it is not possible to know whether the culprit in these inconsistencies is the concept itself, or problems in the various constraints being used to evaluate the concept. Empirical anomalies with respect to a given concept, for example, may reflect observational problems or the presence of causes absent from the theory rather than a problem with the concept in question. And theoretical inconsistencies may reflect problems in certain elements in the abstract theoretical requirements imposed by the general theory, rather than a failure of the specific concept in question. Unless there is a rival concept which fares better with respect to both the theoretical and empirical constraints on concept formation, therefore, it is often difficult to draw definitive conclusions about the adequacy of a given concept.

By 'rival concepts' I mean, in general, rival *definitions* of the same theoretical object. Examples would include rival definitions of the working class, capitalism or the state, within a Marxist theoretical framework or rival definitions of bureaucracy, social closure or rationalization within a Weberian theoretical framework. In each case there is an agreed-upon theoretical object, but its appropriate definition is a matter of contention.⁶ Disputes over theoretical objects themselves—that is, over what are the important theoretical objects to explain and what theoretical objects should figure in the explanations—generally involve

problems of theory adjudication, not simply concept adjudication.⁷

Conceptual adjudication is a double process. It compares rival concepts in terms of their respective consistency both with the abstract conceptual requirements of the general theory in which they figure and with the empirical observations generated using the theory. For example, in the case of the concept of the working class in Marxist theory, this implies assessing the consistency of alternative definitions of the working class with a number of abstract elements in the concept of class (e.g. classes must be defined in relational terms where exploitation is intrinsic to the relation) and the consistency of the alternatives with a variety of empirical observations (e.g. the patterns of class formation and the distribution of class consciousness).

Such double adjudication is often a difficult and contentious project. In terms of the theoretical adjudication, it is rare that social scientific theories are so well integrated and internally coherent that it is clear precisely which requirements apply to a given concept. And even where there is some consensus on this point, it is often the case that rival concepts may each fare better with respect to different conceptual requirements. In terms of the empirical adjudication, the empirical expectations tied to given concepts are not often so precise that a given 'finding' decisively discriminates between contending concepts. And of course, as is often the case, the verdicts of the theoretical and the empirical adjudication may contradict each other. It is because of these difficulties and ambiguities that disputes over concepts can be so durable.

When a process of concept formation and adjudication is launched there is no guarantee, of course, that a satisfactory concept *can* be produced within the constraints it faces. One of the main impulses for the much more arduous task of theory reconstruction is precisely the repeated failure in efforts at concept formation within a given theory, to produce concepts which simultaneously satisfy theoretical and empirical constraints. What we mean by 'dogmatism' is the refusal of a theorist to call into question elements of the general theory in light of such repeated failures (or, equivalently, to deal with such failures by denying their existence).⁸ 'Eclecticism', on the other hand, is the refusal to worry about theoretical coherence. Old concepts are modified and new concepts are adopted from various theoretical frameworks in an ad hoc manner without regard to their compatibility or their integration into a general framework. What is needed is a balance between theoretical commitment to maintain and strengthen the

coherence of given general theoretical frameworks with theoretical openness to allow for concept transformation and theory reconstruction.

In the actual development of scientific theories, the process is never as tidy as methodological prescriptions suggest. Inevitably there are periods of work which tend towards theoreticism or empiricism in the formation of concepts, dogmatism and eclecticism in the elaboration of theories. The point of these methodological injunctions, therefore, is not so much the hope of producing a 'pure' path of theoretical development, but to provide tools for criticizing and correcting the inevitable deviations that occur.

Steps in the Analysis of the Formation of the Concept of Contradictory Locations

On the basis of the general logic of concept formation outlined above, our analysis of the development of the concept 'contradictory locations within class relations' will proceed in the following steps:

(1) *The Empirical Setting*. This will involve indicating the empirical problems which did not seem adequately mapped by the prevailing specification of the concept of class structure within Marxist theory and which first stimulated the effort at concept transformation.

(2) *Theoretical Constraints*. If the concept that attempts to resolve the problems specified under the empirical setting is to be incorporated within Marxist theory, it is important to specify the critical elements of the general theory of class and class structure that act as parameters to the process of concept formation. It must be emphasized that it is not a foregone conclusion that this process of concept formation will be successful. It is always possible that the constraints imposed by the general theory of class preclude the formation of adequate concepts of specific classes that are needed to deal with the empirical problems set out initially. If this proves to be the case, then the attempt at forming such concepts may ultimately lead to a process of transformation of the more general theoretical framework. The presupposition of such an effort, however, is that a rigorous account of the theoretical constraints has been elaborated. This will be the objective of this part of the discussion.

(3) *Alternative Solutions*. When there are striking empirical limitations with the prevailing conceptual maps of a theory, a variety of alternative new concepts will generally be proposed. The process of concept formation is usually at the same time a process of concept adjudication and there are often a number of contending alternatives. To understand the specificity of the new concept I proposed, it is important to understand the nature of the available alternatives.

(4) *Building a New Concept*. Conceptual innovations do not usually spring full-blown into the heads of theorists, but are built up through a series of partial modifications and reformulations. While it would be too tedious to describe all the steps of this process for the concept of contradictory locations within class relations, I will reconstruct the principal stages of the concept's formation and transformation.

(5) *Unresolved Issues*. The concept of contradictory locations generated a new set of problems. There remained unresolved issues, tensions with various aspects of the general theory of class, internal weaknesses within the concept, and empirical anomalies. Ultimately these problems became substantial enough to provoke a new process of concept formation which fundamentally transformed the concept of contradictory locations within class relations itself. This new framework will be explored in the next chapter.

The Empirical Setting

I did not initially engage the problem of the 'middle class' as a general conceptual difficulty in Marxist theory. Rather, my first encounter with the issue occurred in the context of the practical problems of conducting a statistical study of income determination within a Marxist framework. Empirical research on stratification has been at the very core of American sociology, and as a graduate student I thought that it would be a good idea to bring the general Marxist critique of sociology to bear on this body of research. In particular, I wanted to do more than simply present theoretical arguments for the superficiality of 'status attainment' research; I wanted to develop an empirical critique of it as well. To do this I began a series of empirical studies, at first with the collaboration of

Luca Perrone, which investigated the relationship between class and income inequality.⁹

This is not the place to discuss the substance, the strategy or conclusions of this research. The important point here is that to launch this kind of empirical study we immediately faced the problem of how to categorize people with respect to class. From a practical point of view this was a problem of taxonomy: how to pigeon-hole cases so that a statistical study of the relationship between class and income could proceed. But of course the taxonomic problem was really a conceptual one. How should we deal with the numerous cases of people who did not really seem to be either bourgeois or proletarian?

These diverse positions are colloquially referred to as the 'middle class', but this designation hardly solves the conceptual difficulties. The problem of concept-formation which we faced, therefore, was how to generate a class concept for concrete analysis which adequately maps these locations while at the same time preserving the general assumptions and framework of Marxist class analysis. How can we, in other words, transform the ideological category 'middle class' into a scientific concept?

Once we began to explore the issues it became clear that the problem of the middle class impinged on a wide range of empirical problems within Marxism. Even in contexts where the 'middle class' was not itself an object of investigation, the conceptual problem was often present, since to define the working class is, at least in part, to specify the conceptual line of demarcation with the 'middle class'. What began as a problem of how to conduct a statistical investigation, soon escalated into a general theoretical problem of how to conceptualize class relations in capitalist society.

As we will see, a number of solutions to this problem have been proposed by Marxists, including the claim that it is not a problem at all and that the simple polarization concept is correct for concrete as well as abstract analyses of capitalism. But before we can examine these alternatives, it is necessary to specify the general theoretical constraints that the requisite concepts must respect.

Theoretical Constraints

One of the pivotal problems in any process of systematic concept formation is knowing what the theoretical constraints on the pro-

cess are. In the case of the concept of class, there is hardly a consensus among Marxists as to what constitutes the general Marxist theory of class relations, and depending upon how the constraints within that general theory are characterized, the range of possible solutions to the transformation of a specific concept of class will be different. A great deal potentially hinges, therefore, on precisely how those constraints are specified.

The specification of the characteristics of the general concept of class which I will propose cannot be taken either as an authoritative reading of the texts of classical Marxism or as an account of some implicit majority position among Marxists. While I do feel that the theoretical conditions elaborated below are consistent with Marx's general usage and the underlying logic of many contemporary Marxist discussions, I will make no attempt to validate this claim. At a minimum, these characteristics are central elements within Marxist debates on the concept of class, even if they are not exhaustive or uncontentious.

The task at hand, then, is to specify the constraints imposed by the *abstract* theory of classes in Marxism on the process of producing more *concrete* concepts, in this case a concrete concept capable of dealing with 'middle classes' in contemporary capitalism. Two general types of constraints are especially important: (1) constraints imposed by the *explanatory role* of the concept of class within the Marxist theory of society and history; and (2) constraints imposed by the *structural properties* of the abstract concept of class which enable it to fulfil this explanatory role in the general theory.

THE EXPLANATORY AGENDA

The concept of class figures as an explanatory principle, in one way or another, in virtually all substantive problems addressed within Marxist theory. Two clusters of explanatory claims for the concept of class, however, are the most important: one revolving around the inter-connections among class structure, class formation, class consciousness and class struggle, and a second revolving around the relationship between class and the epochal transformation of societies. Let us look at each of these in turn.

CONCEPTUAL CONSTRAINT 1: Class structure imposes limits on class formation, class consciousness and class struggle. This statement implies neither that these four sub-concepts within the

general concept of class are definable independently of each other nor that they only have 'external' or 'contingent' inter-relationships. It simply means that classes have a structural existence which is irreducible to the kinds of collective organizations which develop historically (class formations), the class ideologies held by individuals and organizations (class consciousness) or the forms of conflict engaged in by individuals as class members or by class organizations (class struggle), and that such class structures impose basic constraints on these other elements in the concept of class.

