

Dissertation title: *Which "Class" is Relevant Today? A Critique of Class Analysis and a Proposal Towards a Rival Research Programme to Social Divisions in Globalised Capitalism*

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A mi entrañable amigo, Guillermo Rochabrún.

Por enseñarme y acompañarme a librar mis propias batallas.

Abstract:

The aim of this dissertation is *to critically assess* the adoption of the term “class” by Sociology and its re-processing into *class analysis*, a research programme that chiefly bloomed from within Post-War Anglo-American Sociology. This assessment is informed by a singular Marxist viewpoint (that of Peruvian scholar of Marx's thought, Guillermo Rochabrún) which allows us 1) to distinguish between already given facts and the constitutive processes of social life; 2) to unveil the connection of sociological research with the historical evolution of capitalism, particularly class analysis's concern with the appearances of capitalism and neglect of the inquiry for its determining elements; and 3) to provide clues to a more insightful account for “pressing social issues” of current capitalism, namely, the slowdown in poverty reduction and middle class growth, socio-economic inequality and exclusion.

Fundamentally, this dissertation engages with the work of John Goldthorpe and his collaborators, showing its bloom from the 1970s until the 1990s. Then, it follows Goldthorpe's approach decay in the 21st Century, specially among British sociologists, as well as the surge of a “cultural turn” in response to the growing critiques that class analysis faced at the end of 20th Century.

This dissertation's key findings are the following: class analysis is a research programme (in the sense of Lakatos) that placed at its *hard core* a sociological “prenotions” corresponding to the appearances that capitalism projects onto the immediate experience of social actors. This feature led to successively introduce *auxiliary theories* that do not augment nor preserve the empirical content of their predecessors, while increasingly focusing on anomalies. *Thus, class analysis is a research programme in a degenerating phase, that cannot advance novel facts.*

Finally, the definitive conclusion makes the case for *a rival research programme to explain the key social divisions within the current processes of capital accumulation.*

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1. Introduction

Since the global financial crisis of 2007-2008, there have been extensive discussions on the gains and losses of globalization. On one hand, the last few years have seen claims about poverty reduction and the emergence of a “global middle class” since 1990 (Heiman, Liechty and Freeman 2012; Kharas and Gertz 2010); which by 2018 would have comprised half the world's population (Kharas and Hamel 2018; Kharas 2017). On the other hand, with mounting evidence of growing inequality during the last half-century (Piketty 2014; Milanovic 2016), it has been noted that middle classes are facing great troubles and are shrinking in size (Koo 2016; Sassen 2014).

Moreover, the current global economic recession resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic has set off worldwide alarms regarding the vulnerability of the middle classes and undermined prospects for poverty reduction (World Bank 2021; Castilleja-Vargas 2020). Thus, a recent report has stated that this “economic downturn is likely to have diminished living standards around the world, pushing millions out of the global middle class and swelling the ranks of the poor.” (Pew Research Center 2021, 3).

These pressing “social issues” have come to the spotlight of public opinion, media, multilateral organizations, policy-makers, and sociologists -who have been researching them from the origins of the discipline. Thus, since the emergence of social problems and deviance as fields of sociological study by the late 19th Century, “poverty” has been a focus of concern given its alleged effects on other social problems such as violence, crime, addictions, etc. (Suter et al. 2017). Later, in the mid-20th Century, following Lipset’s (1959, 83) inclusion of middle classes into the “social requisites of democracy”, sociologists were concerned with testing the hypothesis that a large middle class could foster democracy by mitigating conflict and inequality.

Hence, there is a long history of sociological research on “social issues” such as poverty, middle classes, inequality, etc., which has typically been applied, policy-

oriented, and solution-driven (Suter et al. 2017). As a result, empirical research has been privileged in the formation of fields of study marked by the heterogeneity of theoretical frameworks, which has hindered the possibility of reaching rigorous understanding and conceptualization of the very core phenomena of those fields, namely “poverty”, “class”, “inequality”, etc.

Based on the previous considerations, the main aim of this dissertation is to critically expose the constitution of *class analysis* as a mainstream *research programme*¹ in (Anglo-American) sociology, whose permanent commitment to pressing “social issues” has led 1) to place a “sociological *prenotion*”² as the irrefutable hard core of the programme, and 2) to successively introduce refutable auxiliary hypotheses that do not augment nor preserve the empirical content of their predecessors. Thus, we contend that *class analysis is a research programme in a degenerating phase*, expressed in its failure to advance novel facts or provide new insightful interpretations of ongoing phenomena related to pressing “social issues”: e.g. lacking a theoretical framework to account for the reproduction (and changes) of classes, class analysis *cannot explain* issues such as the downturn in poverty reduction and middle classes growth. To *unveil and overcome* the entrapments of class analysis, we *deploy a particular Marxist critique*³ that will allow us to outline hints towards an alternative research programme to study the key social divisions in the context of globalised capitalism.

The remainder of this dissertation is organized as follows: Chapter 2 presents the origins and modern uses of the term “class”, as well as its role in modern social thought

1 Lakatos critically reviewed Popper’s criteria to assess the scientific status of knowledge and to explain the history of scientific discovery, and proposed to shift the unit of analysis from the isolated theory towards the research programme: the sequence of observational hypotheses built around a hard core of highly abstract theoretical propositions.

2 Following the way in which Durkheim (1982[1895]) deploys the term in Chapter 2 of *The Rules of Sociological Method*, we understand “prenotions” as ideas formed without scientific rigour, based on laymen’s immediate experience of everyday life. As Durkheim argued, this is a normal feature of social life but scientific inquiry is misled when prenotions are taken as explanations of social facts. Thus, we use the term “sociological prenotation” in a negative sense.

³ *Capital. A Critique of Political Economy* is the cornerstone of our comprehension of Marx’s thought. We rely on the 2008 reprint of the 1975 Spanish edition of Siglo XXI Editores (México D.F.), which in turn is based on the 1872 second German edition of *Das Kapital. Kritik der politischen Oekonomie*, originally published in 1864.

and the surge of sociology. Chapter 3 studies how the “sociological prenotation” of class was re-processed into class analysis, and its development during the last half century. Finally, Chapter 4 seeks a) to recap the assessment of class analysis according to the methodology of scientific research programmes, revealing its degenerating state; and b) to give hints towards an alternative research programme able to overcome the shortcomings of class analysis.

2. “Class” as a *Prenotion*

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED)⁴, the word “class” has multiple origins: 1) partly a borrowing from the Latin term “classis”, used to describe the divisions of the Roman people on the basis of property (as in a French translation of Livy’s *History of Rome* a1359); 2) partly from the Middle French word “classe”, used in the previous Latin sense but also to name a group of students who are taught together (1549), naval force, fleet (1559), lesson (1611). “Class” came into English by the end of 16th Century, to name a category of people or things (plants, animals, minerals) having some related properties or attributes in common, grouped together, and differentiated from others under a general name or description; a kind, a sort⁵. And the development of its modern social meaning, to name a division or stratum of society consisting of people at the same economic level, frequently with modifying words expressing the ranking (“higher”, “lower”, “upper”, “middle”, “lowest”), can be traced back to Bolton’s *Cities advocates* of 1629; usage that flourished from 1770 onwards alongside the Industrial Revolution, [the consolidation of capitalism in Europe] and its decisive reorganization of society (Williams 2015[1976], 27).

4 All the references to the OED are taken from its official website: <https://www.oed.com/>

5 Sir Thomas Smith (1583, xxiv.33) wrote: “The fourth sort or classe amongst vs, is of those which the olde Romans called capite censij proletarij or operæ, day labourers, poore husbandmen, yea marchantes or retailers which haue no free lande, copiholders, and all artificers, as Taylers, Shoormakers, Carpenters, Brickemakers, Bricklayers, Masons, &c.” Later, in his famous book on forestry, *Sylva*, John Evelyn (1664) wrote: “These [plants] we have distributed [...] into the three following classes.”

In this latter sense, the term “class” implied that property by itself and more broadly, anything that could be acquired (“*the attainable*”, and not “what is assigned by birth”) *was beginning to be a key criterion for people to understand the new social relationships and hierarchies.* “The essential history of the introduction of class, as a word which would supersede older names for social divisions, relates to the increasing consciousness that social position is made rather than merely inherited.” (Williams 2015[1976], 27) “Under the pressure of this awareness, [...] the new vocabulary of class began to take over. [...] Lower classes was used in 1772, and lowest classes and lowest class were common from the 1790s. These carry some of the marks of the transition, but do not complete it. More interesting because less dependent on an old general sense, [...] is the new and increasingly self-conscious and self-used [congratulatory] description of the middle classes. This has precedents in ‘men of a middle condition’ (1716)⁶ [...] The swell of self-congratulatory description reached a temporary climax in Brougham’s speech of 1831: ‘by the people, I mean the middle classes, the wealth and intelligence of the country, the glory of the British name’.” (Williams 2015[1976], 28)

This history of the word “class” can be understood in relation to the development of capitalism in Europe, specially in Great Britain: centred around the industry, and the public and private services it demanded, capitalism brought the increase of manual and non-manual wage labour in the cities, and a growing differentiation inside the latter between routine and (more or less) creative work (or jobs that involved decision-making). People employed in this last kind of jobs (then called “skilled workers”) became the repositories of knowledge in different fields, providing intellectuals, scientists, and artists for their society; and with the nobility being relegated, they placed themselves *in the middle* below the “capitalists” and the “landowners”, and above the

6 According to the OED, the first use of the term “middle class”, highlighting property (“the attainable”) as a defining characteristic to make sense of social divisions, can be found in Bradshaw’s *Scheme to prevent Running Irish Wools to France*, where he states: “The lower and middle Class of their People appear’d at that time, well dress’d in Ratteens and Frizes; the better, or richer Class, wore Cloths of Ten Shillings per Yard.” (1745, 4).

“common people” structured around the “manual proletariat”. The historical rise of labour’s productivity through the application of science and technology, led to a greater demand for and absorption of skilled workers into the capitalist economy and society⁷. Thus, by mid-19th Century, it had already emerged -in the collective consciousness- *the vision of a society divided in classes or strata, among which fluid mobility was plausible and real, based on the acquisition of key resources* (such as money, certain goods like means of production, knowledge, etc.).

However, from this same historical process, surged another meaning associated to the word “class”, most of the time overlapped with the abovementioned. “In the fierce argument about political, social and economic rights, between the 1790s and the 1830s, class was used in another model, with a simple distinction of the productive or useful classes (a potent term against the aristocracy). [As a result,] both the self-conscious middle classes and the quite different people who by the end of this period would describe themselves as the working classes adopted the descriptions useful or productive classes, in distinction from and in opposition to the privileged or the idle. This use, which of course sorts oddly with the other model of lower, middle and higher, has remained both important and confusing. For it was by transfer from the sense of useful or productive that the working classes were first named.” (Williams 2015[1976], 29). “The term working classes, originally assigned by others, was eventually taken over and used as proudly as middle classes had been: ‘the working classes have created all wealth’ (Rules of Ripponden Co-operative Society; cit. J. H. Priestley, *History of RCS*; dating from 1833 or 1839). By the 1840s, then, middle classes and working classes were common terms.” (Williams 2015[1976], 30)

In this second sense, *classes are not seen as plain strata but as divisions that emerge from the functioning of the capitalist economy*, hence the emphasis on productivity and

⁷ The historical process briefly displayed in this paragraph is theoretically reconstructed in *Capital*, Vol 1, Part IV. Specially clear and succinct on this matter is Chapter 14 on absolute and relative surplus-value.

the creation of wealth. This was precisely the way in which classical political economy (or simply, political economy -PE) had been understanding fundamental social divisions since the publication of Smith's landmark *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776), where he aimed to find out how wealth and ultimately, value is produced and distributed within the "commercial society" of his time. Smith's inquiry laid the rudiments for what, 41 years later, Ricardo formalized into the labour theory of value in his *Principles of Political Economy and Taxation* (1817), where he contended that only labour creates value, and analysed the laws of distribution of that value among the "three classes of the community" earlier recognized by Smith: the *landlords* collecting *rents*, the *workers* earning *wages*, and the *owners of capital* making *profits*. Furthermore, Ricardo concluded that profits vary inversely with wages, thereby posing an antagonism of interests between workers and capitalists (Callinicos 2020, 93). Thus, alongside the consolidation of industrial capitalism in Europe, specially in Great Britain, both in the collective consciousness and in PE (direct antecedent of modern social sciences), classes were also understood as social divisions corresponding to the "factors of production" (labour, capital, land), each one retrieving incomes from their inputs to the production of wealth.

