

Chapter 2

Class analysis and Contemporary Life

Class histories

While the history of class can be traced back to ancient Rome, with its static system of "ascriptive groupings" (Edgell, 1993) allowing for essentially no class mobility, this thesis is primarily concerned with the explicit role of class as a dominant way of theorising industrial society, as formulated by Marx in the 19th Century. As Marx points out, for the first time it was not possible to hold shares in another person's labour (as was possible under conditions of slavery and partially possible under feudalism). Instead, each individual owned his or her labour power in the market. Theoretically, at least, it became possible for any single person to use the proceeds of their labour to acquire capital and move between classes. In reality, Marx's impression of 19th Century England was that immense wealth was produced in particular ways that entailed extreme inequality in distribution and associated class conflict (Marx 1992 [1868]).

It is unsurprising that Marx's theories go into great detail about the logic of this conflict. Marx believed that society consisted of two dominant classes, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, who are defined by their relationship to the *means of production*. The conflict of these classes is the primary force shaping history (*historical materialism*). The bourgeoisie own the factories and land, and hire the labour of the non-propertied working classes to produce goods. Marx drew upon the work of Ricardo's theory that the value of a good was the sum total of the labour required to produce it (the *labour theory of value*), and in order to gain profits, the owners of capital must sell the good for more than its value. There is an economic pressure to reduce the wage paid to the working class below what they would receive if undertaking this labour under their own direction (*exploitation*). As the working class become aware of their location in these class relations (*class consciousness*), they find that the exploitation relationship means that the wealth of the bourgeoisie is inversely interdependent with their own, and that equality is only to be achieved by seizing the means of production (*revolution*). The *class interests* of the bourgeoisie, of course, are in reducing the working class' awareness of this possibility. The bourgeoisie produce an ideological *superstructure* that hides the objective economic *base* underpinning these relations.

Within this framework, Marx's use of class terminology was inconsistent, and he never fully articulated precisely what classes are, even though class is a central feature to his political and economic thought. The third volume of Marx's *Capital* "breaks off" as it comes up to a discussion of class. But it was nevertheless a systematic approach to social

and economic theory that would set the agenda for future discussions of socio-economic divisions under capitalism.

The Weberian schema

Max Weber (1962) extended Marx's theory of class. Weber's class theory was part of a much broader sociological programme, and his writings on class were fragmentary. For Weber, class differences related purely to differences in opportunities in the market, or "life-chances" – and his model incorporates a wider range of factors, such as power, education, and status that do not figure strongly in Marx's production-centred economic taxonomy.

The Weberian model offers greater explanatory power at the descriptive level of class analysis, as it accounts for key empirically validated features of contemporary societies that are not supported in Marx's framework. Anthony Giddens (1971) notes that Weber's model accounts for i) the role of the market in class formation; ii) the significance of the new middle class in capitalism, iii) bureaucracy as a form of domination and iv) the role of the state as a force of political and military power.

However, the Weberian formulation of class does not intrinsically tell us anything about how dimensions of inequality are generated and maintained, whereas Marx asserts the antagonistic nature of class relations as an explanation for this. In Weberian class analysis, there is not necessarily anything significant to the relations of production that place classes into conflict (though he elaborates how *domination* occurs through bureaucratic environments). Some people end up being worse-off than others through a variety of means. Class is merely one of many structuring factors of inequality- class inequality is not necessarily the same as status inequality, or racial inequality. Unsurprisingly, perhaps, this less ambitious programme for class analysis is more closely aligned with the results of empirical research undertaken in the late 20th century. There is a strong "common sense" element to Weberian theory, and class becomes a more useful tool for predicting certain things about the world. The efficacy of neo-Weberian approaches has dovetailed nicely with the rise of empirical research as a privileged site of research in the sociological discipline. This has led some researchers to conclude that all class analysis is now essentially in the neo-Weberian tradition (Breen & Rottman, 1995).

Sociological class analysis today

Wright

In recent times a number of researchers have made attempts to update comprehensive class frameworks in the Marxist tradition. Erik Olin Wright (1985) has extended Marx's discussion of class with a framework that places workers into classes based on level of ownership of three kinds of assets: the means of production, workplace authority, and skills. This involves positions that are identified with one of three basic class locations or a "contradictory" position that is more or less aligned with working or capitalist class interests (Frehill, 2000). Wright maintains that relations between these classes are characterised by exploitation, as they were for Marx. According to Wright, three criteria are required to be in place to generate a relationship of "exploitation":

- (1) The inverse interdependent welfare principle: the material welfare of exploiters causally depends upon the material deprivations of the exploited.
- (2) The exclusion principle: this inverse interdependence of the welfare of exploiters and exploited depends upon the exclusion of the exploited from access to certain productive resources.
- (3) The appropriation principle: Exclusion generates material advantage to exploiters because it enables them to appropriate the labor effort of the exploited. (Wright, 1985 p.11)

The concept of exploitation is central to conflict-oriented class analysis of the type undertaken by Wright. Higher classes are not only better off, their being better off fundamentally depends on exploitation through appropriation of the labour effort of other classes. Wright's schema have been extensively modelled and empirically tested (with, as McGregor (2001) suggests, results strikingly similar to Goldthorpe's neo-Weberian analysis), However, Wright's approach gives little attention given to the changing nature of capitalist markets, and how class locations may be evolving. Aage Sørensen (2000a) notes that Wright's comprehensive reflections on the nature of exploitation don't clearly set out how this translates to inequality in the labour market.

