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British Sociology, the Bourgeois Media-Sociology Hybrid and the Problem of Social Class

ABSTRACT

This article advances the scandalous argument that we live in a post-social class modernity, and that the perpetual reinvention of class as the key concept for understanding social inequality is untenable. Class is not only a zombie concept but also an ideology that reflects a set of normative attitudes, beliefs and values that pervade sociology. Its starting point is that, sociology, once adept at imagining new ways to interpret the world, has become a subject field that wants to claim a radical space for itself while simultaneously relying on outworn theoretical frameworks and denying the work radicals do.

The article begins by suggesting that the problem of class has its roots in the deep structure of sociology. Taking its cue from Jacques Rancière's classic study *The Philosopher and His Poor* it develops the argument that if class was once upon a time the fundamental issue in the study of social inequality, today sociology urgently needs an alternative cognitive framework for thinking outside this paradigm which it uses to open up a critical space for its own intellectual claims rather than reflecting society in the round. After arguing that we a living at the 'end of Class', the critique explores the limits of the work of Pierre Bourdieu, who has replaced Marx and Weber as sociology's key theoretician of class. It is argued that in Bourdieu's sociology, contentment is permanently closed to 'the working class' that thumps about like a dinosaur that survived extinction, anachronistic proof of the power and privilege of the theorist and his sociology rather than proof of the usefulness of his ideas. The key to understanding the limits of this interpretation, it is argued, is that it assumes a 'working class' that has little or no agency.

It is subsequently argued that sociology and the bourgeois media are coextensive. The specific function of the bourgeois media-sociology hybrid is to provide ideological legitimation of class inequality and of integrating individuals into sociology's interpretation of social and cultural life. Focusing on the work of two self-identified 'working class'

journalists who have successfully made the transition into the bourgeoisie and who seek solid validation of their new found status in the bourgeois media it is demonstrated that social inequality is neither expressed nor examined in a convincing way. Framing 'working class' worlds even more 'working class' than 'working class', the bourgeois media, at best, lay them bare for clichéd interpretation. Here the article argues vis-à-vis Quentin Skinner that words are not so much mere 'reflections' of the world, but 'engines' which actively play a role in moulding the worlds to which they refer. Drawing on Rancière's idea of the *partage du sensible* (distribution of the sensible) it is argued thereafter that here thinking ends up as the very thought of inequality because by posing social inequality as the primary fact that needs to be explained the bourgeois media-sociology hybrid ends up explaining its necessity.

The final part of the article offers some suggestions about how to rethink social inequality after class, and it concludes with the observation that the predicament facing sociology derives not just from its theoretical limits but also from its failure to give social inequality human meaning and the people who suffer it the proper respect by acknowledging their own interpretations of their own lives.

KEY WORDS

class; social inequality; sociology; bourgeois media; distribution of the sensible (*partage du sensible*); ideology; legislators; Bourdieu; Rancière

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Introduction

As I write this article, interest in class is at an all-time high among British sociologists. It is once again fashionable to speak about social classes. For all the talk about being 'poor' in a globalized world or 'multiple deprivation', social inequality in modern Britain is unthinkable, indeed, unimaginable, without an understanding and acceptance of three premises: the concept of class is sacrosanct to the debate, the underpinning theoretical ideas about class are to be found in the ideas of the founding fathers and the key sociologists who have inherited their mantle, and class belongs to sociology – and broadly speaking, most people concur. The concept might have been given intellectual credence by political economists in the first three decades of the nineteenth century (Bauman, 1985), but it was made famous by two of sociology's luminaries: Karl Marx and Max Weber. Marx revealed the mechanisms of class and how they are greased with money and powered by capitalism and the captive spell of ideology, and Weber explored how they are oiled by status and with pretension.

This position is grounded in one further premise. The importance of class lies not in attempts to reconstruct the past but in understanding the present. The old distinctions between upper, middle and working class identified by Marx ostensibly no longer hold good, demanding that we replace these with five intermediate classifications – the 'established middle class', the 'technical middle class', the 'new affluent workers', the 'traditional working class' and the 'emergent service workers' – book-ended by 'the elite' and the *'precariat',* the poorest, most deprived class which has the lowest economic, social and cultural capital (Savage *et al*, 2015). The impetus for this shift in focus emerged from the *Great British Class Survey, a* collaboration between a team of academic sociologists, BBC Lab UK and BBC Current Affairs (Devine and Snee, 2015), which developed its key arguments by drawing on the sociology of Pierre Bourdieu. The obvious advantage of reprising talk of class – especially through a Bourdieuian theoretical framework – is of course that it enables us to capture the full spectrum of groups in society who share social positions, tastes, orientations, life chances, and so on, in a relational way.

