

## TIME AND SPACE IN CLASS THEORY

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### *Conditions for Class Formation*

Classes are historical and their effects are intertwined with their historicity. Saying classes are historical means that their composition changes at every level of the social structure: ruling groups as well as subordinate groups. Classes form when they make historical difference. Thus in one period the military is integrated into the ruling circles and, for a time, may be the dominant partner; in another it is plainly subordinate to the economic and the political directorate. For the last century, as C. Wright Mills has pointed out, once the cultural and political heart of the American nation -the “old” middle class of small manufacturers and owners of retail establishments- has been relegated to the middle levels of power. (1) Since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century the leading circles of power are constituted, in the main, by large corporations -the institutional form of capital -and the national political directorate. The political directorate is the top layer, that “class” for which politics is a vocation and seems to remain a constant in the development of the nation-state. But the ruling circles are increasing permeable. After the World War One the top layer of the state bureaucracy as well as the politicians have played musical chairs with the commanding heights of the corporate bureaucracy and these social formations are, increasingly interchangeable.

Whether a social formation or a constellation of social formations becomes a class in the historical sense depends on whether their struggles effect a cleavage in social relations and pose a significant change in these relations at a specific time and place. “A specific time and place” indicates that class formation is contingent, even among owners of capital and other components of the ruling class. (2) Whether and which fractions of a social formation forms a class and with whom depends on elements of the situated social context: relationships of power, degree of mobilization, and whether a group’s demands can, relatively speaking, be integrated by the prevailing power bloc. Against Marxist teleology I do not hold a specific form of revolutionary transformation as a standard against which to measure whether these changes constitute the class power of hitherto subordinate groups. Thus there need be no imminent transfer of power over the machinery of the state for class formation to occur. What is required is that transformation in a key aspect of social relations is entailed by the demands of a social formation or, more commonly, an alliance of several of them.

By “social formation” I refer not only to the economic domain but to the political and cultural domains as well. As many writing in the Marxist tradition have shown, economic, political and cultural relations are inextricably intertwined so that the isolation of one from

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another is always a theoretical reduction, consequence of which is to prompt some to separate class from social movements. (3)

“Historical” struggles are over class formation rather than automatically being class struggles. Industrial workers in the first forty years after the turn of 20<sup>th</sup> century America struggled over class formation and, in a wave of organizing and protest, from 1933 to 1937 changed the face of political power and labor relations for the next two generations. The labor movement, which had been on the margins of economic and social rule displayed social power and won the support of wide sections of the population because it embodied both the rage and hope of workers and large fractions of other social formations. But by the end of World War Two it was integrated into the ruling coalition even as its position became increasingly precarious. Labor retained strong ties to the social liberal fraction of the political leadership, and, owing to its perceived necessity to develop a private welfare state through the labor agreement rather than through the state, was closely connected to important sections of the corporate bureaucracy. This strategic decision was a response to the fact that, with the end of the New Deal era, workers and their unions were unable to sustain momentum because, even though formally independent, they had become dependent on, and integrated with, the networks which constituted the power nexus of the liberal state. As a result most unions isolated themselves from the militant black, women and youth insurgencies of the 1960s. (4)

Women as a distinct social formation became a movement about class in the 1960s and 1970s when its radical wing proposed a program of “women liberation” that went beyond legal rights and demanded the end of the traditional domination of women by men. This broad aim was crystallized in struggles over a constellation of demands: women’s right to “control their own bodies” -which entailed sexual freedom; permissive divorce laws; shared child-rearing and housekeeping; and the right to abortion “on demand”. (5) The effects of this agenda reverberated in every aspect of economic, political and cultural life. Since the high point of the movement around 1973, there has been considerable backsliding and many issues raised initially remain unresolved. However that everyday relations of power between men and women were crucially altered is self-evident and is indicated by the violence of the counterattack by conservatives against some of feminism’s signature gains, especially abortion rights.

To argue for the historicity of class, opposes view of class and class structure as always already present in the same configuration across periods, eras and epochs. Nor is the progressivist idea of irreversibility of history tenable. On the contrary, history-making social formations may disintegrate and revert to fragmented individuals and groups which occupy differential spaces on class maps or in their organized expression maintain themselves as “pressure” or interest groups on the ruling institutions but have, at least provisionally ceased to be historical agents. I also contest the idea, which has considerable currency among some intellectuals, that if the working class does not fulfill its revolutionary destiny as assigned to it by intellectuals we may conclude that from the perspective of History there is no working class, except in the sociological sense of strata or movements that pursue narrow economic self-interests. Some in this category attribute the end of the “proletariat” -an indefinite term that signifies the working class in all of its strata, especially the industrial workers- to its successes

which have led to its integration into the dominant society, often on fairly favorable terms. Others have theorized the dissolution of class into the broad concept of “multitudes” or “the people”, statements that describe the emergence of *generalized* proletarianization; on this view in the last quarter of the 20th century the overwhelming majority of the world’s population has been reduced by the emergent transnational Empire to economic and political marginality. Both tendencies are locked into a telos, an a priori that judges history by the concept rather than the reverse. According to this tendency if the working class has not fulfilled its revolutionary task to redeem mankind from exploitation and other suffering, it has disappeared. (6)