Following Wright, Sørensen (2000a) recently attempted a more comprehensive analysis of exploitation relationships. He proposed a definition of exploitation as purely based on ability to extract economic rents. Sørensen defines rent as "total payments given to any factor of production [land, labour, capital] over and above the opportunity

cost of that factor not doing something else.” Wright notes that the abstract elegance of this solution leads Sørensen to some counter-intuitive arguments when applied to real situations. For example, where the working classes “exploit” employers through organisation of labour. More significantly, Goldthorpe notes that Sørensen's framework i) fails to account for the growth in service industry labour where the spot contracts he predicts fail to materialise and, most of all ii) fragments social class in a way that inhibits formation of his “exploitation classes.”

While Wright and Sorenson are engaged in public disagreements about how to consider exploitation processes, anyone not particularly invested in their models may wonder how they can continue to ignore the significant changes in production and consumption practices over the last few decades, let alone the challenges to methodology presented by the political movements of feminism and postcolonialism. Both Wright and Sorenson highlight the difficulties with maintaining adherence to the traditional methodologies of Marxian class analysis. By taking Marx's class structures and analysis of economic processes as givens, it becomes difficult to recognise applications of their theories in the contemporary environment. This brings with it the problems commonly ascribed to “theoreticism” (erasure of difference, lack of application) as well as theoretical problems of having failed to historicise Marxist methodology.

Goldthorpe

As discussed earlier, Weber's class formulation is less ambitious and provides greater analytical purchase on the ‘here and now’ of socio-economic inequality. It has a more empirical flavour: by formulating analytical groups based on life conditions, researchers can predict and assess various “real-life” situations and test for changes in these over time. The most prominent example of this is Goldthorpe's (1987) widely used 11-class schema (also usable in simpler aggregate 3-class forms).

This model has been successfully used in wide ranging empirical research projects proving the persistence of low inter-class mobility in capitalist societies. Goldthorpe is careful, however, not to link this “research programme” to any particular theoretical model (perhaps because he is concerned about the perception that a theoretical alignment will affect the perceived “objectivity” of the results). One issue with Goldthorpe's position is that it has trouble meeting the “So What?” critique – without a theoretical framework to show how these results came to be, the ability to act upon them is limited. These tensions between theoretical and descriptive schemes are taken up in the next section.

Rosemary Crompton (1998) claims that “class analysis” is riddled with “pseudo-debates” resulting from this lack of agreement in definitions used in differing class analytical frameworks. Two main issues arise:

Theoretical class schemes seek to explain societal shifts in production and validate these through analysis of large data sets. These schemes hold class structure and class action as analytically separable: class positions are “empty spaces” which exist regardless of their visibility to their members, and can be filled by people with a variety of occupations and lifestyles. Large-scale surveys are often used to link economic outcomes to particular locations within these class relations. Particularly in Marxist-inspired schemes, there is an emphasis on relationships between various classes. However, *how* these classes form is not clear, their existence is simply assumed.

Occupational aggregate schemes (the “common sense” approach to class) produce a list of occupations, group these into classes and track their behaviour. They do not describe relations between class positions, but instead are useful to track outcomes of social changes in particular variables (e.g. voting, mortality) over time. They can be easily measured, but do not tell us anything about the role of classes in structuring human relationships.

Challenges for class theory

I have only briefly touched on some of the key discussions of class: a full history of class analysis lies outside the scope of this chapter and numerous books tackle this with insight (see in particular Crompton, 1998; Edgell, 1993). For the purposes of this thesis I want to outline some of the key issues that class analysis has had to face in a rapidly changing society. Some issues face class analysis generally, while others are specific to particular frameworks. By evaluating the success of class analysis in adapting to specific issues, particular aspects of class analysis appear to have value for the project of reducing inequality in the information society. I view the challenges facing class analysis as follows, beginning with the most fundamental:

- i. What is the purpose of class analysis? Is it *normative*, innately concerned with changing socio-economic relations, or *explanatory*, seeking to develop our understanding of these relations?
- ii. How do class relations generate inequality? Even though the importance of class as a predictor of various socio-economic outcomes is established, little work has been done to show *how* class relations produce this inequality.

- iii. Is class analysis fundamentally sexist? The “key works” in class analysis have excluded consideration of the labour of women, who make up half the population. Can class analysis be renovated in light of feminist critique?
- iv. Where does the process of colonisation fit within class analysis? The colonial basis of the 19th Century English economy is untheorised in Marx’s analysis. What would a post-colonial class framework look like?
- v. Is class analysis declining in relevance? Class-consciousness is declining in many capitalist economies – will appeals to class-consciousness be effective?
- vi. The “middle classes” are rapidly expanding in capitalist economies. What role do they play in the dynamics of the economy, and class-based political action?

1) Purpose of analysis

While there are numerous books written on the differences between Marx and Weber’s concepts of class (see e.g. Giddens, 1971) one of the most useful summaries is provided by Sørensen (2000a). Rather than distinguishing “neo-Marxist” and “neo-Weberian” concepts of class, he discusses class schema as conflict groups defined through relationships of *exploitation*, or where class is centred in the *life conditions* associated with various class groupings. Framed in this way, we can see that the issues of theoretical orientation toward class analysis are not just attraction to a specific scheme for the purposes of “accuracy”, but quite serious questions about what the purpose of class analysis is and therefore what research questions it can productively explore.