This is why one of sociology's "founding fathers" acknowledged: "As for myself, I do not claim to have discovered either the existence of classes in modern society or the struggle between them. Long before me, bourgeois historians had described the historical development of this struggle between the classes, as had bourgeois economists their economic anatomy." (Marx 1983[1852]). Specifically, Marx wrote in the *Economic Manuscripts of 1861–63*: "Ricardo exposes and describes the economic antagonism of classes -as shown by the intrinsic relations- and... consequently political economy perceives, discovers the root of the historical struggle and development."⁸

⁸ Karl Marx. "The Economic Manuscript of 1861–63", *MECW*, vol. 31, p. 392, quoted in Callinicos 2020.

However, as expressed in Marx's *opus magnum*, *Capital*, his critique of PE uses its categories (its *language*) to expose and overcome its flaws to explain capitalism, and the departure point of this intellectual endeavour is Smith-Ricardo's labour theory of value. Thus for example, in line with PE, Ricardo explains the emergence of classes with antagonistic interests by looking at *individuals in the sphere of circulation*, workers selling and capitalists buying "labour" in a market ruled by the "law of supply and demand", *and in the sphere of distribution*, examining salaries and profits. In contrast, Marx (2008[1864])⁹ reveals that what really happens is the sell and buy of *labour-power* (the capacity to work, whose price is determined by the value of the "necessary commodities" to reproduce it), *that generates surplus labour* (more amount of labour than required to meet the value of the "necessary commodities") *when consumed in the capitalist's production process, thereby creating surplus-value and allowing its appropriation in the form of profits*. Masking the capitalist *private* appropriation of surplus-value produced by a *collective* of labourers (i.e. of surplus-labour not paid to the labourers), is the wage, form taken by the value of labour-power in capitalism. Thus, at the end of a productive cycle, the labourer has nothing but that of the beginning, its free labour-power in need to sell to survive; while the capitalist has profits to reinvest in the *production, constituting the capitalist accumulation process*.

It is inside this process of capitalist accumulation, based on the valorisation of profit-producing capital through surplus-labour, that Marx understands the constitution of

⁹ Marx dedicates the first two Parts of *Capital* to study the capitalist circulation of commodities, where he (re-)affirms 1) that only labour creates value; 2) that the exchange of commodities is possible by equating their values; 3) which are determined by the amount of labour incorporated in commodities (approximated through the "labour time socially necessary" to produce a good under the normal conditions of production); 4) hence, every commodity is exchanged (sold or bought) at its value (more or less reflected in prices). But from this analysis, Marx finds a phenomenon that contradicts the "laws of circulation": *surplus-value*, which appears when obtaining more value in the sell than that paid in the buy. Marx solves this puzzle with aid of the use-value of a singular commodity: *labour-power*, which generates surplus labour (and thus, surplus-value) when it is consumed by the capitalist in *his* production process. The relevance of the commodity-form assumed by labour-power is such that the remainder of Volume 1 is an exploration into this matter and its (theoretical and historical) consequences.

classes, as key social divisions and *potential collectivities*¹⁰, and its *struggles* in capitalism. Completely different were the comprehensions of 19th Century laymen and PE, that saw classes as (aggregates of) *individuals meeting in the circulation, in the "labour market"*, as sellers and buyers in relations of equality, freedom and ownership; vision from which the basic antagonism between classes *appears* to revolve *around the distribution* of value: pressures from both sides *to augment their income*, salaries or profits. Moreover, this notion of "classes" crafted by PE allows us to make sense of the ("oddly" and "confusing") use, in 19th Century Great Britain, of "class" in the overlapped senses of "strata" and of "economic categories", illustrated by the classification schema still in use today: higher/upper-, middle-, working- classes.

From Marx's standpoint, PE understanding of classes and more broadly of capitalism, is entrapped in the surface of social phenomena¹¹: it deals with how such phenomena immediately *appear* to the experience and consciousness of social actors, how they are perceived by people in everyday life. In this sense, we contend that both laymen and PE shared a "common sense", a *prenotion* (Durkheim 1982[1895], 60-84) with regard to capitalist society and its key divisions: *the vision of a society fundamentally composed of classes or strata, into which individuals could be classified (and re-*

¹⁰ We take the concept of "collectivities" from Merton (1968[1949], 353): "people who have a sense of solidarity by virtue of sharing common values and who have acquired an attendant sense of moral obligation to fulfil role-expectations. All groups are, of course, collectivities, but those collectivities which lack the criterion of interaction among members are not groups. Nor should the distinction be considered purely taxonomic: the operation of social control in groups and in other collectivities differs as a result of differences in the systems of interaction. Moreover, collectivities are potentials for group-formation: the common fund of values can facilitate sustained social interaction among parts of the collectivity."

¹¹ That is why, criticizing the method of political economy, Marx (1976[1858-7], 21) wrote: "It seems fair to start with the real and the concrete, with the effective assumption; thus, for example, in the economy, by the population that is the base and the subject of the social act of production as a whole. However, on closer inspection, this turns out false. The population is an abstraction if I neglect, for example, the classes that are part of it. These classes are, in turn, an empty word if one does not know the factors on which they rest, e.g. wage-labour, capital, etc. [...] If I started with the population, I would have a chaotic representation of the whole and, with more and more precision, I would analytically arrive at concepts that were increasingly simple: from the represented concrete I would reach to increasingly subtle abstractions until reaching the simplest determinations. At this point, the return journey would have to be resumed, until we found the population again, but this time I would not have a chaotic representation of the whole, but a rich totality with multiple determinations and relationships." Hence, the theoretical constitution of classes is the *endpoint* of the research, despite the fact that they are as real and immediate to human experience as the division of population in towns and countries.

classified upwards or downwards) according to the amount of resources they acquire from any source of income (salaries, profits, rents), to buy goods (luxuries, means of production, etc.) and services (luxuries, education, etc.).

The emergence of this prenotation among 19th Century social thinkers and laymen shows the degree to which capitalism had gradually been structuring social life¹². On these ideological and material grounds, the social sciences were erected by the end of that century. Hence, another sociology's "founding father" and prominent figure of the discipline's "classics", understood classes as part of a classification system in which "class situation" derived "from the *power of disposition* (or from the lack of it) *over goods and services*, and the ways of its applicability, *to obtain rents or revenue*." (Weber 2002[1922], 242) (Italics are ours).

We are well aware that Weber distinguishes between "class situation", "class" (which can be seen as "social categories"¹³), and "social class" (which can be seen as "groups"¹⁴). However, his concept tree is built on the "prenotation" abovementioned: that social relations and hierarchies in modern societies are mainly (though not

¹² *Capital*'s first line states: "The wealth of those societies in which the capitalist mode of production prevails, presents itself as 'an immense accumulation of commodities'" (Marx 2008[1864], 43). Throughout Chapter 1 of *Capital*, Marx unveils the "secret" behind objects' apparently inherent value: the *social form* that labour takes in capitalism as *private labour* executed by *individuals*. Since autonomous private producers only interact when they exchange their products, they *perceive* that value emerges from the material properties of commodities and not from the amount of labour they enclose within themselves. Thus, the apparently inherent value of commodities is a product of historical social relations. This phenomenon was named "*the fetichism of commodities*" in Section 4 of Chapter 1 of *Capital*.

¹³ "Distinct from both groups and collectivities are the *social categories*. [...] social categories are aggregates of social statuses, the occupants of which are not in social interaction. These have *like* social characteristics—of sex, age, marital condition, income, and so on—but are not necessarily oriented toward a distinctive and *common* body of norms. Having like statuses, and consequently *similar* interests and values, social categories can be mobilized into collectivities or into groups." (Merton 1968[1949], 353-4). "We understand by 'class' any human group that is in the same class situation." (Weber 2002[1922], 242)

¹⁴ Weber (2002[1922], 242) calls "social class" to "the totality of those class situations between which a) personal, b) intergenerational exchange is easy and typically occurs." Once again, we take the term "group" from Merton (1968[1949], 353), for whom the basic identification criterion is sustained *social interaction*. As we can derive from notes 10 and 13, Merton distinguishes "groups" from "collectivities" and "social categories" *according to their different sociological nature*: while groups are supra-individual entities *real and relevant* for the individuals (since they interact and share values), collectivities are only relevant as source of norms derived from *situations perceived as common*, and social categories are even more distant for individuals since they are created (more often by analysts) from characteristics that may or may not be relevant for the concrete individuals.

exclusively¹⁵) *organized according to a classification system of classes emanating from the distribution of resources that an individual can acquire* (once again, “the attainable” at the core of the analysis).

“Thus, we speak of a ‘class’ when: 1) a specific causal component of their probabilities of existence is common to a certain number of men, as long as 2) such component is represented exclusively by lucrative interests and possession of goods, 3) under the conditions determined by the market (of goods or work) (‘class situation’). It constitutes the most elementary economic fact that the way in which the power of possession of goods is distributed in a set of men who meet and compete in the market for exchange purposes creates by itself specific probabilities of existence. According to the law of marginal utility^[16] that rules competition, excludes the non-owners of the most appreciated goods in favour of the owners, and monopolizes their acquisition by the latter. [...] Therefore, ‘possession’ and ‘non-possession’ are the fundamental categories of class situation. [...] ‘Class situation’ ultimately means, in this sense, the ‘market position’” (Weber 2002[1922], 683-4).

Thereafter, with few exceptions, sociological research on classes has assumed the Weberian identification of class situation with market position, *focused on the distribution of resources among individuals, and has aimed to place them into classes or strata on the assumption that these classification systems a) reflect the main social divisions, and b) explain individual and collective action, and more broadly, social life.* The next chapter shows how sociology, once definitively institutionalized as an

15 Weber (2002[1922], 242-6; 682-94] has inspired the analysis of other axis around which society is organized and power is distributed: *status*.

¹⁶ Despite insightful nuances, Weber’s understanding of capitalist economy is mainly taken from marginalist economic theory, for which the founding problem regards the *distribution of scarce goods among individuals who subjectively assign value* (price) to those goods, according to their needs and its supply (Menger 1976[1871]; Böhm-Bawerk 1959[1889]). A thorough discussion on Weber and, more broadly, of sociology vis-à-vis marginalist economic theory is still to be written. An essential reading towards this goal is *Marx, Marginalism and Modern Sociology: From Adam Smith to Max Weber* (Clarke 1991).

influential discipline, dealt with this “modern inheritance”, and open itself a path towards “class analysis”.

3. Rise and Decay of Class Analysis

Although sociology was invented in Europe, it did not flourish there until the post-war period¹⁷. Sociology’s definite institutionalization as prominent social science in the academic and public spheres occurred in the United States, during the first half of the 20th Century, and from there it irradiated its influence to the main sociological circles and institutions around the globe.

The University of Chicago was founded in 1892 alongside the world’s first department of sociology, that soon started the publication of its own journal (*American Journal of Sociology*, 1894), and later was actively involved in the foundation of a nationwide professional association (the *American Sociological Society*, precursor of the *American Sociological Association*, both created in 1905). Practice and teaching of sociology in the University of Chicago was highly influenced by its close relationship with the city, since it provided university faculty with employment in various civic and municipal agencies. Hence, empirical research became highly demanded to tackle urban social problems: poverty, racism, immigration, crime. However, this feature laid the limits to the university’s influence at the national level, which became evident by the end of 1920s, when public concerns turned towards far-reaching national problems such as economic and industrial development, democracy, global security, etc. (Cortese 1995).

¹⁷ Comte coined the term “sociology” and posited it as a science analogous to physics, but did not have any institutional affiliation. Likewise, other “founding fathers” such as De Tocqueville, Spencer and Marx, were not professors, nor were they paid by any academic institution. Moreover, sociology failed to appear as a distinctive entity in Europe; for instance, even in Durkheim’s France, a specialized undergraduate programme started no earlier than 1958 (Duller and Fleck 2017, 5). London School of Economics and Political Science was created in 1895, with a department of sociology that has done teaching and research since then. However, it did not gain a solid toehold within British academy and a sustained engagement with sociology from other countries, until the Post-War period (Scott 2017).

In this context, Harvard's newly created department of sociology (1931) took the lead in the advancement of sociology as it nested structural-functionalism (SF), which became *the* most influential sociological approach both within the academic¹⁸ and public spheres. From its origins, spearheaded by Parsons and Merton, SF intended to be a general and systemic theoretical framework of society. The vision of society that SF created is well known: starting with the idea of an interdependent set of institutions that divide social labour among themselves, it put forth an "equilibrium" model in which society was able to set in motion the necessary forces to perform the functions required by *any* social system, and to correct or counter the deviations from them.

The rudiments of this vision are in *The Structure of Social Action* (1966[1937]), in which Parsons attempts to solve the "utilitarian dilemma" of positivism, which he believes to identify at the core of modern philosophy and social thought from the end of 16th Century to the end of 19th Century. Basically, the "utilitarian dilemma" can be simplified as follows: individuals that act rationally to establish means to reach randomly chosen ends, could only generate an unstable society; but then, *how was social order possible?* Parsons thinks that "a group of recent European writers" (Weber, Durkheim, Pareto and Marshall) have scratched the surface of an answer and that their ideas claim for a theoretical synthesis that would overcome the flaws of positivist-utilitarian theories of action prevailing in the social sciences of his time¹⁹. Parsons answer was a *voluntaristic theory of action*: positing that individuals act not only motivated by rational

¹⁸ Of course there were dissident voices, best illustrated by what Blumer (1969) called "symbolic interactionism", but they were *unequivocally in the minority* and lacked an alternative approach as overarching as SF.