In fact the most commonly invoked criterion for class power, held by Marxists and by conservatives such as Francis Fukuyama revolutions rarely starts out with the object of seizing political power. In 1917 badly battered Russian workers and soldiers and a fraction of the peasantry demanded “peace, bread and land” and joined liberal and revolutionary intellectuals, who dominated the opposition parties, in political struggle that resulted in a new social alignment. The old regime collapsed only after the Czarist government refused to leave the war even after mass military desertions to bow to popular demands for land reform and material redistribution. When the liberal regime of Alexander Kerensky maintained its loyalty to the allied war aims, thereby committing its conscript army to mass annihilation by superior German forces, it sealed its political fate and fell before the Bolshevik-led uprising. There was no inevitability about this chain of events. Had Kerensky left the war there might have ensued a relatively prolonged period of capitalist economic development and the Bolsheviks would have been only one tendency among the opposition.

The possibilities for class formation were greatly enhanced by an historically developed political culture that valorized the concept of social transformation in terms of new democratic forms of popular power. In opposition to both authoritarian and modern liberal concepts of strong central state authority flanked by a weak representative assembly, during the 1905 Russian revolution workers organized councils, the new form of social rule that it intended to bring into being. In contrast to the vertical structure of the liberal state, these were “horizontal” institutions of delegates elected by workers in factories. They functioned both as institutions of revolutionary action and of administration, thereby abrogating the vertical model of the separation of state and civil society. Again in 1917 the reorganization of the councils, but now consciously organized by the left political parties prompted the Bolsheviks, who had achieved hegemony in the soviets (councils) in the key cities, to raise the slogans first of “dual power” with the liberal government and, finally, “All Power to the Soviets” against the prevailing government that had been formed in the immediate aftermath of the February revolution. (7)

The 1968 May events in France began as a protest against the Ministry of Education’s refusal to grant a popular student request at the University of Paris - Nanterre for more authority over their own affairs, and the conflict was joined over the administration’s rejection of coed dormitories. When in March demonstrations were staged, the students were confronted with riot police who used force to break up the protest. Within two months students had erected barricades in the streets of Paris and workers staged a general strike, paralyzing the country’s economy and sending a fleeing President Charles De Gaulle abroad. In fact the drift of the struggle toward

revolutionary power may have been halted not by the state's force but, instead, within the ranks of the insurgency, chiefly by the Communists. The Party and its trade union cadres hesitated on the precipice and, in an amazing failure of nerve, offered to settle the general strike with wage gains, when the effectiveness of the state's repressive apparatuses had been reduced, and whose early overreaching helped widen the struggle. (8)

The May events may have been the first post-scarcity uprising in modern history. The initial impetus for the protest -the spiritual poverty of contemporary life- presupposed that material want had been overcome and relegated to the margins -at least in France. If the historical task of capitalism was to "deliver the [material] goods" its job was done. The May movement challenged the system's capacity to fulfill its promise of freedom. Students, traditional intellectuals, a significant fraction of the technical workers in large computer and automation-producing enterprises joined industrial workers in a multi-leveled struggle against established authority. They fought under banners that varied from those of the older workers movement -economic and social justice- and demands that recalled the programs for workers control of the Paris commune and the Russian revolution, to the newer cries for cultural freedom. That the revolt never reached the point when the question of achieving state power was seriously entertained, even if it was posed, does not disqualify its character as a class movement. The impulse of the struggle was to bring about new relations of authority and power, a new way of life that would liberate its subjects from the thrall of an advancing consumer society and, like its American student counterparts, from the technocratic machine. At the same time in its embrace of the older sectors of society, industrial workers, it held the promise of a more generalized freedom.

Whether rulers are able to integrate the opposition into the dominant power system is never determined in advance. Integration depends on the size of the social surplus available for redistribution, on acumen of the powers-that-be to undertake deficit financing of social benefits when resources are relatively scarce, but also on the capacity of the Opposition to raise the ante rather than willingly settle for smaller potatoes, thereby exceeding the limits of system flexibility. These choices often go to psychological as well as political influences: do the subordinate groups fear the freedom entailed by taking responsibility for the whole society? Are people prepared to resist and try to win over the armed forces and the police during demonstrations and strikes? Does cynicism outweigh hope? Are there alternative forms of rule in process to replace the hierarchical structures of the liberal or authoritarian state? And are the various fractions of the movement prepared to consult with each other before dealing separately with the established powers? Conversely so-called revolutionary consciousness is almost never fully blown before the fact and may only develop in the course of struggles to achieve important but limited objectives. (9)

### *Narratives of Class*

Class formation is usually not a consequence of decisions of the main actors. Often actors think they are doing something else than vying for power. Grounded in an adversarial political culture revolutionary awareness typically arises after the fact, a retrospective summing up by the

ideologists and by the activists of what actually occurred during the insurgency. In turn having proclaimed the mass action to have been a “proletarian” or “democratic” revolution these interpretations tend to become a social force if they are incorporated into ritual, public education and are mythologized in the stories that participants tell to others, especially the young. For this reason the importance of who controls historical narratives cannot be underestimated. They are the main components of political culture, which conditions the character and scope of subsequent struggles. In this respect it may be argued that the virtual absence of a story about the struggle for class formation of the workers movements of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in popular culture as well as institutional knowledge, was a major factor accounting for the decline of organized labor after the 1960s when unions and their gains came under fierce attack, and were unable to mount an effective counterforce.