Marxist analysis implies a normative commitment to social change. It is generally unattractive to those not seeking to change existing conditions. For Marx, philosophy’s point is not to interpret the world, but to change it (Marx, 1972 p.145). Thus, Marx’s theory of class is based on a model of conflict that suggests that deep structural change is possible and inevitable.

A focus on exploitation brings with it a commitment to improving inequality. The purpose of class analysis is to show how exploitation mechanisms generate inequality. According to this logic, while “capitalism” is fragmenting and shifting in its nature, there are nevertheless overarching relationships between classes that show these exploitation mechanisms in operation. These mechanisms may not be clear, but they need to be explicated and changed if we are serious about reducing (or, more ambitiously, removing) this inequality.

A focus on life-conditions suggests that that class analysis is primarily a way of *describing* inequality. In this approach, if class inequalities exist, we must be able to establish them empirically. In order to change this inequality we need to fully understand the inequality that exists and how it is distributed along class lines. By tracking this inequality over time and in different populations we can, via a process of induction, develop models that show how inequality is being produced. These models will suggest a range of social, political and economic strategies to mitigate this inequality, but there is unlikely to be a single aspect of the production system that generates class-based inequality.

These normative versus descriptive tensions are not clear-cut. In order to effect change, any theory of exploitation must reflect the surrounding evidence and appear plausible. And many researchers focussing on life-conditions, such as Goldthorpe, are no less committed to reducing social inequality than those in exploitation-centred analysis, but strategically assert that empirical validation is the best way to cement the importance of class in contemporary inequality. Nevertheless, the tension between discerning overarching relationships of causality versus responding to a rapidly differentiating world is one of the key issues facing contemporary class researchers.

2) Generation of inequality

We know class relations are reproduced, but how does class generate inequality? Marx's theory of class outlined exactly how different relationships to the means of production produced inequality, through exploitation. Marx's exploitation concept was based on the labour theory of value, which almost no contemporary economist or social theorist holds to be valid. However, there has been very little re-evaluation of the exploitation mechanism that supposedly generates inequality in light of new economic theories.

3) Gender

As late as the 1980s, Goldthorpe failed to analyse female class mobility for "economic reasons" (Goldthorpe, 1983). However, oversights like those of Goldthorpe are more than personal theoretical lapses – one could undertake a comprehensively review of the most-cited literature on class analysis and not realise that the 20th Century saw extensive theoretical critique of the dominance of white male perspectives on social theory. While Goldthorpe eventually came to analyse female class mobility explicitly, the point remains that our understanding of "class" as an analytical framework was developed with minimal consideration of the experience and perspective of half of the

human population. This exclusion circumscribes both the validity *and* usefulness of concepts such as class.

From a post-structuralist perspective, we might note that theorists' respective location within social relations inescapably affects the assumptions used and conclusions drawn in our theoretical work, and this theoretical reflexivity now underpins the bulk of new methodological work in the social sciences. Yet Jo Eadie (2001) notes that it is common for introductory textbooks on social theory to start with the Big Four (Marx, Weber, Durkheim and Simmel) and their followers, and fail to mention a woman theorist, except for small addenda on feminism, anti-racism and new social movements. Ariel Salleh (2001) claims that these socially unconscious yet pervasive reproductions highlight the deepest and most fundamental contradiction present in assumptions of male-to-male genealogies of knowledge (or the "Great Chain of Being" as she calls it). The contradiction is materially embodied in the economic positioning of women and indigenous people outside 'humanity', and as a "natural resource" available to industrialising men who are subjects in the analytical framework. Salleh (2001, p.448) describes those "outside" capitalism and untheorised in Marxist class analysis, as a *meta-industrial class*, a term which includes domestic caregivers, peasant farmers, and indigenous hunter-gatherers.

How can we develop a class analytical framework which would respond to and be useful for Salleh's "meta-industrial classes", who are empirically most disadvantaged by current economic circumstances? A start might be seeing feminist work as central, rather than peripheral to class analysis. Shulamith Firestone's work *The Dialectic of Sex*, for example, should be recognised as a theoretical contribution to be incorporated at the core of class analysis. As she notes, while "class analysis is correct in a linear sense, it does not go deep enough. There is a whole sexual substratum of the historical dialectic that Engels at times dimly perceives, but because he can see sexuality only through an economic filter, reducing everything to that, he is unable to evaluate in its own right." (Firestone, 1970 p.132). From Firestone's arguments, we see that the "empty boxes" of subjects in class analytical frameworks are already *gendered*: they assume productive relationships based on an idealised male subject.

4) Race and colonisation

Consideration of the racial and colonial formations of Salleh's meta-industrial class raises further questions for a so-called "purely economic" conception of production in class analysis. Once again, when we talk about the "working class" or "rational choice theory" in economics this rarely includes the subjective experience of those in colonies

whose economic activity is central to the functioning of first world economies. And as Edward Said points out, “[even] if direct political control has disappeared, economic, political and sometimes military domination accompanied by cultural hegemony – the force of ruling and, as Gramsci calls them, directive (*dirigente*) ideas – emanating from the West and exerting power over the peripheral world, has sustained it” (Said, 1993 cited in (Gorlier, 2002 p.78).