But there are also dangers, because we may be seduced into thinking that there is something essential about being, for example, 'poor' and part of the 'traditional working class' and the *'precariat'*. What is worse still, we often hear sociologists using such classifications carelessly, assuming that their readers have a perfectly clear idea what they mean. Yet when we examine closely the categories advocated by sociologists we discover enormous gaps in understanding – including conflicting and contradictory claims. This problem is exacerbated when these are processed on the highest secular level, that is, through the media, which feeds society's craving for all kinds of unifying platitudes. But what we have here, it will be argued in this article, are not only stereotypes of class, such as 'chavs' and 'bogans', mass-produced by the 'culture industry' (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1944) and featured in the mass-circulated media, but clichés produced and featured in investigative journalism and broadcast media (namely though not exclusively the Guardian and the BBC and what I will for the purposes of the current discussion call the bourgeois media), which draw their authority from their reciprocal relationship with sociology. Thus when academic sociology and the bourgeois media collaborate, as with *The Great British Class Survey*, the presentation of twenty-first century social class divisions in an affirmative way is undermined by culturally and ideologically processed clichés – the 'traditional working class' and so on– which are legitimized through a form of critical journalism that embraces the idea of the artist as co-producer of authentic knowledge who is, to quote Jean-Paul Sartre (1947: 121), 'in principle, independent of any sort of ideology', because the journalist operates *outside* the framework of the 'culture industry'. What this observation

suggests is not only that that words are not so much mere 'reflections' of the world, but 'engines' which actively play a role in moulding the worlds to which they refer (Skinner, 2002). It suggests too that it just might be the case that sociological and bourgeois media representations of class are largely coextensive but also to equal degrees clichéd.

As Christopher Ricks (1980: 54) once said, the only way to speak about a cliché is with another cliché. Therefore we might ask, what concept 'could be more hackneyed than *hackneyed*, more outworn than *outworn*, more tattered than *tattered*', than class? So it might be advisable to drop all talk of class in order to avoid confusion, ambiguity and vagueness and to prevent cultural and ideological misrepresentation. In other words, it is not only the dualism between the 'culture industry' and mass-circulated media that we need to be liberated from but also what I shall call the bourgeois media-sociology hybrid, a totally bastard art-form, whose homogeneity corresponds with a typical scene persistently restaged by scholars since Plato (Rancière 2004).

Yet the stock response to such an idea would surely be that it is at best utopian and at worst irresponsible since it would impoverish our ability to understand continuing social inequality and the pernicious divide between rich and poor that has been growing since the end of the 1970s. The problem with the received wisdom, however, is that it never reflects on the strengths and weakness of continuing to use class as a key sensitizing concept. Nor does it contemplate the limits of adopting a Bourdieuian theoretical framework, which it will be argued in this article is purely a sign of the approval of the importance of the power and privilege of the theorist and his sociology rather than proof of the usefulness of his ideas. But the flaws in Bourdieu's sociology are only part of the problem. A deeper issue has to do with the craving for class itself, fixed in its form and stripped of the distortions of time, which in robbing certain individuals of agency and the capacity to act in the world – to do things in a way that is neither predetermined nor simply shot from the hip – does not so much demonize them and turn them into monsters, but worse still patronizes them and turns them into pets (Derrida 1990).

It seems to me that social class is more an obstruction to sociology (and by default to political science) today than an aid. I do not mean to gloss over the importance of economic inequality or the critical contribution that Marx and Weber made to sociology. But I think that class has come to occupy the position that Marx and Engels, in the *Communist Manifesto*, assigned to the bourgeoisie: once dynamic, emancipating and progressive, it has become a fetter on sociology. The complexity of the twenty-first century world is simply too complex to be captured in its nineteenth-century vision. The starting point of this article is that in the

twenty-first century assumptions about universal human experience have run up against their limits. As a critical response to this state of affairs, the article aims to transform our perception by proposing a new parallax around which we might understand social inequality. What it proposes in the following pages is reformulating the study of this topic in response to some key cognitive and social changes in human experience. The assumption of this article is that there is a paradox at the heart of sociology: although it is extremely critical of social inequality, it commits the cardinal sin of representing the 'subjects' of social inequality – 'the poor' generally but 'the working class' specifically – as having no social role other than to perform this social inequality as they endure it as their life (Rancière 2004). On top of this it is too often the case that the bourgeois media-sociology hybrid treats individuals like hapless automatons who do not have any agency. The capacity of individuals to amount to more than the sum of a set of circumstances is ignored; the ability to make a choice is glossed over. What is forgotten in continuing to frame social inequality through class – like all other essential questions in the functionalist epistemic that underpins this bourgeois media-sociology hybrid – is the enigma of freedom.

The use of the term 'epistemic' (or cognitive frame) here is derived from Foucault's conception of an '*episteme*' which he develops in *The Order of Things* (1970). It is the view of the argument developed in this article that sociology is organized around a functionalist epistemic, a theoretical and empirical system of classification, in which words intersect with representations to provide a prevailing order of knowledge (or discourse) for how things are connected in the overall subject field; this discourse describes the conditions under which what is taken to be 'true' knowledge is possible. Put simply, this epistemic is a model of functional equilibrium which has difficulty in analyzing social change. This functionalist epistemic is in this sense characterized by the watchwords 'predetermined' and 'over-determined' which, to paraphrase Foucault, are 'conceived as both the guarantee of that knowledge and the limit of its expansion' (1970: 35).