¹⁹ In 1924, Parsons received his BA from Amherst College where he studied biology and philosophy, and took courses with "institutional economists" Clarence Ayres and Walton Hamilton, who drew him toward social science. In 1925, Parsons went to the University of Heidelberg (Germany) to study his PhD in sociology and economics, where he encountered the work of Max Weber, and was awarded his doctorate in 1929. In 1927, Parsons had already moved to an appointment in the Harvard Department of Economics, and during the 1930s played an important role in developing the Department of Sociology. Parsons remained concerned with developments in economics since he saw it as a corpus of theories on rational action that needed to be confronted with his own (Camic 1991, ix-xxiii; Parsons 1970).

utilitarian but also normative criteria, the social order was possible through individual interiorization of shared norms and values.

It is not by accident that, essentially, Parsons believes to find this answer in some *parts* of Durkheim oeuvre²⁰ since, much like the Frenchman, he saw himself as founder of a new scientific discipline. Nonetheless, Durkheim (1982[1895]) opens the field for his sociology by constructing a *sui generis* object of study that needed to be explained by phenomena of the same nature²¹. Thus, the core of Durkheim's sociology is that of supra-individual phenomena that emerge from the *association of individuals*, and not the problem of social order or control, that Parsons imputes to him²², i.e. the individual-society dichotomy. Of course, Durkheim studied the consequences that social facts had on individuals but his inquiries take, for example, the following formulae: how do changes in the division of labour affects solidarity or collective consciousness? And

²⁰ "Now he [(Durkheim)] makes the far-reaching empirical observation that since individual wants are in principle unlimited, it is an essential condition of both social stability and individual happiness that they should be regulated in terms of norms. But here the norms thought of do not, as do the rules of contract, merely regulate 'externally', e.g. as the conditions of entering into relations of contract -they enter directly into the constitution of the actors' ends themselves." (Parsons 1966[1937], 382).

²¹ Like physics that explains the material-physical world in terms of material-physical phenomena, sociology has to explain society by resorting to social facts: "ways of acting, thinking and feeling which possess the remarkable property of existing outside the consciousness of the individuals. Not only are these types of behaviour and thinking external to the individual, but they are endowed with a compelling and coercive power by virtue of which, whether he wishes it or not, they impose themselves upon him." (Durkheim 1982[1895], 51). Durkheim wrote a Preface to the Second Edition of *The Rules of Sociological Method*, which is mainly devoted to explain the *sui generis* nature of social facts. "Yet since society comprises only individuals it seems in accordance to common sense that social life can have no other substratum than the individual consciousness. [...] Yet what is so readily deemed unacceptable for social facts is freely admitted for other domains of nature. Whenever elements of any kind combine, by virtue of this combination they give rise to new phenomena. One is therefore forced to conceive of these phenomena as residing, not in the elements, but in the entity formed by the union of these elements. The living cell contains nothing save chemical particles, just as society is made up of nothing except individuals. Yet it is very clearly impossible for the characteristic phenomena of life to reside in atoms of hydrogen, oxygen, carbon and nitrogen. [...] Life cannot be split in this fashion. It is one, and consequently cannot be located save in the living substance in its entirety." (Durkheim 1982[1895], 39).

²² "Thus in following out the problem of control Durkheim has progressed [...] to laying primary emphasis on the 'subjective' sense of moral obligation. The element of constrain persists, with a changed meaning, in the sense of obligation. In so far as he has that sense the actor is not free to do as he likes, he is 'bound', but it is a totally different mode of being bound [...] It is, however, a disciplining, controlling element. [...] The normal concrete individual is a morally disciplined personality. This means above all that the normative elements have become 'internal', 'subjective' to him." (Parsons 1966[1937], 385-6).

how these, in turn, affect the conduct of a *set of individuals*?²³ Ultimately, what concerns Durkheim is the *common life* of individuals, which in essence is a *moral life*.

On the contrary, SF placed the individual-society dichotomy and, consequently, the problem of social order (or social control over individuals) as its constitutive core. This results from an acritical assumption of the problems and premises posited by modern social thought; foremost, the *idea of an isolated individual refractory to norms*. From Hobbes's *Leviathan* (1651) to Rawls's *A Theory of Justice* (1971), through Rousseau's *The Social Contract* (1762), philosophy has dealt with the question on how to constitute a stable *political* order among free and autonomous individuals. Ignoring the political and epistemological nature of these previous inquiries, Parsons launched a research programme to build a general theory on an already *constituted social* order, which is assumed to have always existed.

Once the individual-society dichotomy was assumed, and inversely to social contract theories, SF "took the side" of society to solve it²⁴ and in so doing shaped *one distinctive model of sociological reasoning*: individual action and consciousness were assigned the form of *explanandum*, while the individual's *social position* took the form of *explanans*. Sociological inquiry, then, was aimed to describe, explain, and predict individual action and consciousness *according to* the individual's position in the social structure, by situating the actor in a social position.

This sociological perspective accompanied the discipline's definite institutionalization as an authoritative social science in the academic and public spheres, whose influence became increasingly global in the post-War period. The magnitude and nature of this process is such that "the classics" (in the form of the canonical trilogy -Marx, Durkheim,

²³ This formulae summarizes Durkheim's inquiry in *Suicide* (1952[1897]), where he seeks to explain the *social rate of suicides*, not the suicide of a concrete individual. Durkheim's answer emphasises the increase of the division of labour and the erosion of collective consciousness.

²⁴ Social contract theories privilege the process through which individuals constitute a political authority, while Parsons -and SF in general- fails to ask for the process through which norms and values are institutionalized, these are always *given facts* in the actor's reference system.

Weber- proposed by Giddens 1971) were only recognized retrospectively, when the crisis of this perspective became evident. And even after this, we contend that there remain traces of such perspective in the form of “sociological prenotions” circulating unnoticed among researchers²⁵; one of which underlies the sociological approaches to “class analysis” that are the focus of this dissertation.

3.1. The Bloom of Class Analysis

After World War II, in the polarized context of the Cold War, splits grew amongst liberal, conservative, and radical streams of sociological thought. Thus, both Marx’s and Weber’s theories (as related to capitalism, power, social divisions, etc.) were reviewed and reformulated for academic and political purposes in North-America and Europe, where studies on social divisions proliferated either under the stratification approach (concerned with multiple axes of social division and hierarchies: status, ethnicity, race, class, etc.) or as “class analysis” (CA). The two editions of the massive anthology, *Class, Status and Power*, by Bendix and Lipset is a pertinent indicator of the evolution of this kind of research and its position inside mid-20th Century sociology²⁶.

“In the 13 years since its first publication in 1953, this Reader was reprinted nine times, until in the end its editors decided to compose a second edition [...] Of the 60 pieces of

²⁵ Readings of “the classics” were and are still today -in a lesser degree, though- influenced by traces of the sociological perspective that we have described. Thus, for example, it is frequent to find exercises that compare Marx’s theory of capitalism with Weber’s research on that matter, either to *directly* contrapose them (the structuralist-economic determinism of the former vs the individual-subjective approach of the latter) or to *immediately* complement them (with Marx giving the clues to understand “the economy” and Weber providing insights on “the culture” in capitalism). As we have briefly showed in the last pages of Chapter 2, Marx and Weber -among other nuances- differ on their theoretical approach to capitalism (built through distinctive methods); thus, they cannot be immediately compared. First it is necessary to *explicitly* lay a “common ground”, a systematic set of questions for the comparison; without this, the exercise risks to be driven by arbitrary “sociological prenotions” and lead to fallacious conclusions. Despite an admirable effort to provide a fresh look at “the classics”, Giddens’s (1971) understanding of these authors not entirely escapes this tendency.

²⁶ “If, in Europe, sociologists talk about ‘Readers’ [...] the first, and for many the only title that comes to mind is *Class, Status, and Power*. In the United States, an inflation of Readers has probably lowered the perceived status of this particular anthology somewhat, but even so, the volume edited by Professors Bendix and Lipset has become what a youthful discipline in a shortlived time may well call a ‘classic.’” (Dahrendorf 1966, 284)

the first edition, only 13 have survived; 61 new pieces were added to make up the bigger volume. The volume has been brought up to date; no less than 53 of the articles included were published after the appearance of the first edition, 40 of them after 1960. [...] There are more foreign authors represented; at least 10 of the pieces written by contemporary sociologists were written by non-Americans, among them four Poles. Nor are these rather superficial observations without symptomatic relevance. 'A Reader in Social Stratification,' the subtitle of the first edition, has become 'Social Stratification in Comparative Perspective.' [...] Texts on American society have given way to those about other countries, or [...] to comparative analyses. [...] But not all changes made by the editors are as unambiguously improvements [...] comparative research as such is, much like historical work, to begin with a method of description; it leaves all major problems of explanation unsolved." (Dahrendorf 1966, 284).

Dahrendorf's review points not only to a growing number of studies on stratification and classes, but the emergence and expansion of an international research programme originated in North-American sociology, which is focused on producing empirical studies on the social structures of different countries while neglecting theory building. This feature has led some scholars to claim that, in sociology, there is a divergence between CA (applied-driven) and class theory (Breen and Rottman 1995).

Nonetheless, such divergence did not mean then (and does not mean today) that stratification studies in general, and CA specifically, lacked a common framework of ideas; instead, the following notions inadvertently settled among scholars (Marshall 1950; Dahrendorf 1959 [1957]; Lockwood 1958; Bendix and Lipset 1966; Crozier 1973 [1965]; etc.): a vision of their countries as "industrial societies" with democratic political systems and universalistic norms and values, defined by social mobility, expanding economies, and growing shares of its population dependent on wage labour. On these grounds, comparative studies extended throughout North-America and Europe in

search for “empirical generalizations”²⁷ connecting individual’s social positions with their consciousness and action. For researchers working on CA, then, it made sense to associate the term “class” with occupational categories (Crompton 1994), i.e. “class position” came to be identified with “labour-market position”.

In this line, the foremost exponent of CA is John Goldthorpe, who is most known for the class schema he developed since the 1970s, within the Oxford Studies in Social Mobility at Nuffield College. The genealogy of this schema is rather intricate but we can find its origins in Keith and Goldthorpe’s review of “occupational prestige studies” -OPS (1972, 1974), where they posit a specific conceptualization of occupational prestige and mainly devote themselves to measure it. The basic idea in these works is to think of occupational categories as roles crucial for the organization of society; and that they are differentially evaluated by people, thus conferring each occupation and their incumbents prestige or symbolic power: the capacity of an actor to exploit the meanings and values associated to the role -rather than material resources or authority positions- to achieve its goals. Hence, much in line with SF, occupational prestige and the hierarchy of occupations emerging from it would directly derive from the way in which occupations are perceived by social actors sharing a *common universe of values and norms*. Hope and Goldthorpe’s main concern, then, was that OPS were not adequately measuring this concept of occupational prestige but more simplistic ideas on the general desirability of occupations.

However, after developing a sophisticated measure for occupational prestige yielding a hierarchical classification of 36 occupational categories, Goldthorpe and his collaborators decided to aggregate those 36 categories -with explicit disregard of its hierarchical order- into a seven-fold class schema to study the connection of social mobility with class formation and class action (Goldthorpe and Llewellyn 1977a; 1977b; Goldthorpe, Payne and Llewellyn 1978). In a rather convoluted fashion, Goldthorpe

²⁷ In terms of Merton (1968[1949], 149), these are propositions “summarizing observed uniformities of relationships between two or more variables.”

and his collaborators were leaving aside the ranking criterion of their initial research (prestige) while, at the same time, turning to the study of phenomena expressed in terms of rank (upwards and downwards mobility), relying on a classification schema made from the previous one.²⁸ But then, new classification criteria were needed; thus, Goldthorpe and Llewellyn (1977a, 259; 1977b, 271) briefly stated that, following Lockwood (1958), they would take *market and work situations as the two major components of class position*.