Such arguments are too rarely discussed within the classical Marxist tradition. Marshall Berman (1983), for example, places the origins of what we call “modernity” at about 1500, surprisingly close to 1492, barely linking these developments to the processes of material appropriation through colonisation. The postcolonial sensibility would ask, how would the perspective of those colonised affect our theorisation of classes? Susan Buck-Morss makes a forceful argument that not only was the slave trade the economic basis of the European economy at the time Hegel wrote *The Phenomenology of the Mind* (a huge influence on Marx), but it also plays an unacknowledged role in the way we theorise political philosophy today (Buck-Morss, 2000).

These arguments have been investigated by Gregor McLennan (2003) who highlights two issues in Homi Bhabha’s work that pose problems for class analysis and the sociological imagination generally. The first lies in Bhabha’s notion of the time-lag, which fundamentally disrupts Western representations of social structure. Postcolonial insights have a dual function of both disrupting the seemingly ‘shared’ grounds of understanding, which in turn destabilises ground from which to project a single historicity in the mode of Marx and most academic sociology. 19th Century European capitalism was already transnational and colonial in nature, with significant funds flowing into nation-states from exploitation of labour and natural resources in the colonies. From the colonised perspective, both contemporary Marxist theory and our understanding of Marx’s era are out of joint. We cannot easily ‘readily reperiodise and re-name the object of enquiry to fit our revised inclinations.’ (McLennan, 2003 p.74)

Bhabha also recasts the now familiar point that the habitual Western search for a “totality” or understanding of common structures that govern “human” action primarily lies within cultural majorities. Why should minority subjectivities have any real investment in these kinds of universalist intellectual endeavours, that they can be subject to but never the authors of?

5) Class consciousness

Both Marx and Weber predicted increasing awareness among the working class of their class position – that is, they would gain class-consciousness. The traditional notion of class-consciousness is summarised by E.P. Thompson in his study of the English working class: “The class experience is largely determined by productive relations into which men are born – or enter involuntarily. Class-consciousness is the way in which these experiences are handled in cultural terms: embodied in traditions, value-systems, ideas and institutional forms” (Thompson, 1968 p.8). Marx predicted that over time these value systems and traditions would increasingly become recognised as emanating from class position. Classes would move from being a “class in themselves” to a “class for themselves”, and capable of class-based action.

Yet most contemporary research indicates that class-consciousness is decreasing in most contemporary western capitalist economies. Robert Connell (1977), for example, found in the 1970s that most Australian youth did not identify with a particular class, and would describe themselves as middle-class if pressed, even if they did not fit this definition in most class frameworks. Yet they had a strong sense of the various markers of class operating in society – they could describe others as part of particular classes. Michael Savage found similar results in the UK:

People are, however, less likely to offer such descriptions spontaneously: they recognize them if asked about them, and they retain the ability to use them to analyse their social world, but they are more likely to resort to narrow occupational designations and to other means of self-identification if left to their own devices. People tend not to use the specific language of ‘class’ to define their social position, and class position no longer generates a deep sense of identity and belonging (Savage, 2000 p.37).

As noted earlier, in traditional Marxist theory class consciousness is an important step on the path to class action, so it is unsurprising that many unwieldy explanations have been developed to account for the mysterious lack of class consciousness. This has included the suggestion that the ideology of capitalism created “false consciousness” which prevented people from understanding the true implications of their location in class relations. Hall has pointed out, however, that false consciousness had been subjected to a rigorous epistemological critique (Hall, 1988 p.44).

Marx’s initial prediction that the maturation of capitalism will produce revolutionary consciousness is not at all clear. Giddens (1973) points out that event though there is a level of “class awareness” – recognition that classes exist – the move to a revolutionary “class consciousness” is not a given. Giddens suggests that a visible class structure allows awareness of class conflict to develop. But developing a revolutionary

class-consciousness requires experiencing the contradictory nature of class relations within a given sphere of production, and formation of a shared vision of a new productive order. Relative deprivation in itself will not produce a revolutionary consciousness.

In the world of traditional sociological analysis, these phenomena have led Grusky & Weeden (2001) to suggest that class analysis should actually be decomposed to an occupational level, because this is where consciousness is found. That is, at this level subjects can be seen to identify strongly with their occupation and engage in other “class-like” activities such as closure (the exclusion of others from the occupational group). While this “more modest” approach to class analysis has advantages in terms of internal consistency, it necessarily entails backing away entirely from an analysis which can engage with the theory and practice of multinational capitalism.

Another problem with Grusky and Weeden’s approach is that the increasing scale and complexity of the organisation places limitations on what knowledge can be gained of the productive system through its individual members. It is possible to acknowledge these limitations (as increasingly happens in economic sociology) without necessarily resorting to the false consciousness argument. Secondly, if identity is increasingly drawn from consumption practices, it is likely that the current “validity” of occupational aggregates as a link between structure and consciousness will not continue to hold in the future.

6) The growth of the middle class

Marx predicted the increasing agglomeration of social class into two camps – the Bourgeoisie and the Proletariat. The petit bourgeoisie and other middle classes would become increasingly inefficient compared to the forces of capital and would fade out. But by the 1970s most class theorists acknowledged the central role of the “new middle class” in contemporary capitalist economies. Ehrenreich & Ehrenreich (1979) dubbed them the “professional-managerial class”, while Goldthorpe termed them a “service class”. Wright thought of them as being in contradictory locations, neither bourgeoisie nor proletariat.