In the popular press and magazines as well as in schools the effect of the way the story is told is to marginalize, when not entirely discount, struggles over class. Labor’s story rates barely a few pages in American history textbooks. A major school text of the 1990s *America Past and Present* devotes exactly twelve pages of its 1081 pages to work, “labor unrest” and labor unions. Similarly the first and second wave of feminism is given short shrift. The struggle for abortion rights -the cutting edge of second wave feminism- and the “gay liberation” movement receive dutiful notice in this text but it provides little detail and analysis of their social and political significance. History as the story of struggles of ordinary people as well of economic and political elites remains hidden and privilege exists to a perspective of history from above.

Despite its exclusions and omissions the virtue of history writing is that time and social changes or shifts are immanent to its discourse. In periods when profound economic, political and cultural crises, are not a topic of discussion and struggle in the public sphere, social theorists typically privilege social space over social time and refer to classes as locations in the social hierarchy. In these circumstances classes are no longer taken as collective historical actors, but are portrayed as aggregations of individuals and groups who are “members” of differentiated social strata. Social theory tends to freeze time and instead defines classes in terms as status groups or strata. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century’s leading functionalist theorist of social stratification, Talcott Parsons’ definition:

only insofar as the differentiations inherent in our occupational structure, with its differential relations of the exchange system and to property, remuneration, etc has become ramified out into a system of strata, which involve differentiations of family living based largely on income, standard of life and the style of life...

and the impact of these on the opportunities available to the younger generation. (10)

Parsons equates strata with the “class system” with almost no temporal reference. In the functionalist description catalogues of occupational structure replace relations of ownership and control over productive property; income plays a large role in situating these strata as a determinant of standard of living; and “life style” becomes a component in the designation of “class” distinctions in a grid in which income plays the decisive role in differentiating social

groups. The working class disappears and is replaced by the category “lower class” which means the working poor and the unemployed. Since income obfuscates the profound insecurity and subordination of industrial and service labor in the labor process, stratification theory constructs a huge middle class which includes anyone above the poverty line and below those who are considered upper class or wealthy. Missing in this mode of analysis is the concept of class *power*. Many from Marxist and non-Marxist persuasions stipulate the power of the “ruling class” over economic, political and ideological relations but, in the practical activity engage in the same work of social cartography -their work is making maps- even if their maps differ in details. What is often “Marxist” or radical about these maps is that, unlike mainstream sociology, interlocking networks between the political and economic directorates are revealed, which explicitly or tacitly constitute a critique of the traditional liberal separation of corporate power and the state. But both become wedded to classification and draw up charts that show where social groups are placed in atemporal social grids. (11)

Curiously the “scientific” Marxists -those that want to reconcile Marxist concepts with social scientific empirical methodologies- tend to converge with the functionalists in two respects: they draw no correlations of class membership with social and political activity; and have accepted the notion that the subject of class studies are “methodological” individuals. Consistent with positivism, this school abjures abstract concepts that are not subject to measurement. Eric Olin Wright, a leading Marxist sociologist of the scientific functionalist bent, has gone so far as to attempt to “measure” class consciousness by generating categories that may be held as a standard: whether individuals fit these categories share certain views and patterns of behavior. His social statics employs traditional sociological procedures such as surveys, interviews and regression charts. As with Parsons, while subject to alteration by external influences, for Wright class and class consciousness are taken as “facts” having a thing-like existence. (12)

Some recent social theory tries to break the traditional separation of economic and cultural relations and insists that social space is structured by both. Refusing Marxist teleology and its subordination of superstructure to economic infrastructure Pierre Bourdieu’s conception of class proceeds from two principal forms of capital: material and cultural, although he actually names two more that have subordinate significance: social capital and symbolic capital. (13) While privileging economic capital he insists that each is an objective determinant of status, class affiliation and of class struggles. For him the primary qualification of class membership, and the determinant of “social powers” is that social groups share common conditions of social existence which presupposes that they have roughly equal amounts of economic and cultural capital. (14) Faulting Marxism for ignoring the cultural and symbolic dimensions of everyday practice Bourdieu insists on the objectivity of the map of ‘multidimensional social space’. He also opposes the one sidedness of functionalists. Bourdieu argues:

If most of those who carry out empirical research are often led to accept, implicitly or explicitly, a theory which reduces the classes to simple ranked but non-antagonistic strata, this is above all because the very logic of their practice leads them to ignore what is objectively inscribed in every distribution ... what has been won in previous battles and can be invested in subsequent battles; it expresses a state of the power relation between the classes or, more precisely, of the power of the

possession of rare goods, and for the specifically political power over the distribution or redistribution of profit. (15)

The signal virtue of Bourdieu's conception of class is his insistence on the importance of "what has been won in previous battles" for accounting for the current "distribution" and as a basis for predicting what may be won in the future. For Bourdieu class struggles are symbolic - over signs- as much over the appropriation of economic goods; they involve struggles over value as much as quantity, over life style as well as over material distribution. Social groups are engaged in playing the "game" to determine how practices such as speech patterns are decided, fashion, nutritional norms and what counts as high culture and popular, or low culture. Tastes in art, fashion, and nutrition -the most ubiquitous signs of class- are, from the standpoint of the accumulation of symbolic capital, as important as economic capital. By broadening the concept of capital to cultural and symbolic goods Bourdieu has partially resolved the problematic distinction between economic infrastructure and the cultural and symbolic superstructure.