This is not an uncontentious issue. E. P. Thompson, for example, has argued that the structural existence of classes is largely irrelevant outside the lived experiences of actors. While he does not go so far as to reject the concept of class structure altogether, he certainly marginalizes it within his elaboration of class.¹⁰ Most Marxists, however, implicitly or explicitly incorporate such distinctions within their class analysis. In general, when they do so, class structure is viewed in one way or another as the 'basic' determinant of the other three elements, at least in the sense of setting the limits of possible variation of class formation, class consciousness and class struggle.

The rationale behind this kind of claim revolves around the concept of class 'interests' and class 'capacities'. The argument is basically as follows. Whatever else the concept of 'interests' might mean, it surely includes the access to resources necessary to accomplish various kinds of goals or objectives. People certainly have an 'objective interest' in increasing their capacity to act. The argument that the class structure imposes the basic limits on class formation, class consciousness and class struggle is essentially a claim that it constitutes the basic mechanism for distributing access to resources in a society, and thus distributing capacities to act. Class consciousness, in these terms, is above all, the conscious understanding of these mechanisms: the realization by subordinate classes that it is necessary to transform the class structure if there are to be any basic changes in their capacities to act, and the realization by dominant classes that the reproduction of their power depends upon the reproduction of the class structure. Class formation, on the other hand, is the process by which individual capacities are organizationally linked together in order to generate a collective capacity to act, a capacity which can potentially be directed at the class structure itself. Given that the class structure defines the access of these individuals to the pivotal resources that have the potential to be mobilized collectively, it imposes the

basic limits on the possibilities for the formation of such collectively organized capacities.

Two points must be added to this characterization of the explanatory role of class structure to avoid misunderstanding. First, the claim that class structure limits class consciousness and class formation is not equivalent to the claim that it alone determines them. Other mechanisms (race, ethnicity, gender, legal institutions, etc.) operate within the limits established by the class structure, and it could well be the case that the *politically* significant explanations for variation in class formation or consciousness are embedded in these non-class mechanisms rather than in the class structure itself. There is no reason to insist, for example, that the most important determinant of variations *across* capitalist countries in the process of class formation and consciousness lies in variations in their class structures (although this could be the case); it is entirely possible that variations in institutional, racial, ethnic or other kinds of mechanisms may be more significant. What is argued, however, is that these non-class mechanisms operate within limits imposed by the class structure itself.

Second, the above characterization does not provide an account of precisely how class structure imposes these limits. In the case of the class consciousness argument, this would require an analysis of cognitive structures and social psychology, basically an analysis of the psychological process by which people come to understand the social determination of their capacities and options. My assumption is that however these psychological mechanisms operate, the real social mechanisms operating in the world which shape the objective capacities available to people impose the basic limits on how people will view those capacities. In the case of class formation, the full elaboration of the effects of class structure would require an analysis of the organizational dynamics by which individual capacities to act, as determined by class location, become mobilized into collective forms of class practice.¹¹ Again, the assumption is that whatever this process is, it is limited by the form of class relations which distributes the basic access to the resources in question.

The interconnections among these four constituent elements in the concept of class can be formalized within what I have elsewhere called a 'model of determination'.¹² Such a model specifies the particular forms of determination between elements. In the present context, three of these are particularly important: *limitation* in which one element imposes limits of possible variation on

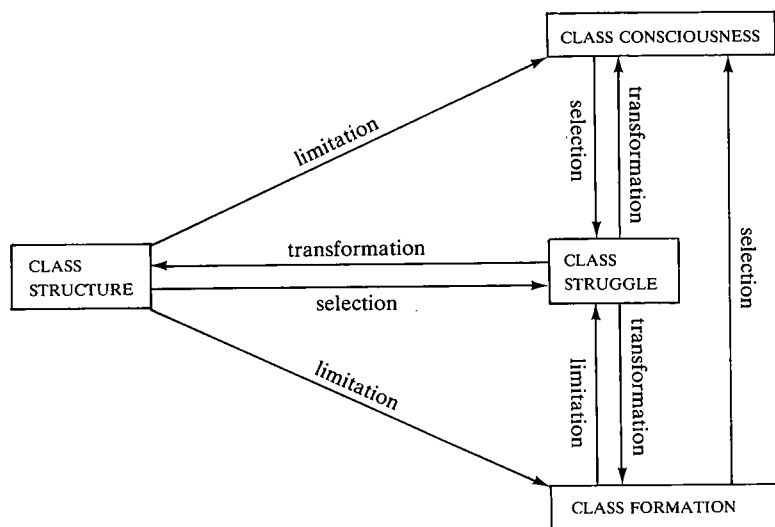


FIGURE 2.1
Model of Determination Linking Class Structure, Class Formation,
Class Consciousness and Class Struggle

another; *selection*, in which one element imposes narrower limits of variation on another element within a range of already established broader limits; and *transformation* in which a practice by social actors (individuals and organizations of various sorts) transforms a given element within the constraints of limitations and selections.

Using these terms, one possible specification of the relationship between class structure, class formation, class consciousness and class struggle is illustrated in Figure 2.1. Class struggle provides the basic transformative principle within this model of determination. Consciousness, class formation and class structures are all objects of class struggle and are transformed in the course of class struggles. Such transformations, however, are constrained structurally. In the most direct way, class struggles are limited by the forms of class organization (class formations), which are themselves limited by the existing class structure.

While the details of this model of determination may be contested, I think that the central thrust of the model generally conforms to

the logic of the Marxist theory of class. This means that any attempt at forming a new concept for mapping the concrete class structure of capitalist societies must be able to fit into this model (or a closely related one). The new concept must be capable of designating a basic structural determinant of class formation, class consciousness and class struggle. As we shall see, one of the bases for my critique of some of the proposed new concepts for dealing with the 'middle class' (eg. Poulantzas's concept of productive/unproductive labour) is that they cannot function effectively within such models.

CONCEPTUAL CONSTRAINT 2: Class structures constitute the essential qualitative lines of social demarcation in the historical trajectories of social change. Not only should class structures be viewed as setting the basic limits of possibility on class formation, class consciousness and class struggle, but they also constitute the most fundamental social determinant of limits of possibility for other aspects of social structure. Class structures constitute the central organizing principles of societies in the sense of shaping the range of possible variations of the state, ethnic relations, gender relations, etc., and thus historical epochs can best be identified by their predominant class structures.

Several points of clarification on this theoretical claim are needed. First, the thesis as formulated is agnostic on the issue of 'technological determinism'. Many Marxists would add the additional claim that the range of possible class structures is fundamentally limited by the level of development of the forces of production. This is at the heart of the classical argument of the 'dialectic' of forces and relations of production. But even within the classical argument, the crucial historical line of social demarcation remains class relations.¹³

Secondly, although in classical historical materialism this thesis typically takes the form of a functionalist account of the relationship of 'superstructures' to 'bases', such class functionalism is unnecessary. The functional argument not only says that class relations impose limits of possibility on other social relations, but that the specific form of those relations are explained by their functional relation to classes. Thus, for example, the form of the state is often explained by the functions it fulfils for the reproduction of class relations. The primacy of class, however, can be maintained without such explanations. It is sufficient to argue that the class structure constitutes the central mechanism by which various sorts

of resources are appropriated and distributed, therefore determining the underlying capacities to act of various social actors. Class structures are the central determinant of social power. Consequently, they may determine what kinds of social changes are possible, even if they do not functionally determine the specific form of every institution of the society.¹⁴ Of course, as a result of such power (capacities to act) institutional arrangements may tend to become 'functional' for the reproduction of class relations, but that is a consequence of struggles rooted in such class relations; it is not spontaneously or automatically caused by the class structures themselves.¹⁵

Third, I am not arguing that class structures define a unique path of social development. Rather, the claim is that class structures constitute the lines of demarcation in trajectories of social change. There is no teleological implication that there is a 'final destination' towards which all social change inexorably moves. There may be multiple futures to a given society, forks in the road leading in different directions.¹⁶ The argument here is simply that along such a road, the critical junctures are specified by changes in the class structures.

Finally, to say that class defines the pivotal lines of demarcation is not to say that all other social relations are uniquely determined by class relations. While class relations may establish limits on possible variations, within those limits quite autonomous mechanisms may be operating. And in specific cases it is even possible that the most crucial forms of variation in a given relation are all contained within a given set of class limits. A case can be made, for example, that in advanced capitalism, the destruction of institutionalized forms of male domination falls within the limits of possibility determined by the class structure. The persistence of such domination and the specific forms that it takes, therefore, cannot be explained by class relations as such, but rather are to be explained by mechanisms directly rooted in gender relations.¹⁷

The claim that class structures define the qualitative lines of demarcation in trajectories of social change is, typically, combined with a closely related proposition—namely, that class struggles are the central mechanism for moving from one class structure to another. If the map of history is defined by class structures the motor of history is class struggle.

There are three basic ways in which class struggle has been defined: by the nature of the *agents* in conflicts, by the *objectives* of conflict, by the *effects* of conflict. Agency definitions of class con-

flict insist that for a given conflict to count as 'class struggle', the actors involved must be class actors (either individuals in given classes or organizations representing given classes) and the lines of opposition in the conflict must be class lines. Thus, for example, conflict between religious groups, even if they produce class-pertinent effects would not normally count as a 'class struggle', unless the opposing religious groups were also classes (or at least plausible 'representatives' of classes). Objectives definitions, on the other hand, argue that to count as class struggles the balance of power or distribution of resources between classes must be a conscious objective of the struggle. It is not enough that the protagonists be collective organizations representing classes; they must be consciously contesting over class issues. Finally, effects definitions argue that any conflict, regardless of objectives or actors, which has systematic effects on class relations should count as a 'class struggle'.

The first of these definitions seems to me to be the most fruitful theoretically. With effects definitions the proposition that class struggle explains trajectories of historical change comes perilously close to being a tautology: if trajectories are defined by changes in class structures, and class struggles are defined as struggles which have effects on class structures, then it is almost a trivial conclusion that class struggles explain trajectories of historical change.¹⁸ Objectives definitions of class struggle, on the other hand, have the danger of reducing class struggles to the relatively rare historical instances in which highly class conscious actors engage in struggle. Whereas effects definitions include too much in the concept of class struggle, thus reducing its substantive meaning, objectives definitions tend to restrict the concept too much, thus reducing its plausibility as an explanation of historical trajectories of change.