Myles and Turegun (1994) have found that the “new middle class” of administrative, professional, and related occupations made up a quarter to a third of the labour force in the developed capitalist economies by the beginning of the 1980s, and continued to grow disproportionately to the other classes in spite of case studies showing widespread “de-skilling.” According to Castells (1996), this trend is linked to the rise of the service industry and the informational economy, where the workplace is focused on the

generation, manipulation, and interpretation of text, images, and other symbolic information.

The emergence of the middle class presents serious problems for Marxian class analysis. The two primary classes whose conflict are supposed to drive history are proportionally shrinking, while the class which was supposed to wither away is expanding rapidly. Exactly what role the “new middle class” is supposed to play in class action and political change is unclear in traditional class theory.

The prospects for sociological class theory

The issues outlined above have significant implications for “class analysis” as a discrete theory, and the discipline of sociology – the traditional home of class analysis – has not always been proactive in dealing with the discussions. Theorists working with class analysis have – with few exceptions – failed to develop class analytical frameworks to keep pace with either empirical phenomena or theoretical innovations in related fields. Reviewing the sociological academic literature on class analysis one is struck by the dominance of established white male academics, and the overall resistance to feminist and postcolonial critiques that have reshaped other fields. In the course of constructing this thesis I have found that disciplines such as (for example) human geography and even economics appear to be much more lively, diverse and important fields of contemporary social theory than the discipline that claims such theory as its own. To see some of that energy within a Marxist context, we have to turn to the cultural tradition.

The cultural turn in class theory

Gramsci and the politics of hegemony

While class analytical debates grappled with the problems of producing a universal social theory, another strand of Marxist thought gained in influence during the 20th century. Often described as “Cultural Marxism”, this strand refers to the political theories of Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci, who worked extensively on the application of Marxist concepts to the political reality of Italy in the 1920s. Gramsci’s work is notable for the recognition of emotion and popular culture as important material inputs into the political process. The ruling classes manufacture “consent” among the masses through ideological apparatuses: eventually constructing a *hegemony*, or general acceptance of particular political ideas. For Gramsci, political action by intellectuals must also adopt this strategy – they cannot be effective intellectuals if they are “distinct and separate from the people-nation, that is, without feeling the elementary passions of the people, understanding them and therefore explaining and justifying them in the

particular historical situation and connecting them dialectically to the laws of history and...knowledge. One cannot make politics-history without this passion, this sentimental connection between intellectuals and people-nation.” (Gramsci, 1971 p.418).

Gramsci’s political strategy was embodied in the figure of the “organic intellectual” – someone tied to a social group, yet able to operate within struggles over consent between social groups. The reflexive mode of Gramsci’s intellectual in issues of identity representation is what Gramsci’s work its contemporary resonance. This sense of the intellectual of a particular “social place” anticipates poststructuralist theory and political forms aligned with the new social movements of feminism and anti-racism.

Gramsci’s focus on culture is often characterised as having abandoned Marx’s commitment to a fundamental importance of economic inequality. However he agreed with Engels’ statement that the economy is only the mainspring of history “in the last analysis”, and is not its only (or always most dominant) structuring force (Gramsci, 1971 p.162). However, in contrast to Marxist theorists seeking to explain economic relationships “in general”, Gramsci’s consistent application of his analysis to questions of Italian politics and culture provided an example to theorists seeking a Marxist “philosophy of praxis” which integrates analysis and social change. Gramsci also made strong criticisms of the limitations of ‘economism’ – an acceptance of existing economic structures as unchangeable – noting that it cannot account for the formation of economic classes.

Gramsci’s approach can be seen as a precursor to a widespread focus on culture in Marxist-influenced scholarship. After the Second World War, these were elaborated in two European traditions:

Althusser, structuralism, and ideology

In continental Europe “structuralisms” emerged from linguistics and literary theory attesting to the “reality” and effectivity of cultural structures and systems. Authors such as Roland Barthes explored how these systems could be used to describe the production of meaning (“signification”) and analyse the effects of cultural interventions. In the 1960s, Louis Althusser (1969) elaborated on this via Gramsci’s reading of Marx, to reiterate the importance of ideological structures in meaning and knowledge production. For Althusser ideologies were defined as the experiential frameworks through which people live their understood conditions of existence. For Althusser ideology is not a “thing in the world”, but a process developed through the Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) that constitute or “interpellate” human subjects. To

understand classes, we must understand their subjective relationships within a “whole cultural system”. Structuralist thinkers provided a framework for seeing culture as material which could be analysed theoretically – even if the framework had a formalist and functionalist abstraction which seems as odds with the diversity of “culture” and lived experience.

Cultural history and the British working class

A U.K. strand in the humanities concentrated the extensive use of Marxist concepts in a materialist analysis of culture. In this category, we could place Hoggart’s (1967) detailed analysis of the UK working class in *The uses of literacy*; Raymond Williams’ historical reflections on culture and society through a Marxist-inflected literary studies; and E.P. Thompson’s *The making of the English working class* (Thompson, 1968), which provided a U.K elaboration of classes as a social relationship, rather than a “thing in the world”. The contribution of this strand to class analysis focussed on *how* particular classes come to be “classes in themselves and for themselves”. This is the case for Thompson in particular – for Thompson, classes become something we make through the cultural assessment of history. To understand classes, we need to have a detailed and historical view of the lived reality of those making up those classes.