Bourdieu's most widely acknowledged contribution to social theory is his articulation of cultural capital in the modern age with the attainment of educational credentials. Appropriating Louis Althusser's declaration-- but only implicitly-- that schools are the premier "ideological state apparatus" because they have assumed primacy in the reproduction of class relations, he goes a step further to argue that education is the path to the achievement of class distinction:

the different forms of capital, the possession of which defines class membership and the distribution of which determines position in the power relations constituting the field of power and also determines the strategies available for use in these struggles -'birth' 'fortune' and 'talent' in a past age, now economic capital and educational capital- are *simultaneously instruments of power* [emphasis mine] and stakes in the struggle for power; they are unequally powerful in real terms and unequally recognized as legitimate principles of authority or signs of distinction, at different moments and, of course, by the different fractions. The definition of the hierarchy between fractions or, which amounts to the same thing, the definition of the legitimating hierarchical principles, i.e. the legitimate instruments and stakes of the struggle is itself a stake in struggles between the factions. (16)

This is one of the most far-reaching and original theories of class formation in contemporary social science, one that ranges between the economic and cultural spheres highly inventive and philosophically informed. Bourdieu recognizes that struggles over appropriation constitute and presuppose the reified fixity of class maps, even if the practice of the mapmakers elides discussion of these struggles. The system's power relies on its capacity to make space, not only for those who possess the lion's share material and cultural capital, but also for subaltern class actors to struggle over the appropriation of material and symbolic goods. Thus social space is produced by these struggles and Bourdieu is among the few theorists who have introduced the notion of horizontal as well as vertical social space. Space is striated so that the multiplicity of positions can be described. But unlike Henri Lefebvre whose work, in this respect, is almost entirely ignored by Bourdieu, the question of time is raised within a fairly restricted frame: in concert with Weber the "system" remains an internally differentiated constant in the spatio-temporal matrix. (17)

Despite many valuable discoveries and insights Bourdieu's theory remains a deft determinism inherited from his mentor, the anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss; and from Max Weber's theory of rationalization. His concepts of habitus -"the making of virtue out of necessity"- that becomes the working class's rationale for its own relative deprivation; the "cultural arbitrary" and "symbolic violence" in schools where students are measured -and measure themselves- against a curriculum and level of performance not of their own making; effectively reproduce the system of antagonistic difference, and are ways the "social powers" place system boundaries on class action. Although recognizing that movement occurs as a result of the uncertainty of these processes Bourdieu privileges the limits over their indeterminacy. However effectively social groups play the game its rules are always already given and make sure that the outcome will not disturb the "balance sheet". (18)

Bourdieu's analysis of the everyday life dynamics of the otherwise autopoietic system of late capitalist domination is both rich and suggestive. But its conception of temporality never segues into history, except as incremental shift and oscillation. Thus, against his own polemic against "objectivism" and his insistence on a "plurality of visions" of social reality the logic of his own theoretical and empirical practice is, folded into scientific objectivism and by invoking the common denominator of capital, has reasserted the primacy of the economic, even if only in the last instance. Lacking a vision of how social formations make history in so far as its most innovative contribution, the concept of cultural capital, allows us to observe the operation of class in various institutional sites, especially education and art, Bourdieu's class theory may be considered a sophisticated update of the hidden variables of social domination. (19)

Here I offer a class theory which presupposes that space is produced by the activity of social formations and as a function of time. Therefore it distinguishes itself from the two main tendencies in 20<sup>th</sup> century social mapping: those who try to squeeze historically-generated social groups such as the managerial, scientific and technical strata in an otherwise immobile social structure determined by relations of ownership and control of the means of material production; and system functionalists who map social groups on to hierarchically arranged grid according to status and occupation. Bourdieu's class theory is surely a partial exception to the binaries of contemporary social thought. It offers a middle ground between the traditional Marxist perspective of class as a relation of social formations to the ownership of productive property and the Weberian theory of stratification, modified by Parsons and others, but is consistent with the contemporary focus on how space is organized. Although adhering to ostensibly different theoretical paradigms these varieties of social theory have abandoned concepts of social time as a fundamental theoretical framework. When time is factored into the picture painted by all three major tendencies of the modern class theory it appears as a function of space. In both variants of social cartography the broad contour is always already given. The difference is only how the given is portrayed.