What would happen if we reversed this tacit assumption? What if we observed 'the poor' like everyone else in the twenty-first century as individuals of singularity in their endeavours to become artists of life in the first place? What if we assumed that the twenty-first century is a world in which we are able to dissolve old social forms (read: social classes) and replace them with new ones: all kinds of habitats, social networks, social spacings and social arrangements where we find new equilibriums. We could then see every phenomenon in people's lives from a parallax view and, contrary to sociology as the *fait accompli* study of completed works, we could develop an understanding human life as a powerful force of self-

realization and democratization, a veritable 'theatre for the equality of opportunity' (Rosanvallon, 2013) that makes it possible to engage in the kinds of practices that shape individuals' lives. With an analogous manoeuvre, we could likewise unpack the art of living when it is no longer only pursuit but when has also become an arrival, a new kind of 'home' for all of us people from somewhere else.

Whether we call this the 'art of living', 'individualism of singularity' (Rosanvallon, 2013), 'self-transformation', 'the care of the self' (Foucault, 1986), 'self-constitution' and 'self-assembly' (Bauman, 1992), 'self-design' and 'virtuoso asceticism' (Sloterdijk, 2013), 'freedom' or simply 'empowerment' is purely a matter of personal judgement. The assumption of this article is that its significance rests precisely on the opportunity it offers critical minded scholars to pursue the above kind of inquiry to a greater effect than as ever been done. To date sociology has operated with the uncanny capacity for putting paid to such ambitions; it has overlooked the extent to which the 'individualism of distinction', understood by sociologists such as Pierre Bourdieu, became unexceptional and lost its elitist connotations in the final decades of the twentieth century, ushering in 'a new phase in human emancipation, defined by the desire to achieve a fully personalized existence' (Rosanvallon, 2013: 226). In so doing sociology has continued to wrap twenty-first century life within a social inequality discourse and the veil of illusions associated with the concept of social class without which it cannot function properly.

This has not only led to the domestication of sociology; the problem of the collusion of the idea of class with intellectual power has also become a problem. To paraphrase Nietzsche, there is a sentence which hangs over sociology: 'I fear that we are not getting rid of class because we still believe in the grammar of Marx and Weber (and Bourdieu)'. Class in other words is an idea sociologists return to again and again despite the fact that its role as become symbolic rather than experiential. What was once a powerful sociological category has lost its original critical (and emancipatory) force. This is just as true of new interpretations of class as it is of old ones which, if they mean anything at all, probably convey nothing more than the idea that social groups continue to be differentiated economically and relationally.

To develop an insight from Quentin Skinner (1980: 564). It seems to me that although sociologists as a group still to have 'self-conscious possession' of class and continue to develop its 'corresponding vocabulary', a vocabulary which they use 'to pick out and discuss the concept with consistency', society as a whole does not. To paraphrase David Brooks (2003), most people today do not hold Marxist concepts in their heads. They 'do not see society as a layer cake, with the rich on top, the middle

class beneath them and the working class and underclass at the bottom. They see society as a high school cafeteria, with their community at one table and other communities at other tables... All of this adds up to a terrain incredibly inhospitable to class-based politics'.

This article argues that there is a need to revise the tacit assumptions sociology has about class in light of contemporary social and cultural transformations. Drawing the essence of its critique from Rancière's (2004) important study *The Philosopher and His Poor*, it is argued that what this functionalist epistemic represents is less a compelling understanding of social inequality than a scene of distribution (*partage du sensible*) – persistently restaged by scholars since Plato – in which marginalized groups (read: the 'traditional working class' and the '*precariat*') are designated, delegitimized, assigned their place, and have their lives classified and tied down to a function, which inscribes them and their worlds into the dominant order of the things. This is the *typical* scene in sociology. In other words, this article makes the somewhat scandalous assertion that in order to open up a critical space for their own intellectual claims, sociologists ultimately distort the lives of certain social groups. Under the auspices of sociology the life practices of marginalized social groups are circumscribed by two distinguishing factors: taste, on the one hand, and legislating power, on the other. The upshot is that judgement of taste is determined by the authority of sociology.

As Zygmunt Bauman explains at the beginning of his highly influential assessment of modern intellectual work: the legislators are those keepers of secrets who make authoritative ideological statements about the world and who have the power to make the '*procedural rules* which assure the attainment of truth, the arrival of moral judgement, and the selection of proper artistic taste. Such procedural rules have a *universal validity*, as to the *products* of their application' (1987: 4–5). Drawing on Bauman's ideas it is my view that in the twenty-first century, the authority of the legislators understanding of social inequality is downgraded in importance, and so is the power of their *legislating* message, their way of communicating the truth about social inequality. This immediately entails the end of a certain form of 'class' analysis.