Questions of Cultural Marxism

European debates in cultural theory took place between these two camps, most bitterly between Althusser and Thompson. However, developments in the 1970s led to revisions of these positions, driven by a number of developments:

- Feminist and anti-racist movements raised questions about the ability of a single history to represent events involving quite different “subjects”. Existing histories of culture written by white men were seen as only part of the story, and needed to be supplemented by other perspectives. History was viewed as a contested space just as it was for Marx, except that the “objective economic base” determining class can be seen from many different perspectives. History’s singular authority is not a given: who writes that history is perhaps more important.
- European authors associated with the Tel Quel group and the journal *Screen* brought psychoanalytic theories of human subjectivity to the analysis of cultural forms. Structuralism’s description of the interpellation of human subjectivity via ideology was given a processual focus, which ultimately questions the overdetermination of subjectivity by structures. Once again feminist

methodologies are present in much of this work, emphasising differences in subjective relations to particular cultural forms and analytical methods.

- Michel Foucault's histories of sexuality and the prison system elaborated a distinctively "post-structuralist" methodology (e.g. Foucault, 1977). In Foucault's "micropolitics", there is no single "dominant ideology." His genealogical approach can ascertain a plurality of differentials in "power-knowledge" which can act as the explanatory narratives of history.
- Gramsci and Althusser held the "relative autonomy" of the ideological and cultural sphere, but agreed that in the "last instance" economic relationships were the determining factor in social relationships. The inconsistency of this position and the difficulties in elaborating it became clear (how can something be "autonomous" yet "determined"? What does "relatively" mean?), and the resort to last instance determination could be seen to spring more from fear of jettisoning the economic relations underpinning Marx's theories, rather than a determination logically required by structuralism or related literary and cultural theory. A need emerged to either elaborate this "last instance determination" or jettison it altogether.

It was in this network of questions, and a proliferation of cultural representations through an explosion of media, that cultural studies emerged as a discipline.

Cultural studies and the fragmentation of Marxism

The self-conscious rise of "cultural studies" in the group associated with the Centre for Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham during the 1970s provided one of the most influential renovations in Marxist theory, as it attempted to bring the British historical approaches to class and European theoretical approaches into conversation. Although, as Johnson (2001, p.262) notes in his reflections of the era, there was a "methodological inexplicitness" which couldn't be labelled "post-structuralist", there was nevertheless perhaps a particular way of approaching cultural issues. The lack of a specific position was a deliberate response to the state of Marxist theory in light of the traditions described above. For the Centre, the "relative autonomy" of the ideological and cultural superstructure identified in structuralism could not be a fixed or final position, but only a beginning, a signal "work to be done" in an "open Marxism" (Hall & University of Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, 1980 p.29). Many of the Centre's working papers convey this frontier sensibility.

The diverse uses of Marxism within the Centre's work was in stark contrast to mainstream sociology at the time, which was struggling to recover from having overwhelmingly organised itself around Parsonian functionalism, an ideology of liberal pluralism which was coming under question after tears in the U.S. social fabric in the late 1960s-early 1970s (Agger, 2002). While the Centre worked with class issues derived from literature associated with sociology, it also sought methodological diversity, appropriating ethnographic and literary analysis methods as well as those associated with the social sciences. Perhaps more significant than particular projects undertaken by the Centre, was the attention to reflexivity in research methods. The act of undertaking research is, itself, a cultural intervention, and for effectiveness (or even "validity") the function of research must be appropriately theorised. The work shifts the emphasis in class analysis debates away from arguing over the *validity* of specific descriptive theoretical constructs toward an awareness of the need for *appropriate* theoretical constructs to fit the aims and context of the research.

We have striven for... the 'near-impossible': to be, at once, rigorous *and* open; to be both theoretical *and* concrete.[...] We have had to make problematic for ourselves what others could take for granted. We have had to investigate the premises and assumptions behind a range of available theories and methods – and have thus, one might say, fallen in the habit of constantly questioning our own starting points. (Hall & University of Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, 1980 p.42)

Yet while Hall outlines the need for a radically heterogeneous toolkit characteristic of postmodernism, this does not mean that there is no centre to Hall's intellectual activity. He sees the post-structuralist "break" as not necessarily resulting in completely "disparate, fragmented, discursive chains" (Hall, 1988 p.60). Rather, this break is a signal that correspondences between class and ideology cannot be assumed, but have to be created, and this is the role of political theory as Hall sees it. Through such a process, articulations between economic circumstances and cultural production can be analysed. At the time, this position provoked questions from more traditional Marxist perspectives about the degree to which Hall's position could be described Marxist. Hall responded:

I choose to keep the notion of classes, I choose to keep the notion of the capital-labour contradiction; I choose to keep the notion of social relations of production, etc. – I just don't want to think them reductively... my critique of Marxism attempts to dethrone Marxism from its guarantees... that in the end the economy does determine [everything]. [...] The contemporary theoretical revolution [is] the notion that the arena or medium in which ideology functions is one of signification, representation, and discursive practices. .. I have

tried to rethink some of the things Marx was saying in that more discursive framework. (Hall, 1988 pp.72-73)

The move Hall makes here is decisive. Marxist theory's value for cultural analysis is fundamentally recast as methodological (e.g. in its value for Gramsci's analysis of Italian politics) rather than as a system that can provide a complete picture of real society. Following the work of the Birmingham Centre, it becomes much more difficult to draw a box around practitioners of Marxist social theory – instead the Marxist perspective can be seen through analytical perspectives in feminist, postcolonial and anti-racial movements.

For Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, such questions effectively displace the whole teleological structure of Marxism and its determinant categories:

At this point we should state quite plainly that we are now situated in a post-Marxist terrain. It is no longer possible to maintain the conception of subjectivity and classes elaborated by Marxism, nor its vision of the historical course of capitalist development, nor, of course, the conception of communism as a transparent society from which antagonisms had disappeared. (Laclau, 1985 p.4)

Instead, for the “Post-Marxism” of Laclau and Mouffe, antagonism is inescapably located in discourse, and it is the struggles for more democratic discursive hegemony in particular fields that drives the “new social movements”. Their conception also dispenses with the “revolutionary subject” who will bring about social change. Instead, Laclau and Mouffe draw upon Gramsci's notion of “expansive hegemony”, as a project to create an “organic ideology” that can link together particular democratic struggles among different domains. As Mouffe puts it, “this project cannot limit itself to questioning the structural relations of capitalist production. It must also question the mode of development of those forces endemic to the rationale of capitalist production” (Mouffe, 1988 p.99)

The role of new political movements since the time Laclau and Mouffe wrote *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* has vindicated many of their concerns. There are, clearly, much more widely dispersed spheres of political struggle in operation, and the ability of singular explanatory narratives (such as classical Marxism) to explain such events is decreasing. However, as I argue in the next chapter, recent developments in economics allow us to fruitfully revisit issues of social structure and the economy in a more diverse and less imperial fashion. Certainly, a post-Marxism that neglects the economy to the extent of Laclau and Mouffe is out of step with recent developments linking culture, production, innovation, and economic development, such as those

identified in the Creative Industries literature (see for example Flew, 2002; Florida, 2002; New Zealand Institute of Economic Research, 2002).

Bourdieu and Cultural Sociology

While Cultural Studies was emerging in the UK, French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu was also working on issues relating to class analysis and culture. Like the CCCS, Bourdieu had a keenly reflexive approach to method, even though he dismissed interdisciplinary work associated with the CCCS (except for Willis) and cultural studies. And like Cultural Studies generally, Bourdieu's focus is on consumption as the key site of class conflict, unlike Marx's production-centred analysis. However, Bourdieu's work springs from a sociological tradition rather than a literary one, and so his analysis engages with the abstract social structures traditionally associated with class analysis.

His book *Distinction* (first published 1979, appearing in English in 1984) (Bourdieu, 1984) represents an attempt to develop a framework for culture as a field of social struggle between classes. *Distinction* documents a large-scale empirical research project into French society and culture to understand the "distinctive logic" of cultural practices. Bourdieu has developed a range of novel concepts in his work that have proven of enduring value in cultural sociology.

The *habitus*, a "structuring structure and a structured structure" (Bourdieu, 1984 p.170) is perhaps Bourdieu's expansion of Althusser's conception of ideology as it appears in the human subject: the habitus is a set of practices which arise from social class divisions, and also reproduce them, while generating a range of activities which are not always predictable. The habitus is a kind of tacit knowledge and experience, a way of being in the world, which through articulation in tastes and activities can be seen as a "lifestyle." The materialist analysis of lifestyle and tacit knowledge as embodied in the habitus is perhaps one of the most powerful tools available for investigating the contemporary economy, increasingly characterised by informality and aestheticisation.

Bourdieu's concept of the *field* has also gained traction as a useful way of describing the separate-yet-connected spheres of economic and cultural activity discernable under contemporary capitalist relations. Fields can be separate analytical windows onto the same objects of study, or discrete collections of related phenomena. For example, within Anthropology, Pacific and South Asian Anthropology may be separate specialisms or fields that are linked by methodology and discourse. Sociology of the Pacific and Anthropology of the Pacific, conversely, may also be seen as different "fields" which share an object of study. McRobbie likens the concept of a field to the window in common operating systems such as Microsoft Windows. More than one window may

show the same data, but it might display it in different ways. Bourdieu's concept of the field allows linkages to be explored between situations without the need to resolve every situation to a shared structural basis. It provides a way of "non-reductively" thinking about links between phenomena as suggested by Hall earlier.

Perhaps most usefully and importantly for the purposes of this thesis are Bourdieu's identification of four types of capital: economic, cultural, social, and symbolic. McNay explains:

The distribution of certain types of capital –economic, social, cultural and symbolic– denotes the different goods, resources and values around which power relations in a particular field crystallise. Any field is marked by a tension or conflict between the interests of different groups who struggle to gain control over a field's capital (McNay, 1999 p.106).

Bourdieu's study highlights the existence of these types of capital in French culture, and shows how possession of cultural capital and economic capital are not always coextensive – for example for professors possession of cultural capital may be more important than economic capital in terms of securing benefits. However this is less true in business – cultural capital remains important for gaining access to particular networks, but carries less weight than money.

Overall, Bourdieu's contribution to the field of sociology was to find a pathway between objectivist theories, which identify social classes as discrete groups in a structure, and subjectivist theories, which emerge from a subject's consciousness of their social position. For Bourdieu, the habitus is a way of describing how we can define classes *simultaneously* by how they are perceived as how they perceive themselves, by consumption as well as relations of production.

Two new classes – Frow and Wark

John Frow's "Knowledge Class" and McKenzie Wark's "Hacker Class" are two recent attempts to propose a new class theory relevant to the informational environment.