The definition of class struggle in terms of the class nature of the protagonists in conflicts, therefore, seems to be the most satisfactory. This means, on the one hand, that various kinds of non-class struggles may have class effects without thereby being considered class struggles, and, on the other, that class struggles are not restricted to cases where the actors are self-consciously struggling over questions of class power. The thesis that class struggle is the 'motor' of history, then, means that it is conflict between actors defined by their location within class structures which explains the qualitative transformations that demarcate epochal trajectories of social change.

As a trans-historical generalization, this proposition has come

under a great deal of criticism, both by non-Marxists and Marxists. Still, I think that it is fair to say that the thesis that class struggle constitutes the basic mechanism for movement between forms of society remains a broadly held view among Marxists, and, in spite of uncertainties, it is generally thought to be one of the hallmarks of the Marxist concept of class. I will therefore continue to treat it as a theoretical constraint on the process of formation of specific class concepts within Marxist theory.

STRUCTURAL PROPERTIES OF THE CONCEPT OF CLASS

As an abstract concept, the Marxist concept of class is built around four basic structural properties: classes are *relational*; those relations are *antagonistic*; those antagonisms are rooted in *exploitation*; and exploitation is based on the social relations of *production*. Each of these properties can be considered additional conceptual constraints imposed on the process of concept formation of concrete class concepts.

CONCEPTUAL CONSTRAINT 3. *The concept of class is a relational concept.* To say that class is a relational concept is to say that classes are always defined within social relations, in particular in relation to other classes. Just as the positions 'parent' and 'child' have meaning only within the social relationship which binds them together—unlike 'old' and 'young', which can be defined strictly in terms of individual attributes of age—classes are definable only in terms of their relations to other classes.¹⁹ The names of classes, therefore, are derived from the relations within which they are located: lords and serfs within feudal class relations; bourgeoisie and proletarians within capitalist class relations. Such relational concepts of class are to be contrasted with purely *gradational* concepts of class.²⁰ In gradational notions of class, classes differ by the quantitative degree of some attribute (income, status, education, etc.) and not by their location within a determinate relation. Thus the names of classes within gradational approaches have a strictly quantitative character: upper class, upper middle class, middle class, lower middle class, lower class, and so on. Of course, relationally defined classes also have gradational properties—capitalists are rich, workers are poor—but it is not these distributional properties as such which define them as classes.

Marxists are committed to relational notions of class for three

basic reasons. First of all, if class structures are meant to explain class formation and class struggle, then relational notions are clearly preferable to gradational ones. It takes opposing groups to have social conflicts, and such opposition implies that the groups are in some kind of social relation to each other. The premiss of relational definitions of the underlying class structure is that a relational specification of the positions which become formed into contending groups has more explanatory power for such formations than a non-relational specification. 'Upper' and 'lower' classes have no necessary relation to each other and therefore this gradational distinction does not, of itself, give any explanatory leverage for understanding the generation of real social conflicts. Now it may happen in a particular society that the positions designated as 'upper class' in a gradational approach in fact do have some sort of determinate social relation to the positions designated 'lower class', and thus a structural basis for the formation of opposing groups in conflict between upper and lower classes would exist. But in such a case it is still the social relation which defines the line of cleavage, not the sheer fact of the gradational distinction.

Second, only a relational concept of class is capable of satisfying the second constraint specified above. Of course, one could construct typologies of societies within a gradational framework: in some societies there is a big middle class, in others the class structure looks like a pyramid, in others it might look like an hour glass. For some purposes, such distribution-based typologies might be of considerable interest. But they cannot plausibly form the basis for lines of demarcation in historical trajectories of social change and thus serve as the basis for a theory of history.²¹

The third reason for adopting relational definitions of class structures is that Marxists generally contend that such class relations are capable of explaining the essential features of gradational inequalities (distributional inequalities). Income inequality, which is usually the core axis of gradational definitions of class, is fundamentally explained, Marxists argue, by the structure of certain social relations, in particular by the social relations of production. Defining classes in terms of social relations, therefore, identifies the concept with a more fundamental structure of social determination than distributional outcomes.

CONCEPTUAL CONSTRAINT 4: *The social relations which define classes are intrinsically antagonistic rather than symmetrical.* 'Antagonistic' means that the relations which define classes intrin-

sically generate opposing interests, in the sense that the realization of the interests of one class necessarily implies the struggle against the realization of the interests of another class. This does not imply that a 'compromise' between antagonistic interests is never possible, but simply that such compromises must entail realizing some interests *against* the interests of another class. What is impossible is not compromise, but harmony.

CONCEPTUAL CONSTRAINT 5: The objective basis of these antagonistic interests is exploitation. While Marx (and certainly many Marxists) sometimes describe class relations in terms of domination or oppression, the most basic determinant of class antagonism is exploitation. Exploitation must be distinguished from simple inequality. To say that feudal lords exploit serfs is to say more than they are rich and serfs are poor; it is to make the claim that there is a causal relationship between the affluence of the lord and the poverty of the serf. The lord is rich because lords are able, by virtue of their class relation to serfs, to appropriate a surplus produced by the serfs.²² Because of this causal link between the wellbeing of one class and the deprivation of another, the antagonism between classes defined by these relations has an 'objective' character.

This is not the place to discuss the knotty philosophical problems with the concept of 'objective interests'. Marx certainly regarded class interests as having an objective status, and the issue here is what it is about those relations that might justify such a claim. The assumption is that people always have an objective interest in their material welfare, where this is defined as the combination of how much they consume and how hard they have to work to get that consumption. There is therefore no assumption that people universally have an objective interest in *increasing* their consumption, but they do have an interest in reducing the toil necessary to obtain whatever level of consumption they desire. An exploitative relation necessarily implies either that some people must toil more so that others can toil less, or that they must consume less at a given level of toil so that others can consume more, or both. In either case people universally have an objective interest in not being exploited materially, since in the absence of exploitation they would toil less and/or consume more.²³ It is because the interests structured by exploitation are objective that we can describe the antagonisms between classes as intrinsic rather than contingent.

CONCEPTUAL CONSTRAINT 6: The fundamental basis of exploitation is to be found in the social relations of production. While all Marxists see exploitation as rooted in the social organization of production, there is no agreement among them as to how the 'social relations of production' should be defined, or about what aspects of those relations are most essential for defining classes. Much of the recent Marxist debate over the concept of class can be interpreted as a debate over how classes should be specified within the general notion of production relations. Poulantzas, for example, has emphasized the importance of the political and ideological dimensions of production relations in the definition of classes; Roemer has argued that classes should be defined strictly in terms of the property relations aspects of production relations; I have argued that classes are defined by various relations of control within the process of production. In all of these cases, however, class is defined as a production-centred relational concept.

These six constraints imposed by the general Marxist theory of class constitute the conceptual framework within which the attempt at transforming the ideological concept 'middle class' into a theoretical concept will occur. This attempt may fail, in which case the more complex problem of rethinking or transforming some of these basic presuppositions may be necessary. But to begin with, I will take these elements as fixed and use them to try to produce the needed concept.

Alternative Solutions

The gap between the simple class map of capitalism consisting solely of a bourgeoisie and a proletariat and the concrete empirical observations of actual capitalist societies has been apparent to Marxists for a long time. As a result, considerable attention has been paid in recent years to the problem of theorizing the class character of the 'middle class'. The motivation for these analyses has generally been a realization that a conceptual clarification of the 'middle class' was needed in order properly to specify the working class. Such a clarification involves two essential tasks: first, establishing the conceptual criteria by which the working class is distinguished from non-working class wage earners, and second, establishing the conceptual status of those wage-earner

locations that are excluded from the working class on these criteria.

Four alternative types of solutions to the problem dominated most discussions at the time I began work on the concept of class: (1) The gap between the polarized concept and reality is only apparent. Capitalist societies really are polarized. (2) Non-proletarian, non-bourgeois positions constitute part of the petty bourgeoisie (and sometimes less rigorously as the 'new petty bourgeoisie' and sometimes less rigorously as the 'new middle class'). (3) Non-proletarian, non-bourgeois locations constitute a historically new class sometimes referred to as the 'professional-managerial class' and sometimes simply as the 'new class'.²⁴ (4) Non-proletarian, non-bourgeois positions should be referred to simply as 'middle strata', social positions that are not really 'in' any class. Since I have discussed these alternatives thoroughly elsewhere, I will not provide an extended exegesis here.²⁵ What I will try to do is to explain briefly the central logic of each position and indicate some of the problems with respect to the constraints in the general concept of class.

SIMPLE POLARIZATION

The simplest response to the emergence of social positions in capitalist societies which appear to fall neither into the working class nor the capitalist class is to argue that this is simply 'appearance'; that the 'essence' is that nearly all of these new positions are really part of the working class. At most, professional and managerial wage-earners constitute a privileged stratum of the proletariat, but their existence or expansion does not require any modification of the basic class map of capitalism.²⁶

The rationale behind this claim is that managers and professional employees, like all other workers, do not own their means of production and must therefore sell their labour power in order to live. This, it is argued, is sufficient to demonstrate that they are capitalistically exploited, and that in turn is sufficient to define them as workers. Except for top executives in corporations who actually become part owners through stock options and the like, all wage-earners are therefore part of the working class.

A simple wage-labour criterion for the working class does conform to some of the theoretical criteria laid out above. It is consistent with a general historical typology of class structures distinguishing capitalism from pre-capitalist societies (constraint 2), it is a

relational concept (constraint 3), the relations do have an antagonistic character to them (constraint 4), nearly all wage-earners probably suffer some exploitation (constraint 5) and the basis for the exploitation under question is defined within the social organization of production, although perhaps in a fairly impoverished way (constraint 6). Where this view of the 'middle class' fails dismally is in satisfying the first theoretical constraint. It is hard to see how a definition of the working class as all wage-earners could provide a satisfactory structural basis for explaining class formation, class consciousness and class struggle. It is certainly not the case that 'all things being equal' top managers are generally more likely to side with industrial workers than with the bourgeoisie in class struggles. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine any conceivable circumstances when this would be the case. Drawing the boundary criteria for the working class at wage-earners, therefore, does not create a category which is in any meaningful sense homogeneous with respect to its effects.