It is noteworthy that no efforts were made to clarify the theoretical grounds of these research projects regarding social mobility and classes; even after the publication of *Social Mobility and Class Structure in Modern Britain* (Goldthorpe et al. 1980) - landmark for the Oxford Studies in Social Mobility-, a critical review expressed the following concerns. "Note, first, that this process of progressively collapsing one set of scales into another is accomplished without ever providing an answer to the question: what are the implications of converting a scale based on subjective evaluations (Hope-Goldthorpe) into a scale of objective class positions? [...] The criteria of shared class position are further elucidated by operationalizing market situation in terms of sources and levels of income, degree of economic security and chances of economic advancement, and work situation in terms of location within the systems of authority and control governing the processes of production and, therefore, autonomy in performing work tasks and roles (p.39)." (Johnson and Rattansi 1981, 212)

This reduction of theory building to the operationalization of "the two major components of class position", nevertheless, did not solve problems of analytic consistency. Continuing their critique on Goldthorpe et al (1980), Johnson and Rattansi (1981, 213) adequately note "that Goldthorpe nowhere discusses the relative significance of forms of control and autonomy. As a result, authority is objectless and his attempts to

²⁸ Somehow acknowledging this problem, the authors expressed that one "implication is, then, that care is required in interpreting mobility displayed in terms of the schema as being 'upward' or 'downward' in direction." (Goldthorpe and Llewellyn 1977b, 271)

differentiate between classes in such terms leads to a succession of abstract and, in the end, meaningless distinctions. [...] The market enters the discussion in much the same way; that is, as degrees of relative security and levels of income. In this case, however, it is admitted that there is a 'good deal of overlap' between classes [...] The effect of this overlap is necessarily to reduce the significance of the market as a defining characteristic of class position.^[29] The authority/autonomy couple effectively operates as the only consistent means of differentiating between classes."³⁰

Furthermore, of great relevance for our thesis is that this shift from the study of the subjective hierarchy of occupations (through the Hope-Goldthorpe scale for prestige) to that of the objective class structure (through Goldthorpe's class schema), by neglecting theory-building, *allowed for a model of reasoning to inadvertently slip underneath the analyses*. As we saw in Hope-Goldthorpe's hierarchy of occupations, prestige was given by the common universe of values and norms shared by the social actors (or the cultural system) and the researcher's task was to adequately measure its manifestation in the individuals' consciousness and action. In consequence, norms and values ("the culture") were left outside the analysis since they were *treated as given facts*; there was no possibility to question how different values came to be associated to certain occupations (the history of how each occupation "gain" its prestige), but to just "discover" those associations.

²⁹ This is not a frivolous observation, since Goldthorpe has developed most of his research on CA in stark contrast with Marxist viewpoints within the social sciences. The foremost approach to CA rooted in Marxism was developed by Erik Olin Wright (1979; 1985; 1997; 2005), and may be seen as alternative to Goldthorpe's approach. It also relies on occupations as indicators and focuses on employment relations; but highlights exploitation as distinctive of class relations. However, being an analytical Marxist, Wright's effort to distil a scientific Marxism legit enough to challenge rising CA of mid-1970s, led him to adopt the way of reasoning and methodology of stratification -which dominated sociology at that time. Reduced to new variables to be included in regression equations, and trapped in discussions on how to "operationalize" classes and which individual assets were relevant to that end, Wright's Marxism was absorbed by mainstream sociology (Burawoy 2020). His last book on CA (Wright 2015) shows this result.

³⁰ But even these criteria and new categories were not consistently applied. For example, Goldthorpe's tendency to slide from class to alternative categories of stratification is illustrated when discussing the closure thesis (access to upper classes is closed to members from lower classes), where he "fudges the issue of class closure by converting it into a question of occupational status." (Johnson and Rattansi 1981, 215).

Analogously, Goldthorpe's class schema treats economic resources and authority positions as *facts given* by, respectively, the market and bureaucracies or organizations, and these too are left outside the analysis. Thus, for instance, when Goldthorpe et al (1980, 62, 84-5) explain the high mobility into "class I" of their schema, they attribute it to changes taking place in the occupational division of labour, and hence in the structure of class positions; these changes, in turn, would be explained by the expansion of bureaucracies, technological development, and economic growth (Goldthorpe et al 1980, 256-7, 274-6). Nonetheless, *lacking a theoretical framework to question how organizations, markets, and more broadly the capitalist economy function*, Goldthorpe et al are unable to link the movement of the latter phenomena to the class structure they are claimed to determine.

To sum up, in both cases, Goldthorpe's analysis 1) revolves around how phenomena immediately *appear* to the experience and consciousness of social actors, i.e. the perception of prestige and the distribution of economic resources and positions of authority. 2) It is so because social divisions are conceived of as given facts already constituted outside the scope of study; facts that are there to be "captured" by the classification systems minutely crafted by sociologists whose prime concern is to study their influence on individual subjectivity and action.³¹ 3) This kind of inquiries could bloom as the mainstream research programme of CA because it was in consonance with the dominant model of sociological reasoning advanced by North-American SF: individual action and consciousness were to be explained by the individual's social position or, in this case, by its position in the classification systems.

During the 1980s, this research programme expanded to different European countries (Erikson, Goldthorpe and Portocarero 1979; 1982; 1983) and peaked with the project known as CASMIN (Comparative Analysis of Social Mobility in Industrial Nations)

³¹ As Johnson and Rattansi (1981, 216) stated, "for Goldthorpe the effects of class relations [...] are only to be discovered in their consequences for individual attitudes and the movement or non-movement between the various levels in his authority hierarchy."

(Erikson and Goldthorpe 1992a; 1992b). In the course of those years, concerns with data suitability for cross-national analysis and empirical generalizations led the original seven-fold class schema to evolve into others of nine and eleven categories.³²

According to Erikson and Goldthorpe (1992a, 37), the rationale for those changes was to build a classification schema “to differentiate positions within *labour markets* and *production units* or, more specifically [...], to differentiate such positions in terms of the *employment relations* that they entail.” The allocation of individuals into different categories of the schema is done in the same way as in earlier works: using occupational categories derived from job descriptions and employment status (self-employed, employee, management); in turn, inside the employees, Erikson and Goldthorpe (1992a, 41) identify “meaningful distinctions” according to differences in “the labour contract” and “the conditions of employment”.

“Employment relationships regulated by a labour contract entail a relatively short-term and specific exchange of money for effort. Employees supply more-or-less discrete amounts of labour [...] in return for wages [...] In contrast, employment relationships within a bureaucratic context involve a longer-term and generally more diffuse exchange. Employees render service to their employing organization in return for 'compensation' which takes the form not only of reward for work done, through a wage and various perquisites, but also comprises important prospective elements -for example, wage increments on an established scale, assurances of security both in employment and, through pensions rights, after retirement, and, above all, well-defined career opportunities.” (Erikson and Goldthorpe 1992a, 41-2).³³

³² The CASMIN class schema was adapted to the British reality and provided the basis for the 2001 National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification, which continues to be used up to this day. The CASMIN schema is also applied in research throughout Europe and North America.

³³ It is notable that for both the authors of *The Constant Flux* (Erikson and Goldthorpe 1992a) and their commentators (e.g. Evans 1992, 214), these rather blur and partial statements are seen as a theoretical shift from the “*authority/autonomy* couple” to the differences in employment relationships, regulated by labour contract or services, as the organizing principle of class divisions; while at the same time recognizing that the key feature of employment relationships is the way in which *obedience* is obtained from the work-force.

These features have led scholars to see Goldthorpe's approach to CA as neo-Weberian, distinct from other theoretical frameworks inspiring CA that have not been as widely accepted in sociological research (Durou 2020; Breen 2005). But it was not until the very 1992, when he concentrated on theory building as "a response to recent critiques" to CA (Goldthorpe and Marshall 1992).

3.2. The "Death of Class": a late call for theory building

During the 1970s and 1980s, rising inflation due to the oil crises and the stagnation of economic growth, together with a fall in productivity and the profit rate, led the central capitalist countries of North America and Europe to abandon Welfare State policies towards a pro-capital State intervention (known today as "neoliberalism"). Reduction of public spending on social services, labour market flexibilization, ease of capital controls, and intensive application of innovation and technologies in all economic sectors, had serious impacts on work: reduction of manual workers, increase of high-skilled workers and professionals in the service sector, "precarization" of dependent labour (low wages, irregular employment, etc.), and weakening of worker unions.

Sociological interpretations of these changes as well as revisions of the pertinent categories to describe them, started to appear. Soon, a new set of common ideas spread among scholars: these countries had become "post-industrial" societies (Bell 1973), characterized by the diversification of the sources of inequality and by radical processes of individualization, which would have dissolve "class" as a heuristic category for sociology and as an everyday experience (Bauman 1982; Gorz 1982; Offe 1985; Beck 1992[1986]). Some took it one step forward, declaring the "death of class" since there was no longer a connection between economic position and collective or cultural identification (Pakulski and Waters 1996). In this "classless society" (Kingston 2000), gender, ethnicity and race would be the relevant categories for inequalities, identities, and action.

In midst of growing critiques, Goldthorpe turned to systematic theory building, starting by making explicit that CA is a research programme that “explores the interconnections between positions defined by employment relations in labour markets and production units in different sectors of national economies; the processes through which individuals and families are distributed and redistributed among these positions over time; and the consequences thereof for their life-chances and for the social identities that they adopt and the social values and interests that they pursue.” (Goldthorpe and Marshall 1992, 382). To show the potential of CA, Goldthorpe and Marshall (1992, 393) refer to a set of findings from research on 3 topics connected to class structure (social mobility, educational attainment, and political action); which taken together would point to conclusions similar to those of *The Constant Flux*: stability or persistence of class-based inequalities and class-differentiated patterns of social action.

However, the explanation of these empirical generalizations required 4 more years and the call for a “reorientation of class theory” towards rational action theory. For Goldthorpe (1996a), class theory has been influenced by two strands of thought, Marxism and liberalism, concerned with the formation or decomposition of classes understood as collectivities (able to develop consciousness and action); which have failed to account for the empirical generalizations of CA because they suffer from a historicist teleological bias. While Marxists would have pointed to the polarization of “class struggle” under capitalism, liberalism would have highlighted the dissolution of class-based inequalities due to economic growth; thus, both would have neglected the analysis of the orientations, goals and conditions of individual action.

“Macrosocial regularities, expressing salient features of the class stratification of modern societies, have been empirically demonstrated. [...] The theoretical challenge that arises is, therefore, to develop some explanation of just how they are created and sustained. A major reorientation of class theory is here implied. Rather than such theory being, as in both its Marxist and liberal forms, concerned ultimately with

explaining [...] class formation or decomposition, what would now appear of central importance is to account for the stability [...] that class relations and associated life-chances and patterns of social action would appear to display.” (1996a, 484)

To this end, Goldthorpe embraces methodological individualism (MI): “the position that all social phenomena can and should be explained as resulting from the action and interaction of individuals. Thus, the theory that I shall try to develop will be one that aims to show how the macrosocial regularities that I take as *explananda* are the outcome of such action and interaction [...]. In the course of providing such an account, I shall indeed make reference, without further elaboration, to institutions or other social structural features which, for the purposes in hand, I simply take as given. [...] I shall, furthermore, opt for rational action theory (RAT). That is to say, I shall aim to give an account of how the *explananda* I treat derive from individual action that can itself be understood as rational.[...] I assume that actors have goals, have usually alternative means of pursuing these goals and, in choosing their courses of action, tend in some degree to assess probable costs and benefits [...] I also assume that actors are to a degree knowledgeable about their society and their situation within it.” (1996a, 485)

“If, then, RAT is to be applied in the context of class analysis in the way envisaged, it will be essential to show not only how actors' goals are intelligible in relation to the class positions they hold but, further, how their actions directed towards these goals are conditioned by the distribution of resources, opportunities and constraints that the class structure as a whole entails. In the following, class positions will be taken as defined by employment relations in labour markets and production units and, more specifically, by two main principles: first, that of employment status, which distinguishes between employer, self-employed and employee positions; and, second, that of the regulation of employment, which distinguishes employee positions according to whether this regulation occurs via a 'labour contract' or a 'service relationship' [...].” (Goldthorpe 1996a, 486). Then, the author illustrated how RAT could explain CA

empirical generalizations by positing a formal model of individual's (students and their parents) rational choice to make sense of class-based differentials in educational attainment (Goldthorpe 1996a; Breen and Goldthorpe 1997).

A further elaboration on the kind of RAT that is most suitable for sociology is found in Goldthorpe (1998), where he distinguishes versions of RAT according to their rationality requirements, focus on situational or procedural rationality, and purport to be general or special theories of action. He starts clarifying that the model of actor to be used in sociology does not have to capture all the particular features of the actions of "flesh-and-blood individuals", but only the central tendencies in their action. Thus, a RAT approach does not claim that all actors at all times act in a rational way, only that the tendency to act rationally is the most important common factor at work when explaining social regularities (Goldthorpe 1998, 168).³⁴ Then, the RAT approach that Goldthorpe (1998, 177-185) put forward for sociology posits 1) a subjective rationality that treats as rational both holding beliefs and acting on these beliefs, informed by some kind of cost-benefit evaluation made by the actors; 2) that rationality must be reconstructed by analysing the situation of individual action (situational logic); and 3) this approach can only yield special theories of action.