The critique offered below anticipates alternative scene which argues that there is actually another sequence of scenes, corresponding to twenty-first century life, where there exists a diversity individuals with ever more equipment for self-enhancement, which demand that we update our conceptual, empirical and normative understandings by embracing human life in the making, challenging functionalist distributions. The analysis begins, drawing on the notion of the 'end of class', that understanding Class as sociology does is no longer useful, has come to an end.

The end of Class

It was the great American art critic and philosopher Arthur Coleman Danto in his compelling interpretation of the seismic shift in modern art in the final decades of the twentieth-century who first alerted us to the fact of the 'end of' thesis:

> We live at a moment when it is clear that art can be made of anything, and where there is no mark through which works of art can be perceptually different from the most ordinary of objects. This is what the example of (Andy Warhol's) *Brillo Box* is meant to show. The class of artworks is simply unlimited, as media can be adjoined to media, and art unconstrained by anything save the laws of nature in one direction, and moral laws on the other. When I say that this condition is the end of art, I mean essentially that it is the end of the possibility of any particular internal direction for art to take. It is the end of the possibility of progressive development' (1998: 139–40).

In other words, what Danto is saying here is that the 'end of art' is not so much that we have witnessed art's end, but the end of all legislating philosophies of art. To draw on this key insight, the idea that class has ended does not mean that it has died or that people no longer have any class. On the contrary. Nor does it mean something like class has come to the 'end of history'. 'End' as I am using it here means something more like a finishing point. The 'end of Class' means that class in the functionalist sense of the idea has come to a conclusion. The 'end Class' means that class no longer has a grand narrative, a compelling story, anymore. After the 'end of Class', there is no such thing as 'Class' – there is only class.

There was once a time when the term 'class' meant something definite. If it is to continue to mean anything definite, then another term must be invented without holding to the functionalist epistemic. The study of social inequality is certainly essential to sociology, but the most important things relating to what people do in their lives are not derived from functionalist definitions. What is most important today is that it is the practices associated with the 'art of living', the 'individualism of singularity', 'self-transformation', 'the care of the self', 'self-constitution', 'self-assembly', 'self-design', 'virtuoso asceticism' and so on, which are the closest expression of the category of human life. Twenty-first century men and women are in no sense fixed. They might occupy very different places in the hierarchy of social institutions, but each and every one of them is born free – that is, contingent, and, indeed, endowed with boundless possibilities – and in this sense also equal. This means that they are individuals who have agency.

One conclusion that can be drawn from this observation is that the reason that class is no longer special anymore is for the simple reason that it can be anything. At the risk of being tautologous, maybe it is simply the

case there simple too many definitions of class. My own understanding of what happened at 'the end of Class' is that it signaled a cause for celebration because human life had at last been liberated from the tyranny of Class, both *for individuals* and *for itself*. The day when class crossed that line was the day when human life became itself and freedom as a real possibility.

To the extent that class continues to be used in sociology is only as a 'zombie category' which no longer has a compelling grip on reality. The way I am using this term here refers to the idea of the 'living dead'. It was developed by Ulrich Beck (2002) as a response to the major epochal changes that have transformed the relationship between sociology, individuals and existing social formations and institutions. For Beck, zombie categories are essentially stock sociological concepts which, if they seem self-apparent, have in fact lost their conceptual and explanatory power. Drawing on Beck's thesis it is possible to argue that after the 'end of Class', the study of class in sociology has become a kind zombie subject field that continues to stalk the living world, even though it has come to feel like a ghost from a different time.

For all the innovative studies sociology has produced over the years, this nineteenth century concept remains sacrosanct. To understand why, let us return to Foucault's conception of '*episteme*' once again. As David Macey (2004: 73) explains, as Foucault saw it, the body of knowledge produced within any *episteme* is organized around its 'unconscious' or *doxa* – the knowledge it thinks with but not about. This tacit knowledge is what underpins its 'order of things'. In Foucault's view then, every *episteme* operates with a set of rules of which its adherents are not consciously aware. The *episteme* under which sociology is organized foregrounds social inequality on the one hand, and a system of classification which assumes that rigorous theorization and empirical study into the social presuppose one another, on the other. It is my argument that, without really knowing it, sociology uses these same rules to produce in a circumscribed way the very diverse objects of twenty-first social and cultural life of which it speaks.

Hitherto I have suggested that the knowledge produced in sociology is governed by what Foucault calls a 'historical a *priori*' which foregrounds certain tacit assumptions about how and in what ways people experience social inequality. Let me put it another way. Fundamental to sociology is the conviction that, however diverse are our social and cultural lives, these are destined to remain of a fundamentally certain order. So, in trying to conceptualize social inequality, sociology must necessarily resort to certain modes of thought for 'describing', 'representing' and 'speaking' that in the nature of the case draw certain connections between different aspects of 'reality', and indeed derive their power precisely from the fact

that they are expected. Whether 'described', 'represented' or 'spoken', the discursive formation known as sociology must continue to produce certain effects that provide us with an integrated account of the 'reality' of social inequality. The further that process of integration continues, the more it can be taken to suggest everything inhering in a single common underlying 'reality', a functionalist equilibrium that is the source of all that is. This is the intuition that is common to sociology.