The alternatives to simple polarization concepts of class structures usually begin by arguing that the social relations of production cannot be satisfactorily characterized exclusively in terms of the buying and selling of labour power. While the wage-labour exchange is important, various other dimensions of production relations bear on the determination of class relations. Sometimes the political aspect of those relations are emphasized (domination), sometimes the ideological, sometimes both. In any case, once production relations are understood in this way, new solutions to the problem of the 'middle class' are opened up.

THE NEW PETTY BOURGEOISIE

The first systematic solution proposed by Marxists in the recent debates over the conceptual problem at hand is to classify the 'middle class' as part of the petty bourgeoisie. Sometimes the rationale for this placement is that such positions involve 'ownership' of skills or 'human capital', and this places them in a social relation with capital akin to that of the traditional petty bourgeoisie (owners of individual physical means of production). A more common rationale for this solution revolves around the category 'unproductive labour', i.e. wage-labour which does not produce surplus-value (eg. clerks in banks). Such wage-earners, it is argued, in a sense 'live off' the surplus-value produced by productive workers and thus occupy a different position from workers

within the relations of exploitation. Some theorists, most notably Nicos Poulantzas, add various political and ideological criteria to this analysis of unproductive labour, arguing that supervisory labour and 'mental' labor, even when they are productive, are outside of the working class.²⁷ Yet such non-working-class wage-earners are clearly not part of the bourgeoisie because they do not own or even really control the means of production. Poulantzas insists that these positions should be placed in the petty bourgeoisie for two reasons: first, because their ideological predispositions are essentially like those of the petty bourgeoisie (individualism, hostility to the working class, etc.) and secondly, because, like the traditional petty bourgeoisie, the new petty bourgeoisie is caught between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie in class conflicts.

The concept of the 'new petty bourgeoisie' suffers from some of the same problems as the simple polarization stance. It is very hard to see how the diverse categories of unproductive and/or supervisory and mental wage-earners (secretaries, professionals, managers, unproductive manual workers in the state, salespersons, etc.) are in any sense homogeneous with respect to the problem of class formation, class consciousness and class struggle. It is therefore difficult to understand why they should be seen as members of a common class. In many cases unproductive wage-earners have interests which are indistinguishable from industrial workers, or which are at least much closer to the interests of industrial workers than they are to other 'members' of the 'new petty bourgeoisie'.

Furthermore, even if we were to grant that unproductive employees were outside of the working class, their ascription to the petty bourgeoisie violates the sixth criterion of the general concept of class. By no stretch of the concept of social relations of production, can an unproductive employee in a bank and a self-employed baker be seen as occupying the same position within the social relations of production. The concept of the new petty bourgeoisie is therefore unsatisfactory because it both employs a criterion for a class boundary which does not easily conform to the requirements of the first constraint, and because the positions defined by this criterion share none of the salient relational properties of the petty bourgeoisie, thus violating the sixth constraint.

THE NEW CLASS

Dissatisfaction with both the simple polarization and new petty bourgeoisie solutions to the problem of the 'middle class' has led

some Marxists to suggest that these various non-proletarian, non-bourgeois positions constitute a new class in its own right. This new class has been defined in various different ways. Gouldner defines it primarily in terms of its control of 'cultural capital'; Szelenyi and Konrad emphasize the 'teleological' function of intellectuals as the key to their potential class power; Barbara and John Ehrenreich argue that the new class—the 'professional-managerial class' in their analysis—is defined by common positions within the social relations of *reproduction* of capitalist class relations. The various advocates of this view also differ in the extent to which they view this new class as essentially an emergent tendency within capitalism (Szelenyi), a rival to the bourgeoisie itself for class dominance (Gouldner), or simply a new kind of subordinate class within capitalism (Ehrenreichs). All of these views have one critical feature in common: they solve the problem of the 'middle class' by redefining such positions in terms of their relationship to cultural production in one way or another.

This solution to the problem of producing a theoretical outline of the category 'middle class' avoids some of the problems of the other solutions. At least some of the categories included in the 'new class' clearly do have the potential to form organizations for collective action, distinct from both the bourgeoisie and the working class. And a good case can be made that 'new class' positions generate distinctive forms of consciousness. The concept therefore does not seem necessarily at odds with the first criterion of the general concept of class. Furthermore, Gouldner and Szelenyi make the case that the 'new class' is in some way implicated in the distinction between capitalism and 'actually existing socialism'. The concept may therefore conform to the second criterion of the abstract theory of class.

What is much less evident is whether or not the concept is consistent with the fifth and sixth criteria. It is not usually clear how the diverse categories of 'intellectuals' subsumed under the 'new class' rubric share common interests based on exploitation or occupy a common position within the social relations of production. Some of them occupy managerial positions within capitalist firms, directly dominating workers and perhaps even participating in the control of investments. Others are employees in the state and may exercise no control whatsoever over other employees (eg. teachers, nurses). Others may be technical employees within capitalist firms, outside the managerial hierarchy and working on specific problems assigned to them by their superiors. While such diverse positions may have some cultural features in common by

virtue of education or expertise, it is difficult to see them as occupying a common position within production relations, sharing common exploitation interests, and thus constituting a single class by the criteria laid out in the general concept of class.²⁸

MIDDLE STRATA

The final alternative solution is undoubtedly the most popular. Rather than transform any of the specific class concepts, positions which do not seem to fit into the bourgeois–proletarian dichotomy are simply labelled ‘middle strata’. This kind of formulation is encountered frequently in Marxist historiography and in some sociological works as well. At times this solution represents either an agnostic position on where such positions belong in the class structure or a retreat from theoretical precision. But in some cases this formulation is itself a theoretical stance: some positions in the social structure, it is argued, simply do not fall into any class locations at all. Calling them ‘middle strata’ reflects the peculiarities of their social location: they are middle *strata* rather than middle *classes* because they are outside of the basic class relation; they are *middle* strata, rather than some other kind of social category, because in the class struggle they are forced to take sides with either the bourgeoisie or the proletariat. They are in a sense ‘caught in the middle’.

As an interim solution to a conceptual weakness, the use of the term ‘middle strata’ is undoubtedly preferable to some of the problematic solutions we have already discussed. Yet, it is itself misleading in certain important ways. Above all, the view that the categories identified as ‘middle strata’ are generally ‘outside’ of the basic classes of capitalist society is not satisfactory. Many of these positions are directly involved in production, they are directly structured by the relations of domination and exploitation within the production system. Even if the positions do not constitute classes as such, they do have a class character and this is lost by the designation ‘strata’.

Building a New Concept

None of the available alternatives, therefore, seemed adequate. In one way or another they were inconsistent with at least some of the theoretical constraints of the general theory of class. I therefore

attempted yet another strategy for transforming the ‘middle class’ into a coherent class concept.

The starting point for the formation of a new concept for mapping the ‘middle class’ was the observation that all of the other alternatives implicitly share a common thesis, namely, that every position within a class structure falls within one and only one class. It was assumed that there is an isomorphic relationship between the categories of the class structure and the actual locations filled by individuals. Rarely is this assumption made explicit, but it does operate in each of the cases we have examined. In the first solution, all positions are either in the working class, the capitalist class or the traditional petty bourgeoisie; in the second solution, the only change is that the petty bourgeoisie has two segments, old and new; in the third alternative every position not in the traditional classes of capitalism falls into a ‘new class’; and in the final alternative, positions which are not part of the traditional classes are treated as non-class positions—middle strata.

If we drop this assumption, an entirely new kind of solution to the problem of conceptually mapping the ‘middle class’ becomes possible. Instead of regarding all positions as located uniquely within particular classes and thus as having a coherent class character in their own right, we should see some positions as possibly having a multiple class character; they may be in more than one class simultaneously. The class nature of such positions is a derivative one, based as it is on the fundamental classes to which they are attached. Such positions are what I have termed ‘contradictory locations within class relations’.²⁹

A brief note on terminology is needed, since this expression may be confusing. As a number of critics have pointed out, the basic class relation of capitalism is itself ‘contradictory’. Workers in their relationship to capitalists, therefore, should be considered the most ‘contradictory location’. In the original exposition of the concept I stated that the full expression should be something like: ‘contradictory locations within contradictory class relations’, but that the simpler expression ‘contradictory locations’ would be used for convenience. But why should positions which are simultaneously bourgeois and proletarian be viewed as ‘contradictory’ in any sense? The rationale is that the basic class relation of capitalism generates objectively contradictory *interests* for workers and capitalists, interests which are intrinsically (rather than just contingently) opposed to each other. Contradictory locations are contradictory precisely in the sense that they partake of both sides of

these inherently contradictory interests. The characterization of such positions as 'contradictory' therefore does not deny the basic contradiction of capitalist class relations; it is derived from that basic contradiction.

The actual process by which this new concept was formed began as a problem of formally operationalizing class locations within the statistical study of income inequality discussed earlier. We had two pieces of data in that initial project which we used to operationalize classes: (1) whether the individual was self-employed; and (2) whether the individual supervised the labour of others. With two criteria, each of which had two values, we immediately had a little four-fold table.

TABLE 2.1
Initial Typology of Class Structure in the Development of the Concept of Contradictory Class Locations

		SELF-EMPLOYED	
		Yes	No
SUPERVISE THE LABOUR OF OTHERS	Yes	Capitalists	Managers
	No	Petty Bourgeois	Workers

The diagonal cells in the table (upper-left and lower-right) posed no problem: self-employed people who supervised others were capitalists (typically quite small); employees without subordinates were workers. And self-employed without subordinates also fell nicely into a conventional Marxian category: the petty bourgeoisie. But what about the non-self-employed with subordinates? In the first presentations of the research we referred to such managerial positions as having an 'ambiguous' class character, neither fish nor fowl. In a seminar discussion of the conceptual framework, the suggestion was made that this was not quite precise: such positions were really *both* fish and fowl, and therefore they should be seen as internally contradictory rather than ambiguous.³⁰

That shift in labels—from ambiguous locations to contradictory locations—was the crucial step in the development of the new concept. 'Ambiguity' suggests that the problem is taxonomic: some people don't fit the slots properly; 'contradictoriness', on the other hand, suggests that the slots themselves have a complex

character that can be identified as internally contradictory and given a positive theoretical status.