³⁴ "The crucial analytical point may be put as follows. Suppose that in their actions in some respect the members of an aggregate or collectivity are subject, on the one hand, to an influence that bears on all alike and, on the other hand, to a variety of influences not deviating *systematically* from the common influence and bearing only on particular individuals or small groups. It can then be shown that, even if the 'common' influence is clearly weaker than the 'idiosyncratic' influences taken together, knowledge of the former is still likely to allow a large part of the variation in the behaviour of the aggregate to be accounted for. This result comes about -and will, other things being equal, emerge the more strongly the larger the aggregate- essentially because the effects of the idiosyncratic influences tend to 'cancel out' and thus leave the effects of the common influence, even if relatively weak, as still the decisive ones at the aggregate level. When, therefore, RAT is used to provide an explanation for probabilistic regularities [...] it is no longer necessary to suppose that all actors concerned at all times act in an entirely rational manner: *only* that the tendency to act rationally, in the circumstances that prevail is the common factor at work, while deviations from rationality are brought about in a variety ways and with a variety of consequences. (Goldthorpe 1996b, 115-6). It is important to highlight that the author himself admitted that the same assumptions could be made for other theories of action, as ones based on shared norms and values. "An analogous point could of course be made with respect to rival theoretical approaches, such as, say, those that would see patterns of action as being primarily shaped by individuals' responsiveness to shared values or social norms. It is, therefore, on the basis of such an understanding that any empirical evaluation of different approaches must in the end be made." (Goldthorpe 1998, 169)

In more recent years, Goldthorpe (2007; 2016; 2021) has continued to expand this theoretical framework to inform general sociological inquiry, but the rudiments of his way of reasoning have remained much the same and can be synthesized from the previous notes. First, in line with Popper (1945; 1957), Goldthorpe's adoption of MI results from a staunch rejection to "historicism": the idea that social sciences could predict human history since it is subject to developmental laws of a teleological character (e.g. the Marxist axiom that class struggle drives history towards the "dictatorship of the proletariat"; liberalism's claim that class-based inequalities would disappear with capitalist development; SF's vision of society as a self-regulating system that tends to order; etc.). The best antidote against these distortions would be that "all social phenomena, and especially the functioning of all social institutions, should always be understood as resulting from the decisions, actions, attitudes, etc., of human individuals, and that we should never be satisfied by an explanation in terms of so-called 'collectives' (states, nations, races, etc.)" (Popper 1945 vol.2, 91).

Second, after giving primacy to the individual, Popper and scholars holding the same stance -like Goldthorpe- propose that social sciences should build theories of individual action with explicit disregard for notions related to cultural, economic, or social systems, while also dispensing with psychological factors. After clearly summarising his ideas on the "logic of the social sciences", Popper (1976[1961], 102) states that "the logical investigation of economics culminates in a result which can be applied to all social sciences. This result shows that there exists *a purely objective method* in the social sciences which may well be called the method of *objective* understanding, or situational logic. [...] Its method consists in analysing the social *situation* of acting men sufficiently to explain the action with the help of the situation, without any further help from psychology. Objective understanding consists in realizing that the action was objectively *appropriate to the situation*. In other words, the situation is analysed far

enough for the elements which initially appeared to be psychological (such as wishes, motives, memories, and associations) to be transformed into elements of the situation.”

Third, building upon the method of “situational logic”, Goldthorpe follows Boudon (1989[1986]) in understanding every action as rational to the extent that it is adequate to its context; i.e., *rationality is equated with intelligibility* of individual action: the analyst has understood the rationality of action when realizes that he himself (and anyone else) would have acted the same way if placed in the same contexts/situations that those of the actors under observation. Hence, these versions of MI -including Goldthorpe’s RAT approach- rely on the actor-situation framework to explain individual action. But then, what elements do the context or situation comprises?

For Popper (1976[1961], 103), “situational logic assumes a physical world in which we act. This world contains, for example, physical resources which are at our disposal and about which we know something, and physical barriers about which we also know something (often not very much). Beyond this, situational logic must also assume a social world, populated by other people, about whose goals we know something (often not very much), and, furthermore, *social institutions*.” Meanwhile, Boudon’s (1989[1986]) explanations of individual action as well as his analyses of the action’s intended/unintended consequences, allows him to identify different social contexts: family, market, bureaucracies, etc.³⁵ Goldthorpe, in turn, places chief relevance to what he has been dealing with for long time: class positions defined by employment relations in labour markets and production units. Thus, his application of RAT to CA seeks to show how individuals' goals and actions are intelligible in relation to class positions identified through his class schema.

³⁵ Boudon (1989[1986], Ch.1) explains that, given the circumstances in which they live, it is rational for the peasants of India to have large families: every son/daughter is inexpensive, allows to avoid buying wage-labour, when working far they send money back home, etc. On the contrary, for the public employees that foster birth-control policies, every son/daughter is expensive; thus, having a small family is the rational thing to do. However, Boudon shows how individual rationality collides with collective rationality: large families put pressure on land and other resources, which undermines the success of policies to fight poverty.

As it turns out, MI reliance on the actor-situation analytical framework has primarily served to make explicit the model of reasoning underlying Goldthorpe's empirical research: individual action and consciousness are to be explained by the individual's "class position" (and the resources and constraints it entails). Given MI's overt rejection for appealing to supra-individual instances in sociology, this conclusion may seem paradoxical; nevertheless, it is not so if we realize that -much like Parsons- Goldthorpe has always unquestionably assumed the individual-society dichotomy, which becomes evident when embracing the actor-situation framework that classifies individuals in one side, and social structures (and positions) on the other. Whereas Parsons and SF placed primacy on the cultural and social system, MI and Goldthorpe take the isolated individual as the founding entity of society; while the former absorbed *individual life* into institutionalized roles, the latter reduce *social life* to the aggregate of individual rational actions. The roles are inverted but the (theoretical) plot, and its shortcomings, remain.

This is so because, although MI claims that social phenomena should be explained as resulting from individual action, its different versions -including Goldthorpe's RAT- have failed to accomplish this task since *none of its exponents have studied the connection between action and situation, and between the action and its ramifications*. MI posits that isolated individuals originate social phenomena, but because *these are taken as given facts* to be introduced as data of the "situation", there is no concern on *how do isolated individuals are capable of producing social life*. Thus, MI is unable to inquiry on the nature of the nexus between individuals, or on the nature of individuals themselves, which make (different kinds of) social life possible or even necessary. These blind spots have inhibit the study of feedback loops between action and situation, or the individual and its context, which limits the ability to explain the presence/absence of change in the individuals and, with them, in society itself (Rochabrún 1993, 120-34).

Goldthorpe's research programme on CA is suitable to illustrate these remarks, especially his attempts to explain class-based inequalities on educational attainment,

which have come to be known as the relative risk aversion (RRA) theory (Goldthorpe 1996a; Breen and Goldthorpe 1997; Goldthorpe 2007, Ch.4; Goldthorpe 2016, Ch. 9). RRA theory may be summarised as follows: when making educational choices, young people and their parents prioritize the avoidance of downward class mobility over the achievement of upward class mobility. However, relative to those from advantaged backgrounds, those with lower class origins have more to lose if more ambitious educational choices might fail; thus, the probability of the latter taking up all further educational opportunities available is smaller than that of the former.

To start, nowhere does Goldthorpe question how is it possible for isolated individuals (as seen by MI) to enter into the employment relations that are claimed to define their class positions. Why would they may enter, exit, maintain or transform that relations? These kind of concerns are out of Goldthorpe's scope since he departs from the assumption that *class positions are already given by labour markets and production units* which are, in turn, reflected by his class schema. His task, then, is to classify the individuals into class positions, to place the actor in the situation. From this point, distinct elements are considered into the situation as resources or constraints for the individual's rational action (income, job security, etc.), which are used to explain the differences in the individuals' probabilities to take certain course of action. As we said, "class position" accounts for individual action and consciousness.

Nevertheless, since there is no inquiry on how do labour markets and production units reproduce themselves over time (this would require to theorize how supra-individual instances function, which is disregarded by MI), Goldthorpe cannot assess the effects that individual action has on the situation (class position), neither can he analyse the ramifications of that action towards different social spheres such as the economy, the educational system, the State's bureaucracy, etc. Hence, Goldthorpe and more broadly MI have not analytically distinguish (nor sufficiently studied) the aggregate effects of

individual action in one single social dimension from its ramifications towards other contexts of interaction.

Curiously enough, this theoretical endeavour was brilliantly accomplished by the most famous predecessor claimed by MI's exponents, Max Weber³⁶, in his *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (2004[1905]): given its orientation towards the concrete world, a certain religious action (inspired by Calvinism) had repercussions in the economic field, especially fostering profit-seeking behaviour. In the long run, as Weber himself made clear, this economic action impacted the religious sphere diluting the "Protestant Ethic" and only leaving the "Spirit of Capitalism".

We can synthesise our assessment of Goldthorpe's work and more broadly of the mainstream CA that it continues to inspire, with the next observations.

- a) This stream of research revolves around how phenomena immediately *appear* to the experience and consciousness of social actors: the distribution of economic resources by labour market and of authority positions within production units. And it is so *because social divisions are conceived of as given facts already constituted outside the scope of study*, facts that are there to be "captured" by the classification systems minutely crafted by sociologists whose prime concern is to study their influence on individual subjectivity and action.
- b) These features have hindered *CA to advance novel social facts*. In fact, we can describe the evolution of CA as *ad hoc* to the changing appearances of capitalism; and it cannot be otherwise since CA lacks the theoretical tools to study how does capitalist economy (including the labour market and production units) function.

³⁶ Weber (2002[1922], Ch. 1) proposed a heuristic conceptualization to reach causal explanation of social action as well as the understanding of its meaning (*verstehen*). To this end, Weber made it clear that he took the individual as starting point for *purely methodological* reasons. First, to ensure the existence of supra-individual phenomena, Weber established that they must be able to be "translated" into concrete individual actions. Second, to access to the subjective meaning of social action, Weber must refer to the individual but the understanding of that meaning is solved in the more complex category of "*social relationship*", which refers to expectations on the probable course of action. Thus, despite loose interpretations of Weber's sociology, he did not give the isolated individual any theoretical primacy; instead, all his work dealt with historical macro-social phenomena. Weber was a true individual-*methodologist*.

- c) CA bloomed under the “Post-War Atlantic Fordist” capitalist *accumulation regimen* (AR) *regulated by the Welfare State*, characterized by a highly productive economy of mass consumption, and a Nation-State that sought to secure full-employment, instituted universal socio-economic rights, and promoted collective consumption (Jessop 2018, 352). As we will explain in Chapter 4, during this period of time, the AR allowed for the inclusion of growing shares of population into the economy and society; it made sense, then, to take occupations as inputs to build classification systems in order to examine the influence of class position on individuals. Thus, CA *emerged from the labour market as structured by this AR*.
- d) Following the 1970s economic stagflation, a new AR arose to secure capital valorisation through labour market flexibilization, the promotion of research-and-development and the financial sectors, and the reduction of public spending on collective goods and services. As we will also detail in Chapter 4, “neoliberalization” progressively prompted a finance-dominated AR in which the valorisation of capital has increasingly sought to free itself from the constraints of *living labour*³⁷ since unleashed financial capital makes profits basically from the *expectations on future labour and surplus-value* (private indebtedness, financial instruments, etc.). Hence, this emerging AR lacks concern with the integration of population into a specific national economy or society as long as people are turned into *individual consumers* of the global market (of commodities, services, financial instruments, etc). This process coincides with scholars’ claims on the diversification of the sources of inequality and the radicalization of individualization, which dissolved the connection between class position and collective identities/action. *Thus, in order to stay viable, CA took an individualist turn explicitly rejecting supra-individual instances in sociological theory*. This way, the problem of the connection between class position

³⁷ In the context of capitalist production, living labour refers to the concrete (time-specific and place-situated) action of spending labour-power in the creation of new use-values and surplus-value, enabling the process of valorisation of capital. See *Capital*, Chapter 5: The Labour-Process and the Process of Producing Surplus-Value

and collective identity/action does not need to be solved, it has been vanished. And once again, CA could reproduce the model of reasoning that deduces individual action from class position; disregarding the aggregate effects of individual action on class position or on its ramifications into other contexts of interaction.

- e) As a corollary, we argue that classification systems (class positions defined by any schema) should take the form of *explanandum* in sociological theory, since they lack the defining character attributed by CA (and the social actors' perceptions).

Finally, despite the attempt to "re-found" CA in MI, it is important to highlight that a new stream of CA has gained momentum in sociological research on classes, specifically in Great Britain. Focused on patterns of consumption and social differentiation, this approach has eclipsed Goldthorpe's "traditional CA". We briefly present it below.