I argue as well for sundering the traditional sociological distinction between class and social movement, a distinction which presupposes the social statics of both camps of positivist class theory. Social movements change life by transforming some fundamental aspect of social



relationships. (20) Thus social movements are not to be confused with the activity of many groups to make gains within the existing power situation without disturbing it. The efforts of blacks to gain access to colleges and universities, of women to enter professional and managerial ranks, of parents to improve existing schools without changing the curriculum, educational ideology or the administrative authority within which they operate are not, by this conception, social movements. Similarly residents' fight to halt the construction of a mall or supermarket in their neighborhoods they are not forming social movements unless their demands become part of a larger struggle to change the shape of real estate development itself and thereby alter economic relations and produce new social space. It is not that class movements presupposed social movements. (21) Genuine social movements are struggles over class formation when they pose new questions for the conduct of institutional and everyday life and entail new arrangements. Which is not to deny the importance of justice movements; they may or may not turn into class movements, depending on the response of those in power and the networks the justice movements build.

This is the distinction between demands for justice, which presuppose entry has been denied an aggrieved group, or interlopers threaten to change an aspect of current social arrangements, and change which entails a new configuration of the power situation. I understand power in three principal dimensions: who constructs the rules of inclusion and exclusion in institutional and social life; who tells the story of past and present, what Gramsci calls "common sense"; and who has power to define the future. This conception of power incorporates the proposals of the Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School and of Michel Foucault who, in different ways, insist on the power/knowledge nexus. But insofar as social relations are objectified in material production, the practices of everyday life, and institutions such as law, corporations, religious organizations and labor unions this understanding of power differs from the tendency of postmodern social theory, to replace class with social movements, obliterate concepts of social structure, and to displace social relations to discourse such as social narratives. (22) While the "linguistic turn" in social theory has served to remind us that power often entails specifying the mechanisms by which the narrative of the past is told, even these crucial discursive practices are often countervailed by the material practices of those who seek to alter present and future space/time. The political and cultural unconscious can be articulated only retrospectively. (23)

### *Three Axioms of Class Theory*

The first framing axiom of the class theory proposed here is the primacy of social time over social space; spatial arrangements are sedimented outcomes of struggles over class formation and, since social time is not irreversible, are marked by contingency. Therefore while class maps are valuable tools of identification in a specific historical conjunction, if taken as the substance of theory they conceal more than they reveal. The task of theory is to render an account of social transformations as well as social integration but the concept "transformation" should be specified in relation to shifts or oscillation kind Bourdieu identifies as the fruits of struggle -as well as to the ambiguous term "change".

My second framing axiom is that social integration is the result of a process of struggle

and presupposes dis-integration of the prior social arrangements, a process which is a theoretical as much as an empirical question. Whether integration into the prevailing system of power occurs or whether the warring parties have succeeded only in living together in an unstable truce is an empirical question and cannot be determined in advance. In almost all instances integration presupposes that the ruling formation has granted substantial concessions to the subordinate classes as a price for social peace. The question to be investigated is whether these periods constitute “integration” signaled by the loyalty and complicity of the subordinated groups within dominant relations, or is the relative silence of the subalterns a product of fear and an unquiet acknowledgment of the superior force of the prevailing power. If the latter one should expect the truce to be sundered under conditions where capital can no longer acquiesce to labor and other social formations’ condition for social peace and undertakes an offensive against the informal social compact including the money wage and the social wage (the welfare state package of benefits). Here “labor” may include those who are culturally coded by gender, racial and professional identities, as well as industrial and service occupations. The “labor question” embraces both wage-labor and household labor and has political and cultural dimensions as well as economic specification. In this respect war functions as an indefinite postponement of the reckoning for it calls the whole nation to sacrifice and, for a time, class combat may be suppressed by force or by consent.

I use the term “subaltern” to designate not only economically abject or exploited social groups but all those who, at different levels of occupation and income, share relative economic, political and social powerlessness. Needless to say those who have been deprived of the ability to control their own lives are not equal in terms of their potential for exercising power in the public sphere. Some social groups may possess the social location for class formation but lack the conditions necessary to conduct struggles over class. Marx made this point about the French peasantry:

The small peasants form a vast mass, the members of which live in similar conditions, but without entering the manifold relations with one another. Their mode of production isolates them from one another, instead of bringing them into mutual intercourse. The isolation is increased by France’s bad means of communication and by the poverty of the peasants. Their field of production, the small holding, admits of no division of labor in its cultivation, an application of science and, therefore the multiplicity of development, no diversity of talents, no wealth of social relationships. (24)

Thus class formation requires people enter into “manifold relations with one another” and that they have the means of communication to form a “unity”. Marx sets forth the conditions for class formation:

In so far as millions of families live under economic conditions of existence that divide their mode of life, their interests and their culture from those of other classes, and put them in hostile contrast to the latter, they form a class. In so far as there is merely a local interconnection among these small peasants, and the identity of their interests begets no unity, no national union and no political organization, they do not form a class... They cannot represent themselves, they must be represented. Their representative must at the same time appear as their master, as an authority over them, as an unlimited governmental power that protects them against other classes, and sends them

the rain and the sunshine from above. (25)

In this conception the central criterion for class formation is the capacity of a social formation or a constellation of them for self-organization and self-representation. And they must not only share common interests but have generated a culture and “community” of their own. While in this connection Bourdieu is right to have criticized Marxism for failing to theorize the horizontal link between culture and economic interests, this connection was already suggested by Marx, especially in his several works on historical events in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Nevertheless, “capacity” does not signal automatically that self-formation will occur. If the ruling groups remain imprisoned in the language of their presumed sovereignty and in their perception that the demands of the subaltern have exceeded the boundaries of the tacit social contract which presupposes that the subordinate groups are still unable to organize into a unity and cannot represent themselves, they may, and sometimes have, committed an historically disastrous mistake.