In the earliest formulations of contradictory locations, the only such location discussed was that of managers, a location characterized as simultaneously bourgeois and proletarian. Managers were considered bourgeois in that they had the capacity to tell workers what to do, to punish them for doing their jobs improperly and in various other ways being directly involved in central decisions concerning the process of production; they were proletarian, on the other hand, because they were themselves told what to do and could be fired by their employers and because they were excluded from basic control over the flow of resources into production itself (i.e. they were non-owners of capital assets). In their relation to workers as positions of domination they were in the bourgeoisie; in their relation to capitalists as positions of subordination, they were in the working class.

Two features of this initial construction seemed unsatisfactory. First, the specification of 'managers' as a contradictory location seemed too undifferentiated. Within this category were simple line supervisors and top executives, positions which involved vastly different kinds of control not just 'degrees' of control. Some further elaboration seemed necessary in order to have a more nuanced class map of the contradictory locations of managers. Secondly, there were positions which did not meet the criterion of supervising/controlling the labour of others which did not correspond to an intuitive idea of the working class. A wide range of technical and professional jobs, both in the capitalist firms and the state, are usually viewed as 'middle class' but do not involve supervision.

In this context I re-read a number of theoretical works by followers of Althusser which deal with problems of class analysis, particularly Balibar's essay 'The Basic Concepts of Historical Materialism' and Poulantzas's books, *Political Power and Social Classes* and *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism*.³¹ Although not designed to be used in quite this way, Balibar's discussion of the distinction between 'ownership' and 'possession' of the means of production proved particularly helpful in furthering the elaboration of the concept of contradictory locations. Balibar used this distinction as a way of specifying the core differences between different modes of production, but in the context of my attempts at refining contradictory locations, the distinction suggested a way of differentiating categories within the general managerial contradic-

tory location. In my use of Balibar's distinction, I defined 'ownership' as real control over investments (the flow of financial resources into and out of production); 'possession', on the other hand, referred to control over the actual operation of the means of production. Such control, I argued, could itself be broken down into two dimensions: control over the physical means of production as such, and control over labour within production (authority or supervision).

Capitalists could now be defined as positions of control over investments, the physical means of production and labour; workers were positions excluded from all three kinds of control. Various kinds of managers could then be specified, depending upon the specific combinations of these three criteria.

On further reflection, however, this extension of the initial criteria still did not go far enough. Clearly, with respect to each of the 'resources' in the three dimensions of control—money, physical means of production, labour—it was not true that a position either did or did not involve control. Because different positions were structured into a complex hierarchy of domination relations, they also involved different 'amounts' of control. Some supervisors could only issue warnings to subordinates; others could fire subordinates; and still others could control the authority hierarchy as such, not just their immediate subordinates. Some managers made decisions only on the day-to-day operation of production processes; others were involved in basic decisions on the kinds of technology to use. To map the texture of the contradictory location between capital and labour properly, some account of such 'levels' of control was needed.³²

This led to the much more complex formalization of the class criteria that appeared in the theoretical essay that publicly introduced the concept 'contradictory locations'.³³ There were three criteria or dimensions of class relations—relations of control over money capital, physical capital and labour—and several 'levels' of control within each of these relations—full, partial, minimal and none. Workers and capitalists were defined by perfect polarization along all three of these dimensions; managers ranged from having full or partial control over some, but not all, of the dimensions (top executives) to having no control over money capital and physical capital and only partial or minimal control over labour (foremen and line supervisors).

This elaboration of the formal criteria for contradictory locations also provided the initial solution to the second general prob-

lem with the first formulation—namely, the specification of the class character of non-managerial technical and professional jobs. Whereas managers were characterized as simultaneously bourgeois and proletarian, such technical/professional positions were generally characterized as simultaneously petty-bourgeois and proletarian: they were proletarian in that they were separated from the means of production, had to sell their labour power for a wage and were controlled by capital within production; but they were petty-bourgeois because, I argued, they had real control over their own immediate labour process within production.

How should such real control over the immediate labour process be formally specified? In the early formulations I moved back and forth between three different specifications: (1) Control over one's immediate labour process should be considered a minimal level of control over *labour*, the third dimension of class relations (i.e. control over one's own labour); (2) It should be considered a minimal level of control over one's own *physical means of production* (i.e. control over how one does one's job); (3) It should be considered a minimal level of control over *investments* (i.e. control over what one produces, not just how one produces).³⁴ None of these seemed entirely satisfactory, but I finally settled for seeing effective control over one's labour process as control over what one produces and how one produces it, but exclusion from control over what other people produce and how they produce it. This seemed to characterize the situation of research scientists, some designers, teachers and a variety of other technical and professional positions. For want of a better name, such positions were referred to as 'semi-autonomous class locations'.

One final contradictory location remained to be specified, the one which combined bourgeois and petty-bourgeois classes. This location I identified with small employers: positions within which the owner of the means of production was simultaneously a self-employed direct producer (and thus in the petty bourgeoisie) and an employer of wage-labour (and thus in the capitalist class).

The result of these elaborations was the 'class map' illustrated in figure 2.2. While I subsequently made various modifications in this picture—adding a position called 'non-managerial technocrats' between managers and semi-autonomous employees and adding 'franchise operators' between small employers and managers—this diagram remained the basic representation of the reformulated concept of class structure which I proposed.³⁵

This was as far as the development of the concept of contradictory

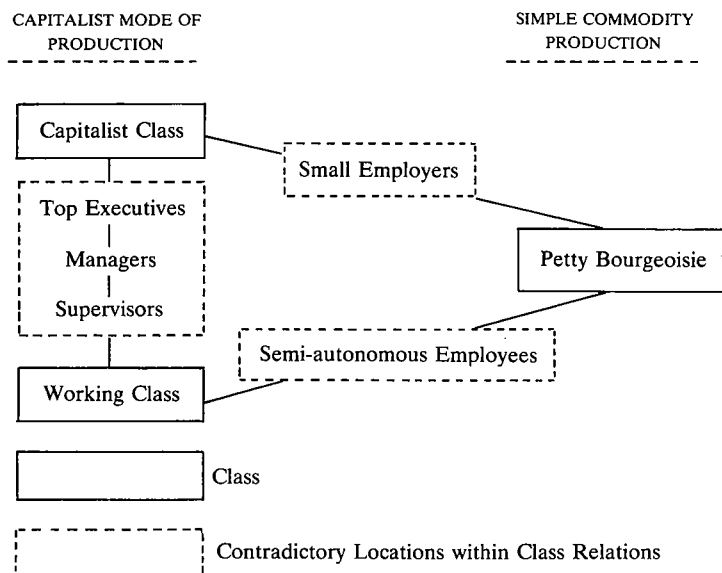


FIGURE 2.2
Basic Class Map of Capitalist Society

locations had gone by 1979. At that time I embarked on a large empirical project on class structure, class experience and class consciousness. The heart of the research involved developing a survey questionnaire which operationalized the class criteria in my proposed class map of advanced capitalist societies together with a wide range of other variables (measuring alternative concepts of class, class consciousness, class biographies, gender attitudes, and other things). This questionnaire was then given to random samples of the working population of a number of advanced capitalist societies.³⁶ At the end of all of my previously published empirical work I had always bemoaned the fact that the data used in my statistical investigations had been gathered by bourgeois sociologists and economists, using non-Marxist categories. While this provided me with a convenient excuse for problems in my own analyses, I felt that it would be useful to generate a substantial body of statistical data explicitly gathered within a Marxist framework.

Once I began the task of trying to formulate specific questions to

operationalize my proposed class concepts, it became very clear that in certain important ways they remained vague or incomplete. In particular, the 'semi-autonomous employee' location was impossible to operationalize in a rigorous manner. This practical difficulty stimulated a rethinking of the logic of this category.

The rethinking of the category 'semi-autonomous employees' coincided with my initial work on a paper on post-capitalist societies, eventually published as 'Capitalism's Futures'.³⁷ At the heart of the analysis of that paper was a discussion of what I termed the 'inter-penetration' of modes of production, i.e. forms of production relations which combine aspects from distinct modes of production in a systematic way. This concept was important for rigorously specifying the tendencies towards post-capitalist societies generated within capitalism itself.

The concept of interpenetration of distinct relations of production also had a bearing on the persistent problem of properly defining semi-autonomous employees. In all of the earlier work I had specified a set of criteria for class relations and then defined particular class locations and contradictory locations by their values on this *common* set of criteria. But if certain classes are defined by *different* types of production relations (modes of production), then different criteria are clearly needed. Feudal serfs, for example, could not be defined by values based on capitalist criteria. A criterion specifying relations of personal bondage would be needed, a criterion which is absent from the specification of any class in the capitalist mode of production.

In other words, the global concept of 'contradictory locations within class relations' needed to be formally differentiated into two distinct sub-concepts: contradictory locations within a mode of production, and contradictory locations between modes of production.³⁸ In the former case, contradictory locations can be specified within a single set of criteria; in the latter, the contradictory character of the location requires two distinct sets of criteria, each rooted in different production relations.

This re-conceptualization meant that to define properly the category of semi-autonomous employees we had to specify the appropriate criteria for the petty bourgeoisie, i.e. for the class determined within simple commodity production. The necessary clarification to accomplish this task came out of my debate with John Roemer over the role of domination in the concept of classes.³⁹ As a result of that debate I was convinced that the central defining criterion for the social relations of production, which in

TABLE 2.2
Developed typology of Class Structure

	Capitalist Mode of Production			Simple Commodity Production		
	Dominant	Subordinate	Appropriation	Domination	Appropriation	
	Dominant	Subordinate	exploiter exploited	self-direction within the labour process	individual self-appropriation of surplus	
<i>Bourgeoisie</i>	+	-	+	-	-	-
Top managers	+	+	+	+	+	+
Lower managers and supervisors	+	-	-	+	+	+
<i>Workers</i>	-	-	+	+	+	+
Semi-autonomous Employees	-	-	-	+	+	-
<i>Petty Bourgeoisie</i>						
Small Employers	+	+	-	+	+	+

Bourgeoisie: Basic Class Location
Top managers: Contradictory Locations within Class Relations
+ = criterion present
- = criterion absent

turn provides the basis for defining classes was the unity of appropriation relations and domination relations.⁴⁰ This led to a simplification of my original criteria for capitalist class relations from three to two. I now felt that control over the operation of the physical means of production and direct control over work should be treated as two alternative mechanisms of domination of workers, rather than two dimensions of class relations with equivalent conceptual status to control over investments. Classes, and accordingly contradictory locations, are therefore to be defined by their position within particular types of appropriation and domination relations.