3.3. Variations on the same theme: "Cultural Class Analysis"

Reactions to the critiques on "class" as a relevant category for social life were not unanimous among sociologists; some of which saw them and the theoretical turn of "traditional CA" as a sign of an exhausted approach (Pahl 1993) and called for a renewal (Devine and Savage 2000). In the face of growing socio-economic inequalities around the world and prominently in Great Britain, a newer generation of British sociologists have transformed the scope and analytical framework of CA by placing emphasis on how culture, lifestyle and taste interact with socio-economic practices; while also abandoning inquiries on class-based collective identity and action, and focusing on individualized hierarchical differentiation (Bottero 2004; Savage 2016).

Drawing on Bourdieu's proposal that class positions are defined by the distribution of three types of "capital" (economic, cultural, social) (1984; 1985), various scholars have set in motion one stream of CA that "differentiates between (1) economic capital (wealth and income), (2) cultural capital (the ability to appreciate and engage with cultural goods, and credentials institutionalised through educational success), and (3)

social capital (contacts and connections which allow people to draw on their social networks). Bourdieu's point is that [...] it is possible to draw fine-grained distinctions between people with different stocks of each of the three capitals [...]" (Savage et al 2013, 223; Savage et al 2015; Devine 2010; Bennett et al 2009).

According to one leading sociologist advancing this approach, Bourdieu's focus on the dominant classes explains its appeal in 21st Century Britain, because it "transformed what David Lockwood identified as the 'problematic of the proletariat' towards a perspective able to critically dissect the more privileged classes", beneficiaries of economic and social changes (Savage 2016, 66). Moreover, Bourdieu is regarded as insightful for CA since his concept of "misrecognition" would serve to solve the problem of the dis-connection between individual class position and collective identity. "For Bourdieu, power operates through the 'naturalisation' of social relations. [...] This argument thus provided a mechanism for explaining why people might not be class conscious, even in the midst of a highly class divided society. For instance, insofar as inequalities are 'naturalised' as the product of differing amounts of motivation, skill, or natural ability, they might not be registered as class inequality. This focus on misrecognition thus resolved the 'paradox of class' [(the decline of class-based collective identification despite the rise of class-based inequality)]" (Savage 2016, 67).

Furthermore, building upon Bourdieu's arguments it was proposed to understand the absence of class-based collective identification as evidence of class influence on individuals' perceptions and practices of differentiation (Bottero 2004, 989-91). Class was then identified with the mechanism and categories through which individuals classify and filter themselves and others (Skeggs 1997; Reay 1997). In words of Savage (2000, 107), class was now seen "as encoded in people's sense of self-worth and in their attitudes to and awareness of others [...]. It is hence the very salience of class struggles over distinction which explains why it is so difficult for them to be

explicitly named and identified by their protagonists, and to be tied down into a neat model specifying the relationship between social location and culture.”

In this vein, younger sociologists have increasingly become interested with individualized everyday cultural practices of differentiation expressed in class terms. Thus, it has recently been proposed that CA should focus on exposing and critiquing the classification systems that individuals use to sort and filter themselves and others, as well as detailing individuals’ struggles against being subject to those classifications (Tyler 2015; Sparkes 2019). Hence, sociology’s “critical duty” would be to unveil the practices of stigma, through which the classification systems reify inequalities, while fostering solidarity with the individuals’ struggles against them (Tyler 2020).

As Bottero (2004) has adequately argued, this “renewal” towards a “cultural CA” has been done in quite a convoluted fashion. On one hand, the *stratification approach has led many scholars to reduce the notion of class to a concept that summarizes distinct variables pointing to the individuals’ provisions (or stocks) of resources (3 types of “capitals”)*. Much like Goldthorpe’s approach, this intellectual procedure relies in quantitative methodology to identify the relevant class positions in which individuals are to be classified; then, it is primarily concern with patterns of *inequality in the individual distribution of those resources*, while also sketching descriptions of individual action and subjectivity. Nonetheless, lacking a theoretical framework to account for the processes through which those resources are produced and appropriated by the individuals, and being those “classes” constituted without reference to the occupational structure or any social institution (as the labour market) whose functioning can be tacitly assumed, *this approach to “cultural CA” has no option but to passively observe inequality patterns or build ad hoc descriptions of them.*

On the other hand, we can identify a branch of “cultural CA” concerned not with the “objective” class positions but with how individuals perceive and reproduce social hierarchies through everyday life processes of cultural differentiation, for which this

approach mainly relies on qualitative methodology. Thus, this kind of analysis *places great importance to the culturally shared classification concepts* which are assumed to organize the chief social divisions and hierarchies. No difficult to see, then, that this approach (more than Goldthorpe's "traditional CA") explicitly revolves around how phenomena immediately *appear* to the consciousness of social actors, and in so doing, *it has tended to take social actors' ideas (or prenotions) as scientific concepts*. This feature has led analysts to "mash up" *under the class terminology phenomena originating in different dimensions of social life* (the political, the economy, the symbolic, etc.), *and that are organized around various axes of social divisions* (age, gender, race, ethnicity, income, occupation, etc). Thus, Bottero (2004, 987) asserted that this branch of "cultural CA" was widening its scope in such a way that it can be regarded as a general view to stratification rather than a type of CA. Nevertheless, it needs to state organizing criteria to mature as a theoretical framework³⁸ able to account for the historically changing relationships between the different dimensions of social life and how these, in turn, structure the distinct axes of social divisions and their corresponding categories and social meaning.

This brief review of "cultural CA" has sought to highlight the main theme that links it with "traditional CA": the *sociological prenotation* that classification systems, based on the unequal distribution of individual characteristics and resources, are key to explain individual action and consciousness and more broadly, social life. However, built from the immediate experience and consciousness of social actors, these *classification systems correspond to the appearances of social life* instead of being its defining fundamentals. Thus, its constitution has to be explained and not taken for granted. The following chapter provides a synthetic exposition of our overall critical assessment of CA that will allow us, then, to present some clues to develop a new sociological approach to class phenomena.

³⁸ Hill Collins (2019) has raised a similar claim for the case of intersectionality, another corpus of literature that covers various axes that organize social divisions and hierarchies.

4. A New Sociological Approach to Class Phenomena

The aim of this final chapter is to argue that a new sociological approach to *class phenomena* is plausible and required in order to properly account for the fundamental social divisions emerged with globalised capitalism, from the late 1970s onwards. To support this claim, we start by putting together our findings regarding a) the notion of “class” inherited by sociology (Chapter 2), and b) its reformulation into CA under the model of reasoning originating in SF (Chapter 3). To this end, we rely on Lakatos’s “methodology of scientific research programmes” to assess the development of CA, and a particular Marxist viewpoint to explain its former success and current *impasse*.

4.1. The “Degenerating Phase” of Class Analysis

Imre Lakatos (1978[1970]) provided an insightful revision of Popper’s criteria to determine the scientific status of knowledge and to explain the history of scientific progress, for which he proposed to shift the unit of such analysis from the isolated theory to the *research programmes* or series of auxiliary theories built around hard cores of highly abstract propositions. For Lakatos (1978[1970], 32), a theory is accepted as scientific only “if it has corroborated excess empirical content over its predecessor (or rival), that is, only if it leads to the discovery of novel facts. [...] a scientific theory T is falsified if and only if another theory T' has been proposed with the following characteristics: (i) T' has excess empirical content over T : that is, it predicts novel facts, that is, facts improbable in the light of, or even forbidden, by T ; (2) T' explains the previous success of T , that is, all the unrefuted content of T is included [...] in the content of T' ; and (3) some of the excess content of T' is corroborated.”

“Then, of course, what we appraise is a *series of theories* rather than isolated *theories*. [...] Let us take a series of theories, T_1, T_2, T_3, \dots where each subsequent theory results from adding auxiliary clauses to (or from semantical reinterpretations of) the previous

theory in order to accommodate some anomaly^[39], each theory having at least as much content as the unrefuted content of its predecessor. Let us say that such a series of theories is *theoretically progressive* (or ‘constitutes a *theoretically progressive problemshift*’) if each new theory has some excess empirical content over its predecessor, that is, if it predicts some novel, hitherto unexpected fact. Let us say that a theoretically progressive series of theories is also *empirically progressive* (or ‘constitutes an *empirically progressive problemshift*’) if some of this excess empirical content is also corroborated, that is, if each new theory leads us to the actual discovery of some *new* fact. Finally, let us call a problemshift *progressive* if it is both theoretically and empirically progressive, and *degenerating* if it is not.” (Lakatos 1978[1970], 33-4)

In the typical course of science, those series of theories are characterized by *continuity* binding them together into *research programmes*, which consist of methodological rules: some tell us what paths of research to avoid (*negative heuristic*), and others what paths to pursue (*positive heuristic*). “All scientific research programmes may be characterized by their ‘*hard core*’. The negative heuristic of the programme forbids us to direct the *modus tollens* at this ‘hard core’. Instead, we must use our ingenuity to articulate or even invent ‘auxiliary hypotheses’, which form a *protective belt* around this core, and we must redirect the *modus tollens* to *these*. It is this protective belt of auxiliary hypotheses which has to bear the brunt of tests and get adjusted and re-adjusted, or even completely replaced, to defend the thus-hardened core. A research programme is successful if all this leads to a progressive problemshift; unsuccessful if it leads to a degenerating problemshift.” (Lakatos 1978[1970], 48). Thus, we “may rationally decide not to allow ‘refutations’ to transmit falsity to the hard core as long as the corroborated empirical content of the protecting belt of auxiliary hypotheses increases. But [...] we maintain that if and when the programme ceases to anticipate novel facts, its hard core might have to be abandoned [...]” (Lakatos 1978[1970], 49).

³⁹ An empirical fact inconsistent with a given theory.

Besides their negative heuristic, research programmes are also characterized by their positive heuristic, which sets the order to develop the auxiliary hypotheses to deal with empirical anomalies. “The negative heuristic specifies the 'hard core' of the programme which is 'irrefutable' by the methodological decision of its proponents; the positive heuristic consists of a partially articulated set of suggestions or hints on how to change, develop [...] the 'refutable' protective belt. The positive heuristic of the programme saves the scientist from becoming confused by the ocean of anomalies.” (Lakatos 1978[1970], 50). “Only those scientists have to rivet their attention on anomalies who are either engaged in trial and error exercises or who work in a degenerating phase of a research programme when the positive heuristic ran out of steam (Lakatos 1978[1970], 52).

In this view, science is composed of research programmes (RPs) competing to explain certain phenomena and historical scientific progress is described by the results of such competition. To enter this arena, scientists posit a set of irrefutable highly abstract propositions that form the RP's hard core, and develop around it a protective belt of refutable theories to explain given empirical facts and advance new ones. Thus, the RP's hard core is identified by the negative heuristic that forbids critique to be aimed at the hard core, and the RP's protective belt is identified by the positive heuristic that informs which empirical puzzles should scientists tackle next and how to deal with acknowledged anomalies. Finally, the clashes between rivals is defined when one RP a) loses its “heuristic power” to advance novel facts or explain old facts in a novel fruitful way; b) fails to augment its corroborated empirical content; c) focuses on managing anomalies; and d) witnesses the emergence of a rival RP with more heuristic power (explains all the empirical content contained in the previous RP, and advances novel facts, some of which are corroborated).

Within this general framework we can adequately present our critical assessment of *CA* understood as a research programme constituted around the following *irrefutable hard*

core: the “sociological prenotation” that classification systems based on individual characteristics and resources explain the consciousness and action of (individual and collective) social actors. As we saw in Chapter 2, along with the development of industrial capitalism in Europe, by mid-19th Century, both laymen and the “founding fathers” of social sciences shared a “common sense” with regard to capitalist society and its key divisions: the vision of a society fundamentally divided in classes into which individuals could be classify (and re-classify upwards or downwards) according to the distribution of individual resources acquired from any source of income. During the first half of 20th Century, sociology assumed this notion and placed it as the cornerstone to study a bunch of empirical socio-economic phenomena (such as social mobility), which were part of the more general field of stratification studies. Within this field, and under the mainstream sociological model of reasoning originating in SF, CA risen as a distinctive RP concerned with explaining individual and collective consciousness and action according to the individual’s “class position” in the classification systems.

However, *lacking a theoretical framework to explain the distribution of the resources deemed crucial to determine the individual “class position”, CA has tacitly accepted the “market laws” of capitalism and mainstream economics* (in particular, marginalist theory). We have tried to make this evident in the analysis of Goldthorpe’s approach, whose class schema groups occupational categories according to the individual’s authority position inside a production unit and its position in the labour market. Since social divisions (classes) are conceived of as given facts already constituted (by the labour market and production units) outside the scope of study, the task of Sociology would be limited to capture them in classification systems, and then assess their influence on individual or collective subjectivity and action. Thus, within this approach to CA, there is no possibility to question how do labour markets, production units, and more broadly, capitalist economy function, and how this functioning, in turn, may shape social divisions, since these phenomena are taken for granted.