It is my view that we must necessarily resort to using some other new metaphors that draw unexpected connections between different aspects of reality, and indeed derive much of their power precisely from the fact that they are unexpected. Yet sociology carries on as if British society has remained the same as it was fifty or sixty years ago (depicted to fine effect in books such as Ross McKibbin's (1998) magisterial historical study *Classes and Cultures 1918–1951*), ignoring the fact that, notwithstanding some continuities in social inequality, people's lives have been radically transformed, which means that the ways in which they live their lives can no longer be seen merely through the distorting lens of a dated social class analysis.

This does not mean that class is unimportant; quite the reverse. It is simply that we need to brush the history of second half of the twentieth century against the grain as it were to redeem, reconfigure and reinterpret social inequality in a different way. Asking if social class is real is like asking if money is real. Both questions are meaningless without a cognitive frame. At the economic level of analysis, classes at the beginning of the twenty-first century are still real enough. But both socially and culturally the working-class worlds described in books such a McKibbin's barely exist today – and haven't since the end of 1970s.

In this article we must try to account for the apparent insistence in sociology that continuity is more preferable to change. It is my view that by continuing to pose social inequality – particularly though not exclusively of class – as the primary 'fact' that needs to be explained with regard to social inequality, sociology has ended up explaining its *necessity* (Rancière 2004). This might appear a somewhat scandalous proposition; it is meant to be. As such, it demands a critical discussion. In the next part of the article I will consider two issues. On the one hand there is the massive legacy of Bourdieu, the social theorist of *Distinction* (Bourdieu, 1984), whose theories and concepts underpin twenty-first century sociological analysis of class (see Savage *et al.*: 2015); on the other is the bourgeois media-sociology hybrid, and in particular the way it reproduces ideologically processed assumptions about 'the poor' emanating from this sociology. Ideology is associated with systems of attitudes, beliefs and values that naturalize social inequality through false consciousness. In this way ideology always embodies particular

arrangements of power. As this article demonstrates, the function of ideology as it is being used here is associated with systems of attitudes, beliefs and values that naturalize social inequality through sociology which is used to uphold norms and perceptions, not by which 'the poor' actually live, but by which sociology requires them to live. Here then my aim is to give two illustrations of what happens when social inequality is presupposed.

The sociologists and 'their' poor: Pierre Bourdieu

Let us begin with Bourdieu. His 'theory of practice' (Bourdieu 1977) as we have seen underpins the *Great British Class Survey*. What this demonstrates is that to a remarkable extent he has become sociology's key sociologist. This is hardly surprising since throughout his academic career Bourdieu undertook numerous studies – taste, high culture, symbolic rivalry, education, sport, skholē – so as to raise some compelling questions relating to social inequality.

Like Adorno, Bourdieu is critical of the economic determinism found in the more unsophisticated versions of Marxism. His thinking requires that we move towards a more general theory of social inequality in consumer-based societies where social classes are 'united by the way they spend their money, not the way they earn it' (Bauman, 1988: 36). In this sense, Bourdieu's social theory of *Distinction* is an explicit attempt to understand the nature of social class and social class divisions in a complex world in which production has largely given way to consumption. Accordingly, he offers what is essentially a treatise on taste. For Bourdieu (1984) social class, like gender and 'race', needs to be understood as much by its *perceived* existence as through its *material* existence in the classical Marxist sense. To make this synthesis he draws on a theoretical toolkit featuring the concepts of field, *habitus* and capital.

Fields reflect the various social, cultural, economic and political arenas of life, which form their own microcosms of power endowed with their own rules. Education, leisure, sport and so on are structured in this way. Power struggles emerge in 'fields' as a result of the belief of social actors that the capital(s) of the field are worth fighting for. To draw on one example, the question is not just whether Italian opera is superior to Chinese opera, but also 'the series of institutions, rules, rituals, conventions, categories, designations, appointments and titles', which constitute the objective hierarchy of opera, 'and which produce certain discourses and activities' (Webb, Schirato and Danaher 2002: 21–22). Analogous to fluctuations in the stock market, the 'currency' or rates of exchange attached to particular capitals in particular fields are also vulnerable to change as these are continually contested.

In order to synthesize the relationship between the individual and society, or more precisely, social actors' relationships with a highly differentiated consumer world constituted by these fields of power, Bourdieu draws on Marcel Mauss's use of the concept of *habitus*. Bourdieu (2000) suggests that the *habitus* is an embodied internalized schema which is both structured by and structuring of social actors' practices, attitudes, and dispositions. The *habitus* also constitutes and is constituted by social actors' practical sense of knowing the world and it is through their 'feel for the game' of the field in question – in our example the world opera – that they come to see that world and the position of themselves and others in that world as unexceptional. Vital to understanding this 'perfect coincidence' is the idea of the social actor's *doxa* values or 'doxic relation' to that field and world, which Bourdieu identifies with that tacitly cognitive and practical sense of knowing of what can and cannot be reasonably achieved. In this sense, the *habitus* constitutes only an 'assumed world' captured as it is through the confines of the individual social actor's 'horizon of possibilities' (Lane 2000: 194).