In these terms, the problem became one of specifying appropriation and domination relations within simple commodity production. I took the appropriation relations to be unproblematic, defined by individual appropriation of the product of one's own labour (i.e. self-employment).⁴¹ Domination relations within simple commodity production were, in a parallel manner, defined as self-control, (i.e. the individual self-direction within the labour process). Such 'self-direction' in operational terms was the ability to put one's own ideas into practice within work, or in traditional Marxian language, the 'unity of conception and execution'.⁴²

This meant that semi-autonomous employees were now defined as positions which did not involve self-appropriation of the product of labour (i.e. they were capitalistically exploited) but did involve self-direction within work (i.e. they were not capitalistically dominated in that they retained an effective unity of conception and execution). It was still a difficult task to operationalize this criterion but the concept had more precision than earlier versions had.

These modifications lead to the final version of the class typology of contradictory locations represented in Table 2.2. This is a long way from the initial, simple four-fold table which began the story of contradictory locations. And, as we shall see, there were sufficient remaining problems with the conceptual framework that eventually I became convinced that it in turn needed to be superseded.

Problems With the Conceptualization

The concept of contradictory locations within class relations was, I believe, an advance over the alternative ways of dealing with the problem of the 'middle class' in advanced capitalist societies. Both

in terms of the explanatory agenda for the concept of class and in terms of the abstract structural properties of the concept, it fared better than its rivals. Yet, from the start there were problems. Some of these were apparent quite early; others became clear only in the course of the development and use of the concept, particularly in the context of my empirical investigations. Four of these problems were particularly significant: the claim that contradictory locations are contradictory; the status of 'autonomy' as a criterion for class; the relevance of the concept of contradictory locations for post-capitalist societies; the marginalization of the concept of exploitation in the concept of class.

(1) *The Contradictoriness of Contradictory Locations.* From the first publication using the concept of contradictory locations, the use of the term 'contradiction' has been criticized.⁴³ In the case of managers a plausible story can be told. If we accept the characterization of managerial positions as combining relational properties of proletarian and bourgeois class locations, and if we accept the general Marxist thesis that the objective interests of workers and capitalists are intrinsically antagonistic, then at a minimum it makes sense to describe the interests of managers as internally inconsistent. Because of the systematic character of this inconsistency, it would not be unreasonable to characterize it as contradictory as well.

But why in the world should semi-autonomous employees be viewed as having internally inconsistent interests? To say that semi-autonomous employees have contradictory (rather than simply heterogeneous) interests is to imply that the proletarian pole of their class location generates interests that contradict those generated by the petty-bourgeois pole of their location. Presumably this petty-bourgeois pole defines interests in the preservation of autonomy within the labour process. By virtue of what does autonomy within the labour process define objective interests that contradict working-class interests? The only answer I could provide was to say that workers had interests in the *collective* control over the labour process—collective autonomy if you will—which was opposed to the individualized autonomy of semi-autonomous employees. This, however, was unsatisfactory since collective control over the labour process is not necessarily opposed to significant spheres of individual control over one's own work.

A similar problem exists for the small-employer contradictory location, the location which combines petty-bourgeois and capital-

ist classes. While it may be that small employers have specific immediate interests opposed to large capitalists when those large capitalists compete with them, it is not obvious that they have any fundamental interests that are necessarily opposed.⁴⁴ They may face various kinds of dilemmas in competing successfully in a world of large corporations, but this does not obviously imply that they have internally contradictory basic interests.

What I have called 'contradictory locations within class relations', therefore, may be 'dual', or 'heterogeneous' locations, but except in the case of managers and supervisors, they are not obviously 'contradictory' locations. The term could therefore be retained for what I called contradictory locations *within* modes of production, but seems less appropriate for contradictory locations between modes of production.

(2) *Autonomy as a Class Criterion.* A second problem with the elaboration of contradictory locations centres on the category 'semi-autonomous employees'. Three issues seem especially troubling: the claim that autonomy is a 'petty-bourgeois' property of class relations; the relatively unstable or underdetermined character of autonomy in certain work settings; and empirical anomalies in the use of the concept.

Even if we accept provisionally the idea that autonomy is an aspect of class relations, does it make sense to treat autonomy as having a 'petty-bourgeois' class character? There are both structural and historical objections to this characterization.

Structurally, the characterization of autonomy as 'petty bourgeois' rests largely on what may be a rather romantic image of the petty bourgeoisie as independent direct producers characterized by a 'unity of conception and execution'.⁴⁵ The contrast between independent producers (self-employed artisans, craftspersons, shop-keepers, farmers, etc.) with such autonomy and proletarian wage-labourers without such autonomy may simply be incorrect. On the one hand, for a variety of reasons, self-employed petty-bourgeois producers may have little choice over how they produce or, in some circumstances, even over what they produce. Their options are constrained by markets, by credit institutions, by long-term contracts with capitalist enterprises, and so on. On the other hand, it is easy to exaggerate the extent to which workers in modern capitalist firms are indeed fully separated from 'conception', since in many factory settings the actual operation of production continues to depend heavily on a wide range of accumulated

knowledge on the shop floor, knowledge which must constantly be applied in non-routinized ways.⁴⁶ Such autonomy, therefore, may not have a distinctively 'petty bourgeois' character at all. The only thing which defines the petty bourgeois is ownership of certain kinds of *assets*—land, tools, a few machines, perhaps in some cases 'skills' or credentials—and self-employment, but not work autonomy.⁴⁷

The characterization of work autonomy as petty-bourgeois is also very problematic when looked at historically. The semi-autonomous employee category contains two quite distinct sorts of positions: highly autonomous craft wage-earners, and professional-technical wage-earners. The former could plausibly be considered combinations of petty-bourgeois and proletarian classes, since the independent artisan is an historical antecedent to the modern craft worker. It makes less sense to see a research scientist, a university professor, an industrial engineer or a social welfare counsellor as having a petty-bourgeois character combining elements from the capitalist mode of production and simple commodity production. The kinds of autonomy that occur within contemporary bureaucratically organized institutions cannot be treated as remnants of 'simple commodity production', but this is what is implied by treating semi-autonomous class locations as combinations of proletarian and petty-bourgeois classes.

A second problem with semi-autonomy as a class criterion is what could be called its structural underdetermination. Whether or not a given job is 'semi-autonomous' could easily be a consequence of rather contingent characteristics of the work setting. For example, a research technician could move from a job where the scientist in charge assumed that technicians were incompetent and thus gave them no responsibilities, to a laboratory in which the scientist was lazy and left a great deal of discretion and decision-making up to the technicians. In the second job the technician would probably be classified as semi-autonomous; in the former as proletarianized. Should such a shift in jobs be viewed as a change in the *class* character of the technician-position? Is the former position purely working class while the latter, semi-petty bourgeois? The concept of class is meant to designate fairly stable and structurally determinate properties of locations within the social relations of production. At a minimum, the seemingly contingent character of autonomy in certain jobs is a weakness in the claim that autonomy is a class criterion.⁴⁸

A final problem with autonomy as a class criterion revolves

around a number of empirical anomalies that have emerged in the course of the empirical research involving the concept. For example, if autonomy is defined in terms of control over what one produces and how one produces it, then many janitors in schools who also perform a variety of 'handyman' tasks will end up being more autonomous than airline pilots. Now, one could regard this as a deep discovery about the nature of the class location of pilots, in spite of its apparently counter-intuitive character. It is more plausible that it indicates the problematic status of the claim that autonomy should be viewed as a basic criterion for class.

(3) *Classes in Post-capitalist Societies.* Classical Marxism was absolutely unequivocal about the historical prognosis for capitalism: socialism—and ultimately communism—was the future of capitalist societies. The bearer of that necessary future was the working class. The polarized class structure between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat within capitalism thus paralleled the polarized historical alternatives *between* capitalism and socialism.

The actual historical experience of the twentieth century has called into question, although not unambiguously refuted, this historical vision, and it is thus necessary at least to entertain the possibility of post-capitalist class structures. The difficulty is that with few exceptions, the conceptual frameworks adopted by Marxists for analysing classes in capitalist societies do not contain adequate criteria for systematically understanding post-capitalist classes. Whereas in the analysis of feudal societies, the classes of capitalism appear as emergent classes, there is very little theoretical work which either systematically conceptualizes post-capitalist classes or shows how they emerge within capitalist societies.⁴⁹ The result is a tendency for discussions of postcapitalist class structures—the class structures of 'actually existing socialisms'—to have a very ad hoc character to them.

The concept of contradictory locations within class relations as I had developed it was particularly vulnerable to this criticism. All of the class categories in my analysis were either situated firmly within capitalist relations (bourgeoisie, managers, workers) or in contradictory locations involving relations that were basically pre-capitalist (semi-autonomous employees, the petty bourgeoisie and small employers). What was perhaps even worse, the formal operational criteria used in much of the empirical analysis of classes could be applied to either capitalist or 'actually existing socialist

societies' almost without modification.⁵⁰ There were no elements within this analysis of class relations which could give any real specificity to the class structures of post-capitalist societies or point the direction for the analysis of the emergence of post-capitalist classes within capitalism. Now, it could be argued that this empirical insensitivity of the operational criteria for classes to the differences between West and East reflects the basic similarity of their real class structures, and thus is a strength rather than a weakness. However, since I do not in fact believe that state-socialist societies are 'really' capitalist, this insensitivity remains a significant problem.