We can make sense of these theoretical flaws by highlighting its clear affinity with the “common sense” shared by laymen and social scientists, since mid-19th Century, regarding key social divisions in capitalism. They all revolve around how phenomena immediately *appear* to the experience and consciousness of social actors: the distribution of economic resources and power in production units. In this sense, those phenomena correspond to the “tip of the iceberg” of social life under capitalism, *they need to be explained* inside a larger theoretical account on the latter; thus, *CA has mistaken distribution phenomena for what they are not: the defining elements of capitalist society, its key social divisions, and collective and individual action and subjectivity.*

This “mistake” and the fact that, despite it, CA continued to grow as a RP can be understood by taking into account the “social issues” that sociologists have tried to tackle over time. Since the surge of the discipline at the end of 19th Century, “poverty” has been one of its chief concerns; during most of the 20th Century, “social mobility” animated the development of stratification studies; and in the 21st Century, “inequality” has come to the forefront of “social issues” worrying social scientists. Along the same timeline, policy-makers, media, social actors, etc., have centred their attention on those problems focused on the distribution of resources; and they have turned to the social sciences for answers on how to deal with them.⁴⁰ Thus, it is our contention that the constitution of CA as a mainstream RP has gone hand-in-hand with sociologists’ permanent commitment to pressing “social issues”, which led them to place the aforementioned “sociological prenotion” as the irrefutable hard core of CA.

That permanent commitment to deal with pressing “social issues” points to the *positive heuristic* of CA as a pragmatically driven RP; informing which problems should scientists tackle and how to develop auxiliary hypotheses to undergo “empirical tests” (and protect the hard core). As we saw in section 3.1., Goldthorpe’s CA expanded to

⁴⁰ Gouldner (1970) gives a good example of the connection between socio-political actors and the development of sociology; specifically, he focuses on the relationship between the Welfare State and the evolution of SF.

several countries through the CASMIN project, from which surged a class schema that has been widely applied in empirical research throughout Europe, North America, and more recently Latin America (Solis and Boado 2016). These endeavours have focused on data suitability for cross-national studies in the search for “empirical generalizations” connecting class positions with different outcomes such as electoral behaviour, social mobility, educational choices, etc. Here lies the positive heuristic of CA, primarily focused on the empirical corroboration of any link between classification systems and individual (or aggregate) outcomes, for which improving ways to operationalize and measure diverse concepts of “class” has been of chief interest.

The historical development of CA can show its negative and positive heuristics at work. Formed around a hard core that takes for granted the existence of social divisions constituted outside its scope, Goldthorpe’s CA did not seek to explain the *constitution* of such divisions. Instead, under the influence of stratification studies and the model of reasoning originating in SF, its positive heuristic put scholars in the path of searching for empirical corroborations of the impact of social divisions on individuals. To this end, the key task has been to refine the methods to operationalize and measure different conceptualizations of “class”, that would render different classification systems based on the distribution of resources. Classification systems, then, would be the ones facing the empirical tests of “predicting” different outcomes.

From the 1970s until the early 1990s, Goldthorpe's class schema seemed to successfully “pass the tests” since its class positions were correlated to some patterns of social mobility, educational attainment, and electoral behaviour. Regarding the latter, for instance, since Crewe et al (1977) put forward the “dealignment thesis”, scholars started to notice the declining effect of class on electoral outcomes in Great Britain, specifically highlighting the lack of support to the Labour Party from the working class. To face this challenge, class analysts applied Goldthorpe's schema to data on voting in British elections, and argued there were no significant changes in the relative rate of

working class support to the Labour Party, between 1964 and 1987 (Heath et al 1985; Evans et al 1991). Goldthorpe's approach enabled class analysts to turn an anomaly into a victory by deploying the RP's positive heuristic: setting different empirical criteria to classify individuals according to the distribution of given resources, yielding a new classification system that proved more discriminating than previous ones to examine the connection of its categories with individual outcomes. Between the 1980s and 1990s, Goldthorpe's class schema was applied to an increasing number of countries in order to test its reliability to capture the new conceptualization of class divisions and find empirical generalizations on their influence. Thus, the hard core of CA remained intact while its protective belt seemed to increase its corroborated empirical content.

However, as seen in section 3.2, criticism to CA continued to spread, focusing on the disconnection between class position and social identification but also in the declining influence of class position on individual outcomes. The failure of CA to deal with the anomalies and to advance novel facts regarding class-based collective identity and action, led class analysts to unanimously abandon inquiries on these matters as well as on the relevance of class categories for social identification. Thus, the first modification to the hard core was operated: analysts would thereafter focus only on the effects that class divisions had on individual or aggregate outcomes. Given that critiques were also pointing out the declining strength of these effects, class analysts deployed different strategies to tackle the anomalies and build new auxiliary hypotheses to test the influence of class.

Goldthorpe's strategy was to embrace MI to explain the probabilistic regularities between class categories and individual outcomes identified through statistical inference. Nonetheless, even in these terms, anomalies continued to plague the research agenda of scholars, who then proposed new argumentative threads to highlight the prevalence of class effects.

Once again, studies on electoral behaviour in the UK may help us illustrate this feature. According to Savage (2017, 707), from “the electoral success of ‘New Labour’ in the 1997 election, it became clear that, even in relative terms, the relationship between class and vote was breaking down, as the Labour party moved to the middle ground and downplayed its historical association with the Labour movement.” To face this issue, Evans and Tilley (2017) have argued that the “new politics of class” consist of the exclusion of the British working class; i.e. while acknowledging that the class-vote relationship has been eroded, they insist that class divisions still impact on electoral behaviour since the working class has increasingly abstained from elections because not feeling effectively represented by the messages of politicians. From the viewpoint of Lakatos’ methodology, though, this kind of auxiliary hypotheses seem to have developed to catch up with facts instead of i) leading to novel ones and ii) preserving as much empirical content as the unrefuted content of its predecessors.

Another strategy devised by class analysts consisted on re-defining the concept of class to include more individual characteristics and resources deemed relevant for social divisions. And once again, the key task was to carefully operationalize and measure the new variables mashed up into “class”. Hence, a new classification system emerged, capturing the individual distribution of 3 types of “capitals”, and its categories would face the empirical tests of “predicting” individual or aggregate outcomes and accommodating known anomalies. Nevertheless, this new conceptualization and class schema have been mainly concerned with describing patterns of inequality in the individual distribution of those resources, but neglecting theory building to account for the processes through which the resources are produced and appropriated. Moreover, being those “classes” constituted without reference to the occupational structure or any social institution whose functioning is known, this approach has only proposed ex-post hypotheses to account for inequality patterns and its effects on individual outcomes.

Finally, one last strategy to accommodate anomalies and build auxiliary hypotheses to test the influence of class divisions on individual action and subjectivity has been to understand “class” in terms of the people’s perceptions and practices regarding social differentiation and hierarchies. Thus, instead of following the typical positive heuristic of CA, concerned with operationalizing and measuring objective class conceptualizations, this approach is focused on the subjective meanings or culturally shared notions related to class categories. Hence, as we saw at the end of section 3.3., this approach has tended to take social actors’ ideas (or preconceptions) as scientific concepts, leading scholars to “mash up” under the class terminology phenomena originating in different dimensions of social life (the political, the economy, the symbolic, etc.), and that are organized around various axes of social divisions (age, gender, race, ethnicity, income, occupation, etc). In consequence, this branch of “cultural CA” has widened its scope in such a way that it needs organizing criteria to mature as a theoretical framework able to account for the historically changing links between the different dimensions of social life and how these, in turn, structure the distinct axes of social divisions and their corresponding categories and social meaning.

Nonetheless, these strategies have led to an exhausted positive heuristic mainly concerned with accommodating known anomalies instead of a) anticipating new facts; or b) proposing new insightful interpretations of “old facts”; or c) uncovering facts “forbidden” by competing RPs⁴¹; or even d) preserving the corroborated empirical content of preceding theories. Hence, the development of auxiliary hypotheses in CA does not constitute a theoretically progressive problemshift (new theories do not have excess empirical content over their predecessors, they do not lead to the discovery of novel or unexpected facts), nor it constitutes an empirically progressive problemshift (there is no excess empirical content to be corroborated). *In consequence, CA has*

⁴¹ With regard to the empirical generalizations eagerly sought by class analysts, Lakatos (1978[1970], 34) stated the following. “If I already know P_1 : ‘Swan A is white’, P_w : ‘All swans are white’ represents no progress, because it may only lead to the discovery of such further similar facts as P_2 : ‘Swan B is white’. So-called ‘empirical generalizations’ constitute no progress. A new fact must be improbable or even impossible in the light of previous knowledge.”

reached an impasse and has entered a degenerating phase, prompted by the stubborn adhesion to a sociological prenotation that non-critically placed laymen prenotations as the hard core of a scientific research programme.

Even at this point, though, Lakatos posits that a RP can only be abandoned when an alternative emerges. A rival RP has to arise, equipped with a theoretical framework able to a) anticipate novel facts, re-interpret them in an insightful way, or uncover hitherto unexpected facts; b) explain the previous RP's success; and c) some of the excess empirical content of the emerging RP starts to be verified. The next and final section aims to sketch the basic features of such a rival RP to sociologically understand the dynamics beneath the key social divisions in globalised capitalism.

4.2. Conclusions: *One Way out of the Impasse*

It is no place here to advance a detailed rival RP, but to suggest the main theoretical propositions at its hard core and to outline a clue to its positive heuristic. To this end, we take as departure point Marx's theory of capitalism within which classes are constituted from the process of capital accumulation.

When analysing the capitalist circulation of commodities (*Capital*, Chapters 1-4), Marx discovers surplus-value, a phenomenon that cannot be explained at that stage and requires taking the analysis into the capitalist production of commodities (*Capital*, Chapters 5-20), where the consumption of labour-power creates surplus-labour (more labour than required to meet the value of the necessary commodities to reproduce labour-power or "means of subsistence") and hence surplus-value (more value than required to buy means of subsistence). This collectively produced surplus-value is privately appropriated in the form of profits by the capitalist owning the production process; fact masked by the wage-form of labour-power's value.

Until this point, *Capital* uncovered an intrinsic contradiction between two categories at the heart of capitalism: capital and wage-labour. For capital, labour-power is a cost, another production input whose value must be reduced to allow for a greater appropriation of surplus-value and increase the profits. Nonetheless, labourers resist to accommodate to the commodity-form of labour-power; and thus, a struggle began, in which capital historically first sought to augment surplus-value by expanding the working-day (absolute surplus-value); strategy that was countered by the workers' political activism and the intervention of the State that led to a reduction in the working-day. The capitalist solution to this problem was, then, to develop methods to increase the productivity of labour in the production of the means of subsistence, thus decreasing the necessary time to produce them, and correspondingly reducing the value of labour-power (relative surplus-value).

Hence, capitalism starts to reveal an immanent abyss, an insoluble division between classes, phenomenon that, nevertheless, can be fully understood only when Marx studies the *continuity* of the productive cycles or its *reproduction*, which is realised as the accumulation of capital: the constant growth of capital by reinvesting surplus-value into production. This inquiry leads Marx to explore how do individual capitals intertwine with each other and with the workforce; i.e., the interdependence relationships that emerge from the capitalist economy and its ramifications into society as a whole.

Starting with the simple reproduction (*Capital*, Chapter 21), Marx shows 1) that the capitalist class constantly gives the working class, in the form of wages, shares of the product created by the latter and appropriated by the former; and 2) that the labourers permanently return to the capitalists money to buy the share of product (means of subsistence) they need to survive. This mechanism reveals that the labourer produces both the surplus-value for the capitalist and the value with which he will be paid in the form of wage; thus, labour-power is not paid with value created by the capitalist (the buyer) but with that produced by the labourer (the seller). As a result, the illusion of a

“market” of labour-power is called into question; but more important, at the end of a productive cycle, the labourer has nothing but that of the beginning, its free labour-power in need to sell to survive; while the capitalist has profits to reinvest by buying means of production (constant capital) and labour-power (variable capital).

Nonetheless, from the analysis of the reproduction of capital on a progressively increasing scale or the accumulation of capital (*Capital*, Chapter 22), Marx is able to unfold all of capitalism’s potentialities to structure socio-economic relationships and divisions. There he establishes that the rate of accumulation depends on the mass of surplus-value, which increases with relative surplus-value. Furthermore, when Marx studies the effects of capital accumulation on the working class (*Capital*, Chapter 23), he introduces the notion of composition of capital or its division into constant and variable capital, and he finds that the historical tendency reflects a greater growth in constant relative to variable capital (e.g. the replacement of labourers by machinery). This decisive finding reveals that relative surplus-value can be explained inside capital accumulation through the growth of constant capital: when this is introduced in the production of means of subsistence, it reduces the value of labour-power, when it is generalized into every branch of production, it increases labour productivity and reduces the necessary time to reach production goals, and thus reduces the number of labourers needed.