In any field the practices, attitudes, and dispositions which social actors both adopt and embody ultimately depends on the extent to which they can position themselves and their particular 'endowment of capital'. For Bourdieu, a capital

> is any resource effective in a given social arena that enables one to appropriate the specific profits arising out of participation and contest in it. Capital comes in three principal species: economic (material and financial assets), cultural (scarce symbolic goods, skills, and titles), and social (resources accrued by virtue of membership in a group). A fourth species, symbolic capital, designates the effects of any form of capital when people do not perceive them as such…The position of any individual, group, or institution, in social space may thus be charted by two coordinates, the *overall volume and the composition of the capital* they detain (Wacquant, 1998: 221).

What this suggests is that 'the profits of membership' offered are not available to everybody in the same way. This is because, as Ball (2003: 4) asserts, the point of all 'capitals' is that they are resources to be *exploited* and it is their exclusivity in the battle for distinction that gives them their value. In other words, people who realize their own capital through their leisure interest in opera do so specifically because others are excluded.

Bourdieu explains this process through his theory of cultural capital which identifies the forms of value associated with culturally authorized consumption patterns and tastes. Bourdieu identifies three separate strands of cultural capital — (1) *incorporated*, which is seen as indistinguishable from *habitus* and confined to the embodied experiences and knowledge of class groups across the life span, (2) *objectivated*, which is

independent of individuals and located in material culture and its value in the market place, and (3) *institutionalized,* which is located within establishment structures, such as appointments, titles, awards and so on, and their implicit and explicit relations of power. Despite their distinctions, these different forms of cultural capital should be seen as co-existing within specific cultural fields defined by their own institutions, conventions and dispositions.

According to Bourdieu, social capital, like cultural capital, has two decisive features: on the one hand, it is a tangible resource made by advantage of social networks, and on the other, it has a symbolic dimension, which contrives to hide networks of power woven into the fibres of familiarity. In the event, Bourdieu's understanding of capital suggests that it is related to the extent, quality and quantity of social actors' networks *and* their ability to mobilize these, which is always governed by the mutual understanding that any given field is an arena of struggle and it is the battle for distinction that gives capital its qualities. The upshot of this 'battle for distinction' is that it ends up symbolically approving the interests of the most powerful e.g. opera, ballet, classical music etc. and disapproving those of the weakest groups e.g. shopping, sport, pop music etc. What this tells us is that the world in general is made up of different sites of symbolic rivalry. As Skeggs (2009) argues, the battle for distinction in is also often accompanied with 'a gaze', or a 'look that could kill', that embodies a symbolic reading of who has and who hasn't the right to certain kinds of cultural capital, and which makes those who are perceived as unworthy feel 'out of place'. This is what Bourdieu calls symbolic violence.

One of Bourdieu's major themes in this regard is people struggling with their own embodiment, with the fact of having bodies in the modern sense. If how a body looks makes some individuals happy, it can also make others unhappy with their bodies, particularly when they feel that they fail to match the social norm. This can persuade some individuals to pretend things are not as they are or encourage them to pursue leisure pursuits which will give them a better 'look'. It can also lead some individuals to follow conventions which, while they complement some bodies, must be stretched over others; this can also lead to a situation where those (deviants) who contravene the social norm are over-identified with and through their bodily 'look' and deportment. In other words, and as Bourdieu would say, violence is exercised upon individuals in symbolic rather than in physical ways.

Symbolic violence is the non-physical, emotional violence which is exercised upon individuals with their complicit that plays a key role in underlining the socially reproductive nature of the status quo (Bourdieu, 1989). Individuals are represented as the reproducers of 'objective meaning' who do not, strictly speaking, know what they are doing that

what they do has more meaning that they know' (Bourdieu 1977: 79). Symbolic violence works to ensure the reproduction of class and gender *dispositions* and the *habituses* most advantageous for maintaining the order of things. In other words, symbolic violence is one of the tools which enables the activator class to impose a *cultural arbitrary* as an arbitrary power – it does this by making class and other inequalities seem both natural and necessary. In the event the most powerful groups in society maintain their positions in the social hierarchy not only with the aid of economic capital, but also the social and cultural capital embodied in their leisure lifestyles: a combination of earning power and superior taste. On top of that, the most vulnerable groups tend to be blamed for their own misfortune since it is presumed they lack that right social and cultural resources to determine their own lives, which in turn encourages the superior 'us' to determine what is appropriate for the inferior 'them' (Blackshaw and Long 2005).