(4) *The Shift from Exploitation to Domination.* Throughout the development of the concept of contradictory class locations I insisted that this was a reformulation of a distinctively Marxist class concept. As part of the rhetoric of such an enterprise, I affirmed the relationship between class and exploitation.

Nevertheless, in practice the concept of contradictory locations within class relations rested almost exclusively on relations of *domination* rather than exploitation. Reference to exploitation functioned more as a background concept to the discussion of classes than as a constitutive element of the analysis of class structures. Managers, for example, were basically defined as a contradictory location because they were simultaneously dominators and dominated. Relations of domination were also decisive in defining the class character of 'semi-autonomous employees'—locations which, I argued, were simultaneously petty-bourgeois and proletarian by virtue of their self-direction within the labour process—since 'autonomy' defines a condition with respect to domination. This same tendency to substitute domination for exploitation at the core of the concept of class is found in most other neo-Marxist conceptualizations of class structure.

For some people, of course, marginalizing the concept of exploitation is a virtue, not a sin. My own view, however, is that this is a serious weakness for two reasons. First, the shift to a domination-centred concept of class weakens the link between the analysis of class locations and the analysis of objective interests. The concept of 'domination' does not, in and of itself, imply that the actors have any specific interests. Parents dominate small children, but this does not imply that parents and children have intrinsically opposed interests. What would make those interests antagonistic is if the relation of parents to children were also exploitative. Exploi-

tation intrinsically implies a set of opposing material interests. Second, domination-centred concepts of class tend to slide into the 'multiple oppressions' approach to understanding society. Societies, in this view, are characterized by a plurality of oppressions each of which are rooted in a different form of domination—sexual, racial, national, economic, etc.—none having any explanatory priority over any other. Class, then, becomes just one of many oppressions, with no particular centrality to social and historical analysis.⁵¹ Again, this displacement of class from the centre stage may be viewed as an achievement rather than a problem. However, if one wants to retain the traditional centrality Marxism has accorded to the concept of class, then the domination-centred concept of class does pose real problems.

Of these four conceptual problems—the contradictoriness of contradictory locations, the status of autonomy, the absence of an analysis of postcapitalist societies and the displacement of exploitation by domination in the concept of class—the fourth one seems to me to be the most fundamental. In one way or another, each of the other issues is tied up with marginalization of exploitation.

Given a recognition of this situation, there are two main theoretical alternatives that could be pursued. One possibility is to celebrate the shift to a domination-centred concept and use this new class concept as the basis for analysing both capitalist and post-capitalist society. This would lead class analysis firmly in the direction of Dahrendorf's analysis of classes as positions within authority relations.⁵² A second alternative is to attempt to restore exploitation to the centre of class analysis in such a way that it can both accommodate the empirical complexities of the 'middle class' within capitalism and the historical reality of post-capitalist class structures. I will pursue this second course of action in the next chapter.

Notes

1. The analysis below will not discuss the practical task of producing and transforming concepts, only the logic of engaging in this task. For a brief discussion of a range of practical strategies that can be used in the process of concept formation, see appendix I at the end of this book.

2. All scientific activity also takes place, of course, under social constraints (institutional constraints from the scientific establishment, economic constraints on the freedom of theorists, etc.). While these may be of tremendous importance for

explaining why certain concepts emerge when they do, my concern here is with the methodological issues in the formation of concepts, not the sociological problems of the production of knowledge.

3. The fact that real-world constraints operate through concepts has sometimes led people to treat the constraint imposed by empirical investigation as identical to the constraint imposed by the general theoretical framework, since both operate, in a sense, 'in thought'. This, I think, is a mistake. Even though there is not a one-to-one relationship between the way the world 'really is' and the data of an empirical investigation (since that data is gathered through pre-given concepts), the data is constrained by real mechanisms in the world. If the world were different, the data would be different, just as the data would be different if the concepts were different. This implies that the empirical constraint on concept formation—the constraint imposed by the fact that concepts must directly or indirectly figure in explanations of empirical phenomena—can be viewed as a mediated constraint of the real world itself.

4. As I am using the term, empiricism is not simply the absence of such self-conscious theoretical constraints, but a methodological stance that proscribes the elaboration of such constraints. In the development of most theories there are sub-areas that do not operate under highly systematized, explicit theoretical constraints, where the investigations are undertheorized and largely descriptive. This is only a problem, as opposed to a stage of development, if the procedures adopted within the theory prevent the further development of the theoretical structure.

5. It should be noted that there is no absolute virtue in scientific concepts over other sorts of concepts—aesthetic concepts, moral concepts, theological concepts, etc. Theoreticism and empiricism, defined in the above manner, are sins only with respect to the objective of producing concepts for scientific purposes, i.e. concepts which can figure in explanations of the real world.

6. The disputes in question are therefore not simply terminological debates over how to use *words*. One could decide, for example, that the word 'bureaucracy' was to be used to describe any complex organization. The problem of concept adjudication would then concern the appropriate criteria for defining a 'complex organization', the theoretical object to which the word 'bureaucracy' was to be applied. Alternatively, following Weber's usage, the term bureaucracy could be reserved for a particular kind of complex organization, one organized strictly along principles of formal rationality. The debate would then be over the appropriate criteria for specifying the properties of such an organization.

7. Depending upon the levels of abstraction involved and the scope of theoretical objects being brought into question, such theory adjudication can take place within a single general theory (as in the perennial theoretical debates within Marxism) or between general theories.

8. Dogmatism is sometimes confused with a systematic application of theoretical requirements. Faithfulness to a theoretical structure in the formation of concepts, however, only becomes dogmatic when the theoretical structure is viewed as inviolable.

9. The initial paper from this research was written in 1973 and published in 1977. Erik Olin Wright and Luca Peronne, 'Marxist Class Categories and Income Inequality', *American Sociological Review*, vol. 42, no. 1, February 1977. The research eventually culminated in my dissertation and was published as *Class Structure and Income Determination*, New York 1979.

10. See especially the introduction to E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, Harmondsworth 1968. For a careful critique of Thompson's

rejection of the structural definition of classes, see G. A. Cohen, *Karl Marx's Theory of History: A Defence*, Oxford 1978, pp. 73–77.

11. For an extremely interesting discussion of this problem, see Claus Offe and Helmut Wessenthal, 'Two Logics of Collective Action', in Maurice Zeitlin, ed., *Political Power and Social Theory*, vol. 1, Greenwich, Connecticut 1980.

12. See *Class, Crisis and the State*, pp. 15–29, 102–108, for a discussion of such models of determination.

13. For a defence of the technological determinist version of this constraint, see G. A. Cohen, *Karl Marx's Theory of History*. For a critique of Cohen's position relevant to the present discussion, see Andrew Levine and Erik Olin Wright, 'Rationality and Class Struggle', *New Left Review*, 123, 1980, pp. 47–68.

14. See Erik Olin Wright, 'Giddens's Critique of Marxism', *New Left Review*, 139, 1983, for an elaboration of this argument.

15. In recent years there has been a productive debate among Marxists over this functional form of class reductionism. This debate has been particularly sparked by the discussions around G. A. Cohen's *Karl Marx's Theory of History*, although earlier discussions of 'structuralist' Marxism of the Althusserian school raised many of the same issues of functionalism and functional explanation. For an interesting set of exchanges over these issues, see Jon Elster, 'Marxism, Functionalism and Game Theory', and G. A. Cohen, 'Reply to Elster', *Theory and Society*, vol. 11, no. 3, July 1982. For a useful non-Marxist assessment of Marxian functionalism, see Anthony Giddens, *A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism*, Berkeley California 1982.

16. For a more systematic defence of this thesis, see Erik Olin Wright, 'Capitalism's Futures', *Socialist Review*, no. 18, March–April 1983.

17. Such a claim, however, may still maintain that it is transformations of class relations—the development of advanced forms of capitalist production accompanied by emerging elements of state production—that explains why it is that the elimination of institutionalized forms of male domination has become historically possible (if indeed it has).

18. I say 'almost' trivial, because it is not necessarily the case that any kind of struggle 'explains' trajectories; trajectories of change could be explained by processes other than struggle: cultural diffusion, technical change which does not play itself out through conflict, etc. Still, effect-definitions of class struggle make the theoretical content of the proposition much less substantial than agency or objectives definitions.

19. At first glance it might seem that the use of the term 'class' to describe the petty bourgeoisie (self-employed commodity producers who employ no wage labor) is an exception to this. Even in this case, however, the concept is still basically relational, for the petty bourgeoisie is a class only in so far as petty-bourgeois producers engage in systematic exchange relations with other classes. If *all* producers were in fact petty bourgeois (a situation that has never occurred historically) then they would cease to be a 'class' in the proper sense of the term.

20. The contrast between relational and gradational notions of class was made forcefully in slightly different terms by Stanislaus Ossowski in *Class Structure in the Social Consciousness*, London 1963. For an extended discussion of this distinction which bears directly on the present analysis, see Erik Olin Wright, *Class Structure and Income Determination*, chapter 1.

21. It is noteworthy in this regard that theorists who adopt gradational notions of class structure tend to treat class in an extremely ahistorical manner. All societies have 'upper' and 'lower' classes, and gradational accounts of class tend to treat

these terms as having the same meaning regardless of historically specific features of the society. Thus, for example, Seymour Martin Lipset, in *Political Man*, Garden City, N.J. 1963, p. 311, argues that the relationship between 'status or class position' and party loyalty in the United States has been essentially the same since the late 18th century: in all cases the upper classes tended to support the more conservative party while the lower classes the more 'liberal'. This of course ignores the vast transformation of what kinds of actors were in the 'lower' classes and how this affected the content of what was 'liberal': the proletarianized worker of 1880 and the small farmer of 1800 are in qualitatively different relational classes, and this has systematic consequences for the content of the politics of the two periods and the forms of political conflict, even though both were 'lower' class.