Elsewhere in the same text Marx declares “the social revolution cannot draw its poetry from the past, but only from the future”. (26) Not exactly. I have already argued that since history is written by the victors narratives of the past powerfully shape the common sense of the present. The cultural and political opposition is compelled to retell the stories if it hopes to overcome the ideological baggage imposed by current rulers. But there is another reason to qualify Marx’s statement of revolutionary futurity. Walter Benjamin has reminded us that every current generation must redeem the unfinished tasks left by the past; and the danger of losing sight of these tasks must be recognized: “for every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably”. (27)

Thus I propose a shift in the concept of class from a cleavage based exclusively on relations of ownership of capital, that is, of productive property, and the corollary idea that the core classes were arrayed on the basis of productive labor - that which produces surplus -value- to relations of power in all of its domains, including the power to construct historical memory. With Marx I hold the empirical question is whether the class-in-formation can organize and represent itself and make demands on the system that array them in “hostile contrast” to it. And since we can never know the history “as it really was” it must convincingly and selectively appropriate images that it can place on the table of contemporary politics and culture. But we must also take our poetry from the future and not remained chained to the poetry of the 19<sup>th</sup> and first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Thus I propose to shift the basis for the cleavage from an exclusive focus on capital possession whatever its form. The axis of power/ powerlessness widens the understanding of the base of subalternity to those who may perform “unproductive” labor within the traditional Marxist frame of reference, and those who do not enter the wage-labor system at all. (28) This is not merely an opportunistic broadening of the concept of potential class formation. It corresponds to two somewhat contradictory phenomena: the historical emergence of a huge social surplus in industrially advanced capitalist societies that permits a considerable fraction of the population to live outside the wage-labor system, at least for a substantial period of their adult lives. Many are marginals, “hippies”, free-lance artists and writers, and graduate students who never enter the professional or academic work forces except as temporary, part-time

workers. Rather than seeking “normal” full time employment in bureaucratic, commercial or industrial workplaces they prefer to take jobs as office “temps” or find niches that do not require the employee to keep her nose to the grindstone, to show up to the job at an appointed hour, or to work for fifty weeks out of the year. On the other hand the spread of the commodity form makes necessary the entrance of women into the wage labor force, most in low-wage service and administrative occupations. But in contrast to technical distinctions between productive and unproductive labor it may be argued that the vast expansion of the tertiary sector corresponds to the commodification of everyday existence; life is increasingly about buying and selling and those involved in the sales and distribution efforts are engaged in the reproduction of both consumption and production.

Economic and political power is wielded at many levels. At the commanding heights the base of those who wield economic, political and social power has narrowed within the national framework. Since World War Two we have witnessed a new form of global capitalism in which the partnership between transnational corporations and nation-states constitutes economic and political power. But it broadens the conception of the ruling groups to a global perspective since the organization of economic institutions in transnational corporations has enormous implications for cross-national class formation. And the traditional idea that even if economic relations are global, culture remains local is now in question. What counts as cultural power is not the same as it was before the 1960s. It may be argued that while we may stipulate that culture is capital in two senses, for individuals, and has become a major source of economic capital accumulation, the power to shape cultural goods remains in contention between the producers and their audiences, and those who own the means of production of cultural capital. In this connection we are in the midst of a great transformation in international economic relations; the export of culture as commodity competes with the export of other forms of capital. The phrase “the media are American” connotes relations of dominance in this new sphere.

In liberal democracies of the United States and Western Europe through self-organization into labor unions and professional associations many intellectual and manual workers have won a voice in determining their own conditions of labor as well as their housing, education, and public and private consumption. A growing minority are still consigned to a situation of complete abjectness and their ranks swell or diminish according to the level of social struggles they and others have won or lost. These gains expressed themselves at every level of society and, for more than a quarter century attenuated and contained what capital could achieve. But since 1970 when global capital and the political classes of the constellation of nation-states of the economically developed world fought a largely successful battle to restructure economic and political power, the once-confident assumption that gains in the post-war, gains in social wage were permanent features of the social map have been severely tested, when not entirely refuted. The power shift was undertaken to counter the impressive gains made by labor movements since world war two in money and social wages as well as their ability, through job actions, strikes and everyday, mostly, invisible sabotage within the labor process, to limit the power of capital to determine many aspects of production in the workplace. The deterritorialization of production and the consequent steep job losses that accompanied them, disciplined a once defiant labor force; capital regained much of its control over the labor process

and proceeded rapidly to increase productivity through the introduction of automation and computer-mediated technologies. A succession of conservative governments adopted policies that weakened the social wage and resulted in a decline of the labor movements and consequently of living standards for large sections of the population.