Homo Bourdivinus: the arbitrary as necessity

In this regard Bourdieu's sociology remains firmly within the Marxist tradition of foregrounding 'structure' at the expense of 'agency'. This has led Jeffrey Alexander to argue that his 'theory of practice' is 'nothing other than a theory of the determination of practice' (1995: 140). This observation has led Richard Jenkins to argue that Bourdieu's sociology is reductionist, deterministic and tautologous since its overriding focus is on social stability rather than social change. 'Objective structures... are somehow given as 'cultural arbitraries', which the actions of embodied agents then reproduce' (1992: 82). Nowhere is this criticism more apparent than in Bourdieu's theory of *habitus* which he uses to attempt to transcend the 'structure' and 'agency' debate in sociology. As Peter Sloterdijk explains, in typical acerbic fashion:

> The *habitus*, then, is the somatized class consciousness. It clings to us like a dialect that never disappears, one that not even Henry Higgins would be able to drive out of Miss Doolittle. When Trimalchio, the freed slave who subsequently acquired wealth, tastelessly displays his wealth at his banquets, the members of the old elite recognize the typical slave in him. When Bourdieu, on the other hand, the grandson of a poor metayer and the son of a postman from Beam, rose to become a master thinker and dominate the 'field' of academic sociology in France, the thought of the ineradicable *habitus* of his class helped him to allay the suspicion that he had betrayed his origins through his career. From this perspective, the theory of *habitus* has the inestimable advantage of serving the moral reassurance of its author: even if I wanted to betray my own class, it would be impossible, because its absorption into my old Adam forms the basis of my social being (2013: 180–1).

What this suggests is that there is a paradox at the heart of Bourdieu's sociology: although it is extremely critical of social inequality, its subjects have no social role in it other than to perform this social inequality as they endure it as their life. As Swenson explains, for Rancière, this leads to 'a theory of the *necessary* misrecognition of social relations as the very mechanism of their reproduction' (2006: 642). This tautology is important for our purposes since it clearly identifies the limits of Bourdieu's sociology. Not only is social inequality built into the deep structure of his sociology, but it also performs the brilliant feat of making 'the poor' feel ennobled while confirming their exclusion from the world of choice (see for example Bourdieu's *Magnus Opus The Weight of the World* (Bourdieu *et al.* 1999)). My use of the term 'the poor' here is Rancière's which works with the assumption that the history of Western thought is one in which freedom and the right to think are premised on situating and excluding those whose social role is perceived other than to think. In applying the term in this way I am also using it as a shorthand to include all those social groups who are in one way or another subjugated and/or excluded.

It isn't that Bourdieu's respect for 'the poor' isn't genuine, it is simply the case that his insights are not convincingly constituted of the different situations in which social inequality occurs. To use our example of leisure once again, in a nutshell, the great sociologist of reflexivity thinks that the majority of 'the poor' do not have any time for leisure and he presumes that those who do are incapable of having any – well, any that doesn't incite the kind of disapproving, puritanical look made corporate by the Frankfurt School, whose ghost lives on in Bourdieu's sociology, grimly looking down and shaking its mocking head at those amongst 'the poor' 'aspiring to reranking [*reclassement*] through [their] feats in the great simile industry of the new petty bourgeoisie: the manufacture of junk jewelry or sale of symbolic services; the commerce of youth leaders, marriage counsellors, sex therapists, advertising executives, or dieticians determined to create within people the symbolic need necessary for the enlargement of their market, hence for the reconquest of their inheritance' (Rancière 2004: 192–193).

Here the working class thumps about in a new consumer world like a dinosaur that survived extinction, anachronistic proof of Bourdieu's sociology. He also imagines a sad working class flaunting their conspicuous consumption, their unconscious misappropriation of the symbols their betters. Here Bourdieu produces 'the poor' without distinction and without any agency.

The upshot is that 'the poor' is simply an abstraction. In Bourdieu's sociology, life practices are understood through their necessary misrecognition. In his obsession with imposing his own grand narrative, Bourdieu's ends up with a thesis of 'the working class' with neither the leisure to

think of itself in other ways (Rancière, 2004) nor alternative ways of thinking about social inequality other than those imposed on them by the theorist of *Distinction*. As Sloterdijk explains Bourdieu is thus unable to

> grasp the individualized forms of existential self-designs. Bourdieu's analysis necessarily remains within the typical, the prepersonal and the average, as if *Homo sociologicus* were to have the last word on all matters. In a certain sense, Bourdieu parodies the analysis of the 'they ' in Heidegger's Being and Time from an inverted perspective. While human *Dasein* is, for Heidegger, 'proximally and for the most part'...subject to the anonymity of the 'they ', and only attains authenticity through an act of decisiveness, the authenticity of existence for Bourdieu lies in the *habitus*, over which a more or less random superstructure of ambitions, competencies and attributes of distinction accumulates. This reversal of the 'they' analysis follows almost automatically from agreement with the political ontology of practical thought, which states that the base is more real than the things that are superstructurally added. This would mean that humans are most themselves where their shaping through the *habitus* pre-empts them – as if the most genuine part of us were our absorbed class. The part of us that is not ourselves is most ourselves. The *habitus* theory provides a clandestine hybrid of Heidegger and Lukacs by taking from the former the idea of a self-dispersed among the 'they ', and from the latter the concept of class consciousness. It builds the two figures together in such a way that the pre-conscious class 'in itself' within us becomes our true self. This corresponds to Bourdieu's division of the social space into diverse 'fields' – in which one naturally finds no ' persons', only *habitus* controlled agents who are compelled to realize their programmes within the spaces offered by the field (2013: 181–2).