22. See chapter 3 below for a more elaborate discussion of this conceptualization of exploitation. It should be noted that at the time of the development of the concept of contradictory class locations I accepted a much more classic conceptualization of exploitation based directly on the labour theory of value. That is, I saw exploitation as a relationship in which one class appropriated the surplus labour of another, which in capitalism meant appropriating surplus value. While I now prefer the more general characterization of exploitation offered here, the basic arguments in this chapter do not depend upon which characterization of exploitation is adopted.

23. This formulation obviously side-steps a number of difficult issues, in particular the definitions of material well-being and toil. While in the end there may be an irreducibly subjective element in defining the specific content of each of these, nevertheless I believe that there is sufficient continuity of meaning of these terms across contexts that it is reasonable to treat exploitation and the interests structured by exploitation as having an objective status.

24. The expression 'professional-managerial class' (or PMC) was introduced in an influential article in the American Left by Barbara and John Ehrenreich, 'The Professional-Managerial Class', *Radical America*, vol. 11, no. 2, 1971. This article along with a series of critical responses has been reprinted in a book edited by Pat Walker, *Between Capital and Labor*, Boston 1979. The expression 'new class' has a longer pedigree, but most recently has been associated with the writings of Alvin Gouldner and Ivan Szelenyi. See Alvin Gouldner, *The Future of Intellectuals and the Rise of the New Class*, New York 1979, and George Konrad and Ivan Szelenyi, *Intellectuals on the Road to Class Power*, New York 1979; Ivan Szelenyi and Robert Manchin, 'Social Policy and State Socialism', in G. Esping-Anderson, L. Rainwater and M. Rein, eds., *Stagnation and Renewal in Social Policy*, White Plains 1985.

25. See Erik Olin Wright, 'Varieties of Marxist Conceptions of Class Structure', *Politics & Society*, vol. 9, no. 3, 1980.

26. Examples of this position include Carles Loren, *Classes in the United States*, Davis, California 1977; Francesca Freedman, 'The Internal Structure of the Proletariat: a Marxist Analysis', *Socialist Revolution*, no. 26, 1975; and James F. Becker, 'Class Structure and Conflict in the Managerial Phase', *Science & Society*, vol. 37, nos. 3 and 4, 1973 and 1974.

27. See especially *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism*, London 1975. For a detailed exposition and critique of Poulantzas's work on classes, see *Class, Crisis and the State*, chapter two.

28. This may mean that we should abandon these two criteria and allow social relations of reproduction or cultural production to become the basis for specifying certain classes. This would certainly constitute a major reconstruction of the Marx-

ist concept of class, but perhaps it is a necessary reconstruction. In any event, none of the theorists who have advanced the concept of the 'new class' have attempted such a general reconstruction. It should be noted here that the new reformulation of the problem of class elaborated in chapter three below is much more friendly to 'new class' approaches than my original concept of contradictory class locations.

29. G. Carchedi, in his book, *The Economic Identification of Social Classes*, London 1977, developed a similar conceptualization, although he preferred to label such positions 'new middle class' and he treated their class determination as 'ambiguous' rather than calling it 'contradictory'. Nevertheless, the heart of his argument was that such positions were simultaneously bourgeois and proletarian in so far as they fulfilled both the functions of capital and the functions of labour. For a discussion of the differences between Carchedi's conceptualization and my own, see my essay, 'Varieties of Marxist Conceptions of Class Structure', pp. 355-365.

30. The actual suggestion for the shift in label came from the anthropologist Brigit O'Laughlin who then taught at Stanford University. Although it was tossed out in the discussion in the usual off-handed way that comments are made in academic seminars, it immediately sparked off a rapid clarification of the conceptual problem with which I was grappling. I doubt very much if O'Laughlin remembers her comment or is aware of the ramifications which it stimulated, but I remain grateful to her for it.

31. See Etienne Balibar, 'The Basic Concepts of Historical Materialism', in Louis Althusser and Etienne Balibar, *Reading Capital*, London 1970; Nicos Poulantzas, *Political Power and Social Classes*, London 1973 and *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism*, London 1975.

32. The term 'levels' in this context seemed to suggest an emergent gradational notion of class. The argument, however, was that the positions were defined by their location within a complex hierarchy of social relations. As a result of such relations, a given position involved certain capacities for decision-making and control over others. The degree of control was therefore posed as an indicator of a location within a complex pattern of relations.

33. 'Class Boundaries in Advanced Capitalist Societies', *New Left Review*, 98, 1976.

34. In the essay published in *New Left Review* in 1976, I adopted the second formulation; in the revised version appearing in *Class, Crisis and the State* I opted for both the second and the third. The formulation in terms of minimal control over labour was entertained, but never appeared in print.

35. The formal typology which provided the criteria for this class map appears as Tables 2.7, 2.8 and 2.9 in *Class, Crisis and the State*.

36. As of 1984, surveys have been completed in the United States, Finland, Sweden, Norway, Canada, New Zealand and Great Britain, and a regional survey has been completed in South Australia. Future surveys will be conducted in West Germany, Denmark and Australia, and possibly in Japan. The United States data are available from the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. The comparative data will be available from ICPSR in 1986.

37. The first version of 'Capitalism's Futures' was written during the summer of 1979 and presented at a conference at the University of Toronto in December of that year. The revised version of the paper was published in *Socialist Review*, 68, 1983.

38. Two brief terminological points: first, strictly speaking the second type of location is not 'between' modes of production, but combines elements from distinct

modes of production. The spatial metaphor is potentially misleading here, as it is in general in discussions of classes. Second, I am using the expression 'mode of production' non-rigorously here to describe any distinct form of production relations, not simply those forms which can become dominant within a social formation. Most Marxist theorists do not refer to simple commodity production—the production relations within which the petty bourgeoisie is determined—as a 'mode' of production, but simply a 'form' of production. For present purposes this nuance is not important.

39. See John Roemer, *A General Theory of Exploitation and Class*, Cambridge, Massachusetts 1982, and the special issue of the journal *Politics & Society*, vol. 11, no. 3, which deals with Roemer's work.

40. 'Appropriation relations' is a more general term than 'exploitation relations' and refers to the relations within which the social surplus is appropriated. When the surplus is appropriated by one class from another, appropriation relations become exploitation relations.

41. Since self-employed individuals often have part of the product of their labour appropriated by capital through credit relations and other forms of exchange relations, self-employment is obviously insufficient to define self-appropriation.

42. This formulation also owed a great deal to Harry Braverman's *Labor and Monopoly Capital*, New York 1974. Braverman's characterization of traditional artisanal, craft labor as embodying a unity of conception and execution comes very close to saying that such wage-earners are incompletely proletarianized, and thus in a contradictory class location combining petty-bourgeois (independent, self-employed artisanal labor) and proletarian elements.

43. See Stewart, et al., *Social Stratification and Occupations*, London 1980; J. M. Holmwood and A. Stewart, 'The Role of Contradiction in Modern Theories of Social Stratification', *Sociology*, no. 17, May 1983; Anthony Giddens, postscript to *The Class structure of the Advanced Societies*, second edition, New York 1979, p. 304.

44. The distinction between immediate and fundamental interests is between interests defined within a given set of 'rules of the game' (immediate interests) and interests over the basic rules themselves (fundamental interests). For a fuller discussion of this distinction, see *Class, Crisis and the State*, pp. 88–91.

45. This image is clearly indebted to the work of Harry Braverman on the degradation of labour. Even though Braverman's work has come under increasing attack in recent years for minimizing class struggle, for seeing degradation as too monolithic a process, for romanticizing traditional artisanal labour, and so on, I feel that his essential intuition remains sound, namely that proletarianization is a process both of dispossession of ownership of the means of production and of loss of real control over the means of production.

46. See David Noble, 'Social Choice in Machine Design', *Politics and Society*, vol. 8, no. 3–4, 1978, for an interesting discussion of how workers retain substantial involvement over 'conception' even under conditions of high automation.

47. If one wanted to maintain the characterization of autonomy as petty bourgeois, the above observations could be interpreted as suggesting that there are two, not one, kind of contradictory location combining proletarian and petty-bourgeois classes: semi-autonomous employees (petty-bourgeois autonomy within capitalist production) and semi-proletarianized self-employed (proletarian subordination within petty-bourgeois production). In the former case, the position occupies a proletarian location within appropriation relations but a petty bourgeois location within domination relations; in the latter, the position occupies a petty-

bourgeois location within appropriation relations and a proletarian location within domination relations.

48. One possible line of defence against this criticism would be to argue that the unit of analysis is not the specific job actually held by a given individual, but rather the general properties of a given occupational category. In the technician example above it could be argued that the technician *occupation* is characterized structurally by its potential for individual autonomy, but that the actual level of autonomy empirically manifested in a given technician *job* depends upon relatively contingent processes, such as the personality of the research director of the laboratory, the particular training or interests of the particular technician, etc. By this reasoning technician positions might generally be considered semi-autonomous even if a particular laboratory technician is uninterested in acting autonomously or is unable to do so because of his or her personal relations to superiors. Such an approach to the problem of autonomy, however, poses a host of additional problems, particularly the problem of how to draw meaningfully the boundaries between occupations and how to define 'potential' autonomy.

49. The exception to these certain analyses of the 'new class'—such as Alvin Gouldner's *The Future of Intellectuals* and Ivan Szelenyi and William Martin's *New Class Theories and Beyond* (unpublished manuscript), 1985—which do suggest at least some elements of how classes within capitalism can be analysed in a way which allows for post-capitalist class structures.

50. The realization that the operational criteria for classes in my analysis of the United States could be applied to state socialist societies with very little modification came in the course of a comparative investigation of the United States and Hungary with the Hungarian sociologist, Robert Manchin. Manchin was the first person to point out to me the unfavorable implications of this for my conceptualization of the class structure of capitalist society.

51. This multiple-oppressions view of society within which class has no necessary centrality is characteristic of what is sometimes called 'post-Marxist' radical theory. Some of the leading proponents include Michael Albert and Robin Hahnel, *Marxism and Socialist Theory*, Boston 1981; Jean Cohen, *Class and Civil Society*, Amherst Massachusetts 1982; Stanley Aaronowitz, *The Crisis of Historical Materialism*, New York 1981.

52. See Ralph Dahrendorf, *Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society*, Stanford 1959.