In many countries unions lost members but, since some were affiliated to Labor, Social Democratic and social liberal parties, their power was undermined by their compliance with some of the policies of the Center-Left as well as the ostensible Right. They became, in effect, dependent variables in the economic and social system of power. In other words, while ownership of productive property remains one of its key elements, power relations in the state and everyday practices are outcomes of struggles which are, in turn, indeterminate from the perspective of the relations of production. Capital and other powerful forces are not fated to win. To be sure owing to the weight of the power of owners and top managers of large-scale productive property and, in the case of men, tradition, established power enjoys the advantage. The ability of the ruling groups to impose their domination depends to a large degree on whether an alliance of differentially situated social groups emerges to oppose them. Moreover in every era only some sectors of capital are in a position to become winners. Others may lose out, even disappear, or, in some cases, especially small holders, join the alliance.

Capitalist power is constituted by an increasingly integrated network of transnational corporations and coordinating institutions such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, among others which, however, reproduces itself within the political and cultural contours of the nation-state. The power relations within the global network are constantly shifting, and is a component of every national context. In turn since the local context remains the field within which transnational powers must play, mobilized national and regional social groups mediate the extent that these institutions prevail or are required to modify their interventions. These arrangements are not the same as the power frameworks of earlier 20<sup>th</sup> century capitalism which, despite international "cartelization" were constructed within the confines of the nation-state. While the composition of the leading bodies of the World Bank, IMF, and WTO reflects the finance ministers and financial leaders of the major industrialized nations, in which the United States plays the leading role, there are struggles within fractions of capital and within nations over their direction. The new configuration of capitalism's commanding heights has, like previous arrangements, resulted in inclusions and exclusions which change the actors and restructure the cleavages within and between them. (29)

Class theory lacks an account of the historicity of social classes and of the spatial and temporal contexts within which they emerge and change. But theory also lacks reflexivity and therefore does not acknowledge its own historicity. Theory rarely tries to account for its own predispositions in relation to the historically-conditioned situations that produced them. Thus my third axiom is that when widely disseminated among intellectuals and the underlying population class theory, and social theory generally which becomes a force in history, must account for itself. I propose to understand class in terms of its historical specificity and try to account for the changes in the struggles over class that may help comprehend theory's shift in the 20<sup>th</sup> century from diachronic to synchronic frameworks (from time to space). If we abjure the logic of

monocausality that is, the idea that we may explain “b” by reference to “a” as a single causal agent we must trace a complex, although interlinked, series of historical developments that form the context within which many of our ideas about the social world, including class relations, have been forged in the 20<sup>th</sup> century: the contradictory effects of world war one; revolution and counter-revolution; economic crisis and relative economic stabilisation.

Since our ideas and thought-systems are inevitably intertwined with the social and historical contexts within which they are produced I do not invoke the notion of “false consciousness” to denote how theory represents class relations. Although some theorists are politically motivated in constructing their thought-system -Marxists seek to find an increasingly two-class model, liberals try to see classes and power relations as a plurality of forces- these standpoints do not always determine the product. More reasonably theorists are ensconced in their own times. What Raymond Williams terms the “structure of feeling” -which is embedded in everyday life and in the transformations of social relations- often overcomes intellectual predispositions. Therefore it is necessary to discern the salient influences on that feeling-structure in order to see how certain theories displaced others. This is, in the main, a retrospective evaluation which may yield only a schematic description. Yet without such explorations thought seems to follow thought and theory is constructed as the history of internal, hermetically sealed ideas and their influence on each other. Ideas do not have an independent history; while intellectual influences are important they germinate, reach maturity, and have influence only under certain social circumstances. They describe both their knowledge-objects and they can be grasped in relation to their historicity. (30)

### *References*

1. I reserved a fuller treatment of the ruling class for my book *How Class Works Power and Social Movement* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).
2. The group of theorists who have been termed representatives of “western” marxism -those who tried to comprehend C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956).
3. The changes that advanced industrial capitalism has wrought -may be characterized by the attention they give to the concepts of ideology and culture. This tendency spans an otherwise diverse, even contention group: From Georg Lukacs and Karl Korsch in the 1920s the Frankfurt School and Antonio Gramsci to Henri Lefebvre’s series on the Critique of Everyday Life begun in 1947 which culminated almost thirty years in his classic, *The Production of Space* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1976) later and Louis Althusser’s further development of Gramsci’s thought especially his seminal article “Ideology and Ideological Apparatuses” in Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1970).
4. The sad, almost tragic story of the failure of American unions to organize Southern Workers has been told in terms of specific case histories by several labor historians, but there still is no general treatment of the saga. Janet Irons exhaustive account of the national textile workers strike of 1934 illustrates some of the major problems Janet Christine Irons, *Testing the New Deal. The General Strike of 1934*, Ph.D dissertation Duke University, 1988; see also

Barbara Griffith, *Operation Dixie*, for the CIO's post world War Two collapsed effort to organize the South; for the role of the Communists in Southern Organizing Karl Korstad, *Black and White Together Organizing in the South with the Food, Tobacco, Agricultural and Allied Workers Union (FTA-CIO)*, Steve Rosswurm (ed.), *The CIO's Left Led Unions* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992). For the role of black Communists Robin Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe Alabama Communists in the Great Depression* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990). Michael Honey, *Southern Labor and Black Civil Rights* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993) goes a considerable distance in articulating the role of racism, within the movement as well as an employer weapon in thwarting Organized Labor in the South.