John Frow has made one of the most significant attempts to reconcile cultural approaches to class with sociological frameworks in his formulation of the "knowledge class" (Frow, 1995). Frow takes Nicholas Poulantzas' conception of class as his starting point to put forward a powerful argument for the continued relevance of class analysis. He notes that the political, ideological and economic spheres interpenetrate each other, and a framework must be able to flexibly accommodate each focus without excluding the other. This leads Frow to a reformulation of Wright's classes, identifying an additional "knowledge class." However, these classes are detached from their all-encompassing nature – Frow's framework does not claim to be able to be empirically

validated, but he holds that it will be empirically *useful*. While Frow's conception of a knowledge class *is* useful, it is curious that he ends with a need to assert the "relative autonomy" of this class against its supposed denigration at the hands of Andrew Ross (1989), who urges a much more sceptical view of the transformative potential of the intellectual. While I take a methodological lead from Frow's identification of intellectual communities when formulating a class framework in Chapter Four, I would also like to retain what I see as Ross' important refusal to ignore the antagonism between this class and other groups.

McKenzie Wark (2001) notes that Marx develops moments of privatisation through two distinct phases. One is the privatisation of land, the other is the privatisation of productive resources in the form of capital. Wark considers intellectual property to be a "third, distinct form of private property, which gives rise to a third, distinct class antagonism". He suggests that "while privatisation of intellectual property historically proceeds alongside the privatisation of land and capital, it is analytically distinct". Wark's formulation provides an interesting starting point for assessing shifts in the movements of transnational capital in the fast-growing arenas of intellectual property. Wark's descriptive analysis of 'modes of abstraction' allows it to be applied effectively in many situations. Wark formulates the "hacker class" (Wark, 2002) as a collective of intellectual labour with the tools to disrupt and circulate this abstraction. However, this does seem to need elaboration to account for the relationship between e.g. white-collar professionals, who may not own any intellectual property but own means of production (even if tithed to an employer), and a non-informational labourer who works under a distinctively different form of exclusion from capital. What is the role of those outside a self-conscious "hacker class" in disrupting the flow of informational capital? Both Gramsci (1971) and Hardt and Negri (2000) ascribe a key role to those most excluded from the ruling regimes, while in Wark's formulation their role remains mostly untheorised. A question which can be asked is: are the hacker class themselves in an exploitative position in regard to a traditional proletariat?

Possibilities for a new class agenda

While the discipline of Cultural Studies has perhaps been the most vibrant field for Marxian analysis, the focus has been on elaborating the operations of culture, media and power, rather than developing class schema as such. According to Hall, it was a self-conscious decision for him (and the Centre) to apply their analysis to existing cultural forms and downplay the economic issues of class:

It is difficult to do both [economic and ideological analysis]. Practically, it means either that you have access to a wide range of analytic skills or that you have a well-differentiated research team... I ask myself whether I should combine a sort of naïve economic analysis with a highly sophisticated ideological one, and it doesn't seem to fit. In a more open intellectual climate we would take some risks like that. (Hall, 1988 p.63)

Thirty years of economic transformation has perhaps sharpened our perception of the failings of traditional production-centred class analysis. There have been few attempts to explore the relationships between Cultural Studies and Cultural Sociology in their approaches to culture, or to formulate new class taxonomies based on these insights, perhaps for the reasons Hall outlines above. However, recent academic developments indicate that there is room to refashion class theory by incorporating cultural analysis into a structural framework. This would perhaps provide the theoretical tools for exploring socio-economic reproduction in information-intensive societies that I am seeking in this thesis.

Across many disciplines, there is an emerging consensus that subjectivity, consciousness, and socio-economic position is neither completely determined by the means of production, nor formed in the market by a relatively autonomous superstructure, but a complex site of relationships between cultural and financial capital, each constitutive of the other. For example:

- The recent emergence of economic sociology and cultural sociology investigates how the use of language and social exchanges constitute “the real” in financial discourse, and how the objects, parties and norms of exchange on the market are culturally constructed and socially specific.
- Cultural information is also expanding as a commodity with an explicit financial value, sharpening discussion of the “economics of culture” (Caves, 2000). Information, of course, is highly culturally specific, meaning that discussion of an “information society” also entails analysis of the cultural dimensions of access to and control of information.
- The hegemony of the neo-classical tradition of economics is corroding (in much the same way as structural functionalism in sociology did in the 1960s), as an increasing number of prominent economists realise the shortcomings of its assumptions (e.g., Stiglitz, 1991).

One of Marx's key contributions was to historicise the economy. Marx showed that “what is” is but a particular historical variant of “what could be”. What is possible now is

to historicise Marxism's terms of reference – to rethink classes, capital, labour, and value in light of the various critiques that have come from the new social movements.

Scott Lash (2002) elegantly suggests that the accumulation of capital is now the accumulation of means. If this is the case, the means to produce and distribute information and culture is now the critical object of class theory. These means are social, cultural and economic in nature and what constitutes a class and capital require rethinking in these frameworks. Essentially, what is possible is a theory of class that acknowledges value is always *value for* someone and something (Frow, 1995); it is *interested* (Spivak, 1987). Value is socially constructed through ideological, informational processes. I will argue that *specific informational resources and modes of struggle* can be usefully identified and that these concepts can be formulated, after Marx, in a way which illuminates and emphasises the competing interests of relative class locations in this informational, cultural and social framework. This could provide testable propositions for *how* these relationships reproduce inequality and provide a basis for further research.

Chapter 3 will investigate the emerging information environment that gives rise to these “classes”, and Chapter 4 will document the processes of exclusion that form these information classes.