In consequence, capital accumulation has been dispensing with *living labour* (variable capital) in favour of *past labour* (constant capital), which immediately reflects in the augment of unemployed labourers, who then become crucial for accumulation as industrial reserve army: surplus labour-force always available 1) to enter the production to valorise new and increased capital, and 2) to be used to contain the demands of the employed labourers (such as decreasing the working day or augmenting wages). This examination shows that capital holds the key to grant access to the economy and society, fact masked by the illusory mechanism of labour-force “market” that is

influenced both in its demand and offer sides by capital accumulation. As a corollary, Marx gives a hint to capitalist crises resulting from over-accumulation of capital: the mass of capital is greater than the amount of labour-power available to valorise it.

After this exposition, Marx posits one of *Capital's* most well-known thesis: the General Law of Capitalistic Accumulation (GLCA), which basically states that the development of the means of production fosters the growth of capital composition, leading to a greater increase in constant relative to variable capital, which creates unemployment and raises the misery of the masses. Capitalism's own dynamic, then, would lead to a polarised scenario between opulent capitalists and pauperized working classes.

However, capitalist reproduction comprises not only industrial living labour but society as a whole, and Volume 1 of *Capital* provide tools to research this matter, opening the possibility to reach a comprehension distant from that polarisation and closer to capitalism's evolution during the last 150 years (Rochabrún 2021). First, Marx examined the share of surplus-value that capitalists reinvested in production and converted into capital, thus he neglected the analysis of the unproductive consumption of capitalists: surplus-value destined to cover their private expenses.

Only in a few pages of *Capital's* Chapter 13, Marx gave some clues on this topic when highlighting the weight of the "servant class" in the employed population (almost 31%), in England and Wales, according to the 1861 Census. These were domestic workers hired by capitalists (and in general, the wealthy classes), and thus paid with surplus-value that did not convert into variable capital since those workers were not producing commodities nor were employed by capitalist companies. This finding reveals 1) that the working-class not only reproduces its life from variable capital, but also from a fraction of surplus-value; 2) that these jobs augment the income of working-class families; 3) these expenses of the capitalists are not part of capital accumulation and hence reduce the risk of over-accumulation; 4) the industrial reserve army gets shrunk and even more if we include all capitalistically unproductive labour (bureaucrats, civil

servants, armed forces, self-employed workers providing private services, etc.). Therefore, it was a crucial neglect not to study capitalists' unproductive consumption the in the process of accumulation (Rochabrún 2021, 392-5).

Nevertheless, Marx's most important omission regards another feature that is also briefly mentioned in *Capital's* Chapter 13, the *general conditions of production*, which refer to the *collective-use goods inherently demanded by the development of private capitalist production*, goods that have tended to be universally used but not privately owned by anyone: roads, ports, airports, drinking water systems, phone/internet networks, power plants, communication satellites, etc. In this sense, *their evolution reveals the growing social character of production under capitalism*⁴². Analogously to the employment not comprised within variable capital, whether these goods are encompassed within constant capital depends on insofar they are created and managed by capitalists or by not-for profit organizations (such as State-owned companies). But regardless of these differences, the production and functioning of these goods increase the employed population, which reduce the industrial reserve army, raise the income of working-class families, and thus, *constitute a counter-tendency to the GLCA*. Furthermore, their scope and diversity *demand the constitution of some kind of social power*, located at the outskirts of capitalism, to rule on their creation and access; i.e., *the singularities of the general conditions of production bring about discussions on the "general interest", which concerns the entire society* (Rochabrún 2021, 395-404).

Lastly, *Capital* allows us to delve into the expansion of collective services (such as education, health, and social security) aimed at the reproduction of labourers; which, together with the general conditions of production, are *part of the development of the*

⁴² Here lays the core of Marx's critique to capitalism: the urge for valorising capital (private appropriation) impedes production to be oriented towards satisfying the growing collective needs prompted by capitalism itself.

*productive forces*⁴³. Since the expansion of these services have been done with taxation and compulsory contributions, and given that the labourers are their main beneficiaries, an additional share of the social product (besides wages) goes to the working-class and to the entire population. Thus, albeit inherent of capital accumulation, the general conditions of production and collective services *constitute socialized areas at the outskirts of private capitalist production* (Rochabrún 2021, 405-6).

Capital accumulation has finally displayed its full potential to structure interdependence relationships and divisions in capitalist economy and society. On one hand, the abyss between capital and labour-power is inherent to the history of capitalism: not only labour-power is a cost for capital, but the latter holds the key to access economy and society itself (capital hires and fires), influences both the demand and offer of labour-power, and sets the aims of production. Crises and developments in the productive forces shake the abyss and give pass to new re-arrangements between capitalists and the working-class (resulting from consensus or impositions). On the other hand, the social character of capitalism builds bridges over the abyss, which branch out the whole society. Thus, if the GLCA embodies the offensive of capitalism, the bridges display its defensive capability, *allowing to broaden social inclusion*. This has resulted in a highly differentiated social structure crossed by multiple communicating vessels, which attenuate capitalism's contradictions while amplifying them to the entire population. Hence, building on Marx research, it is possible to reach a different scenario to that posited by himself, and that constitutes Marx's most well-known thesis by superficial readers and class analysts: the radical opposition of two classes clearly defined as self-conscious collectivities (Rochabrún 2021, 408-9).

⁴³ The productive forces comprise everything that affect the productivity of labour. Some of its components are inside the scope of individual capital companies, such as the methods encompassed within relative surplus-value: the organization of labour, the means of production, skills of the hired labourers, etc. In a broader sense, though, the development of productive forces displays in the entire society, including communication and transport infrastructure, power plants, basic and universal education, general life conditions of the population (basic and universal health systems, sanitation, sewerage, housing, etc.). Basically, they materialise in *collectively-oriented goods and services* (Rochabrún 2021, 177).

There is hardly another period in history in which capitalism has displayed a greater defensive capability as throughout the Welfare State of Post-War Europe and North America. During these “golden years” of capitalism, the increased productivity of labour and a new era of automation in production led to a dramatic decrease in the value of commodities that soon became part of the normal “basket of goods” of general population. These developments went hand-in-hand with a continuous expansion of the general conditions of production and the massification of collective services, due to 1) capitalism’s immanent movement; 2) political struggles of the labourers; and 3) State policies that sought to secure full-employment and universal socio-economic rights, and promoted mass consumption to fuel economic growth (Jessop 2018, 352). As a result, this “Post-War Atlantic Fordist” capitalist *accumulation regimen* (AR) *regulated by the Welfare State* (Jessop 2018, 2015, 2013, 2002), was able to absorb ever-growing shares of population into the economy through wage-labour (not necessarily within variable capital, though), and collective consumption of goods and services; which in turn, allowed for their integration into society itself.

Within this AR, CA consolidated as a distinctive sociological approach to study inequality in “industrial societies”, relying on the occupations defined by the “labour market” structured by that AR. Influenced by the stratification framework, CA then grouped occupations into class categories reflecting social ranks, according to the distribution of economic resources and authority inside production units. Since then, not only CA but almost all discussions on poverty and inequality have focused on the appearance that capitalism projects onto the immediate experience of people: the distribution of resources. But it is by no accident that such appearance imposes itself, since the aforementioned expansion of the “basket of goods” opened the public sphere for “the consumer”, figure that shadowed “the labourer”, propped by new marketing strategies and systems of credit fostering unproductive consumption.

Thereby, CA's appeal to scholars can be explained by its success to correlate occupations with consumption and life chances; whereas that very success explains CA's negative results regarding classes as self-conscious and acting collectivities (as deduced from the GLCA). And it cannot be otherwise since even the GLCA was not derived from the distribution of resources, or labour market mechanisms; the decisive task is to inquire how do people is placed along that abyss between capital and wage-labour or over the bridges that capital accumulation opens and shuts with its changing rhythms, i.e. how do people articulate with the process of capital accumulation, and how in turn they are included/excluded from economy and society⁴⁴.

However, the dynamic of capitalism brought changes to its AR and its ramifications into society. During the 1970s and 1980s, rising inflation and the stagnation of economic growth, together with a fall in productivity and the profit rate, led the countries of North America and Europe to abandon Welfare State policies. New economic and social bases for accumulation were needed and State intervention arose to secure the valorisation of capital: "neoliberalization" gave primacy to financial services and interest-bearing capital as means for accumulation, enabling capital-money to globally move freed from Nation-State regulations. Under the auspices of international agencies, permanent innovation and flexibilization in production and the workfare were promoted, subordinating social policy to global competition (seeking to reduce the costs of labour-power, capital, and raw materials) (Jessop 2019, 2018, 2016, 2015).

The effects of the new AR on labour-power consist of labour market flexibilization, reduction of manual labourers, increase of high-skilled workers and professionals in the service sector, "precarization" of wage-labour (low wages, irregular employment, etc.),

⁴⁴ An example from Latin America may illustrate our critique here. To explain the conflicts that proliferated throughout the region from 2018 until the Covid-19 pandemic, some experts highlighted a slowdown in the income inequality reduction since 2014. See: Bárcena, Alicia. "ECLAC: the region has underestimated inequality." Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, November 8, 2019. <https://www.cepal.org/en/pressreleases/eclac-region-has-underestimated-inequality> . However, the uprisings happened in countries that successfully reduced inequality and poverty in the last two decades, according to World Bank Data available here: <https://data.worldbank.org/>

and weakening of worker unions. Meanwhile, the most important impact on the entire society is the reduction of public spending on collective services and the general conditions of production. Instead of demanding an expansion of collective-use goods and services that would require the intervention of social powers to rule on the general interest, the emerging AR privileges and enhances the private interest.

Furthermore, in the last four decades, the heartlands of capitalism have seen the surge of a finance-dominated AR in which financial capital has become autonomous and demands a greater target rate of profit and a shorter expected time of rotation than that of profit-producing (industrial) capital. This new capabilities of financial capital propel it to massively lever fictitious credit and capital to achieve those targets (Jessop 2018, 354-6; 2019; Elsner 2012). Thus, a new crisis mechanism has been added to that of over-accumulation, and consists of financial speculation and the development of different forms of rent. In this new scenario, the valorisation of capital has increasingly sought to free itself from the constrains of *living and past labour* since unleashed financial capital makes profits basically from the *expectations on future labour* and surplus-value (private indebtedness, financial instruments, etc.). Today, it appears to be enough labour-power and capital, but it does not seem possible to combine them in order to meet the expected rate of profitability in the expected rotation time. In consequence, fundamental categories of capitalism, labour and commodity, yield ground to what used to be accessory (interest and credit) or an anomaly (rent).

These new dynamics of capital accumulation “shut the bridges over the abyss” and enhance capital powers over labour, and thus explain recent phenomena such as the exclusion from stable dependent wage-labour and the constitution of a “precariat”, as well as the exclusion of large shares of population from the consumption of different collective services and goods. Capital accumulation can even help explain what Sassen (2014) has called “expulsions” from labour market and society itself. Therefore, albeit they cannot be reduced to the contradiction of capital and wage-labour,

capitalism can account for far reaching divisions demarcating those who are inside and outside the social system.

On the other hand, we can identify counter-tendencies generated from the enhanced unproductive consumption of those privileged classes associated to the valorisation of financial and profit-producing capital. These classes demand private services (from house-keeping to private tutoring) to be paid with money that will not be part of variable capital and will not produce surplus-value; but will augment the number of employed population, as well as raise the income of working-class families and improve their life chances and expectations of consumption. This consumption, in turn, is enhanced through the massification of unproductive credit (a mechanism of financial capital) and the growth of private indebtedness. Thus, this AR may have no concern in people as labour-power as long as they are turned into individual *consumers* of the global market. Therefore, it is also inside the dynamics of capital accumulation that we can make sense of the shifts taken by CA, from the study of occupations to the study of lifestyle, taste and cultural differentiation through consumption.

Finally, a word must be said about the future of the rival RP that we have advanced here. Lakatos (1978[1970], 70-1) stated that “a new research programme which has just entered the competition may start by explaining ‘old facts’ in a novel way but may take a very long time before it is seen to produce ‘genuinely novel’ facts. And we should certainly regard a newly interpreted fact as a new fact [...] As long as a budding research programme can be rationally reconstructed as a progressive problemshift, it should be sheltered for a while from a powerful established rival.” In this sense, we have tried to provide new insightful explanations for the changes in the relevant interdependence relationships and social divisions by abstracting them from the historical dynamics of capital accumulation. This procedure has also allowed us to explain the success of CA, the previous RP we are challenging, as well as its flaws and the shifts it took to stay viable. In this course, we have departed from the appearance

of reality that CA takes as object of study, and moved towards a theoretical explanation of why that appearance imposes itself. The key point in this endeavour has been to study how different people articulate to the process of capital accumulation, and in so doing, understand their exclusion, expulsion or inclusion in society, and thus, their life chances. We contend that through this method of research, or positive heuristic, this rival RP would be able to produce “genuinely novel” facts.

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