5. The most ambitious attempt to theorize the Womens movement in terms of class liberation is Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex The Case for Feminist-Revolution* (New York: William Morrow, 1970). Her effort to suggest a feminist historical materialism is pioneering and singular for its intensity and consistent argument in the literature of feminism. More recently continuing in this vein Nancy Hartsock has made a valuable contribution Nancy Hartsock, *Money, Sex and Power* (New York Longman, 1985).
6. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000). This important contribution is discussed in chapter six of my book *How Class Works...*, op. cit.
7. The slogan "all power to the Soviets" was advanced by in 1917 Bolsheviks' strategic maneuver to undermine the authority of the Central Liberal Republican government of Alexander Kerensky by making the workers' councils both administrative and legislative body. It recalled the 1905 revolution's great innovation. However during the period of "War" Communism which followed the Bolsheviks' seizure of state power they "temporarily" dissolved the councils and established an even more centralized state. The councils were restored but never enjoyed much authority. They became a fig-leaf for the regime's party-led state.
8. Alain Touraine, *The May Movement* (New York: Random House, 1970); Fredy Perlman, *Worker and Student Committees* (Detroit: Black and Red, 1969).
9. The question of revolutionary class consciousness has plagued marxism throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the wake of the collapse of the revolutionary upsurge in post World War One Europe in his essay, *Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat*, George Lukacs offered a powerful explanation for the the demise: the universalization and reification of the commodity-form had become a property of actual proletarian consciousness. This theme ran like a red thread throughout the body of western marxist social theory in the 20<sup>th</sup> century which neither the so-called "linguistic turn" of structuralism nor the allegorical efforts of Lukacs himself could erase. For the fact was that first, fascism was able to excite the imagination of a substantial fraction of the underlying population and then consumerism and the Welfare State were able to accommodate Desire, an accommodation that was challenged in several occasions but never overcome.
10. Talcott Parsons, *An Analytic Approach to the Theory of Social Stratification*; Talcott Parsons, *Essays in Social Theory*, revised edition, (New York: The Free Press, 1954).
11. G. William Domhoff, *Who Rules America?* (Englewood Cliffs: NJ Prentice Hall, 1967); *The Higher Circles* (New York: Random House, 1970).

12. Eric Olin Wright, *A General Framework for the Analysis of Class Structure*, Eric Olin Wright (ed.) *The Debate on Classes*, (London and New York: Verso, 1989). The term “analytic” in the title refers not to the common sense usage but to the precepts the school known as Analytic Marxism whose other major figures are John Roemer and Adam Przeworski. To purge marxism of its speculative and utopian problems, the fundamental project of this tendency is to subject the propositions that constitute the body of historical materialism to a realist worldview that is, of the general correspondence of its concepts with “reality” Further they wish to “test” all theoretical claims according to the rules of empirical evidence and, especially of falsification. Hence history is compressed into categories, class struggles into class maps.
13. Pierre Bourdieu, ‘What Makes a Social Class’, *Berkeley Journal of Sociology*, v. XXXII, 1987, p. 4
14. Pierre Bourdieu, ‘What Makes a Social Class’, *ibid*
15. Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction A Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984) p. 245.
16. Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction*, *ibid* p. 315-316; Pierre Bourdieu, *Reproduction in Education, Culture and Society* (London and Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 1979)
17. Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, *op cit*.
18. Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction*, *op cit*; *Reproduction in Education, Culture and Society* *op cit*.
19. Pierre Bourdieu, ‘What Makes a Social Class’, *op cit*. p. 10
20. Daniel Foss and Ralph Larkin, *Beyond Revolution* (South Hadley: Bergin and Garvey, 1984).
21. J.Craig Jenkins and Kevin Licht, ‘Class Analysis and Social Movements A Critique and Reformulation’, John R.Hall (eds.) *Reworking Class* *op cit*.
22. Ronald Lawson (ed.) *The Tenant Movement in New York City 1904-1984* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1986).
23. Margaret R. Somers, ‘Deconstructing and Reconstructing Class Formation Theory: Narrativity, Relational Analysis, and Social Theory’, in John R. Hall (ed.) *Reworking Class*, *op. cit*.
24. Karl Marx, *The 18<sup>th</sup> Brumaire of Louis Napoleon*, in Karl Marx, *Selected Works Volume 2* (New York: International Publishers, 1964), p. 414-415.
25. Marx, *The 18<sup>th</sup> Brumaire*, *ibid* p. 415.
26. Marx, *The 18<sup>th</sup> Brumaire*, *ibid* p. 318.
27. Walter Benjamin, ‘Theses on the Philosophy of History’, Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, edited by Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books,1969), p. 255.
28. Many of the 1960s movements as well as the movements against capitalist globalization today were, and are, sustained by unwaged or marginally waged people. In the late 1990s demographic factors such as an aging population and the fact that more than half of people between ages 18 and 25 are enrolled in higher education institutions constituted some of the material conditions for the growth of political and social protest. At the same time. In a period of relatively full employment pressures to enter the paid labor force thwarted many neighborhood-based movements and the two and three job phenomenon acted as a counterforce to labor activism especially trade union organizing. Many workers simply lacked the time to participate as rank and file leaders of organizing campaigns.



29. For a further elaboration of these developments see chapter six of my book *How Class Works...*, op cit.
30. Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1973).