What this suggests is that issues of critical self-reflection and authenticity for 'the poor' remain largely unaddressed in Bourdieu's work. What this also means is that his sociology is limited ontologically in the sense that it ignores that fact that *all* of us, notwithstanding our social background, are existentially individuals for whom being is itself also the performing of distinction.

Building on this critique, Rojek and Blackshaw (2013) argue that the bearing of 'generative principles' (Bourdieu 1977) that produce and reproduce the social practices underpinning choices in the contemporary societies are of a different order in the contemporary world than those suggested by Bourdieu. In other words, Rojek and Blackshaw call into question Bourdieu's tacit assumption that social structures are deeply incorporated into individuals' 'dispositions' in such a way we can anticipate what their leisure choices are going to be over time. As they point out, drawing on the work of Bauman,

> liquid modern consumers prefer to wear the more informal gear of *habitat* rather than the more regimental class uniform of *habitus*. Whereas *habitus* is uncompli-

cated in the sense that it is relatively fixed because it is pre-determined by social class location, the *habitat* is 'a space of chaos and chronic *indeterminacy*'... which is a schema of self-regulation subjected to competing and often contradictory meaning-conferring claims that nonetheless appear equally contingent. The ontological status of liquid moderns is for this reason not one of 'durably installed generative practices' (Bourdieu, 1977), but of under-determination, liquefaction and rootlessness (Rojek and Blackshaw 2013: 553).

The bourgeois media-sociology hybrid and its poor

In the course of their work, responsible journalists do many things, but the most difficult assignment in a under-determined liquid modern society is to explain social inequality in a language that does not resort to clichés of class – which as we have seen sociologists have not shown much interest in getting rid of. The trouble is – as I argued at the beginning of this article drawing on the example of the *Great British Class survey* – journalists in the bourgeois media resort to sociology because they assume that it is, to quote once Sartre again, 'in principle, independent of any sort of ideology'. One of the important cultural roles, perhaps the most important cultural roles performed by responsible journalists is to correct public conscience by revealing lies and telling sobering truths. But what happens when these journalists' attempts to correct the public conscience not only collude with ideology but are also 'out of joint' with the social reality in our contemporary moment? In the next part of this article it will be demonstrated that it is not only the dualism between the 'culture industry' and mass-circulated media that we need to be liberated from but also what I call the bourgeois media-sociology hybrid, a totally bastard art-form, whose homogeneity corresponds with the typical scene in sociology.

A description of bourgeois media-sociology hybrid in action can be found in the writings of two journalists: Lynsey Hanley, author of the books *Estates* (2007) and *Respectable* (2016) and a Guardian journalist, and Édouard Louis, author of the novel *The End of Eddy* (2017a), editor of the academic book *Pierre Bourdieu: L'insoumission en heritage* (2016), and occasional Guardian journalist, who are both devoted to revealing how social class continues to be socially produced and culturally defined, respectively in Britain and France. I have chosen to discuss Hanley's and Louis's journalism (rather than offer a discussion of the relationship between sociology and the *Great British Class Survey*) for a particular reason. Both are especially interesting writers not just because they ply their trade in the bourgeois media but also for the reason they were themselves once upon a time of 'the poor' (that is they are both self-identified 'working class' individuals whose claim to fame is that they have made the tran-

sition to the bourgeoisie), which means their social mobility can offer insights that get us even further than what we pick up from discussing the bourgeois media-sociology hybrid in a general way.

Social mobility from 'the working class' to the bourgeoisie through plying ones trade in bourgeois media is based on a tacit deal that comes with certain 'strings attached'. In order to overcome the possibility of any disruption in the *partage du sensible* (distribution of the sensible) the new bourgeoisie – who are strikingly different from the old bourgeoisie and, yet interrelated; who converse with the old bourgeoisie and, yet apparently have little in common – has to play its right and proper role in maintaining the status quo by raising themselves above the world from which they originated.

But what is the distribution of the sensible? This is a world with an almost transcendent order. It has a structure. It has uniform repetitiveness. It is ruled by a centre and a hierarchy. It is the lack of confusion – the clarity and orderliness of what fits where – that is most important in any distribution of the sensible. A sensible world is one of coherence, of particulars, of relations, of belonging, of specific place, all of which exist in microcosm of the broader whole. In this world things have their appointed places. One way of characterizing a sensible world is to subvert the existentialist slogan, 'existence precedes essence'. That is, 'essence precedes existence'. People are divided into social divisions. Place, belonging to place, wholeness of self, tacit understanding of the world and the certainty of its continuation are all part of the process of life. A distribution of the sensible is a world of belonging. People have their appointed places and these are inseparable from identities. Everything is interconnected. You can connect one thing to another because everything has its appointed place. In this distribution everything is 'sensibly' either altogether one thing or altogether another; any compromise, any hint of contagion, jeopardizes its ontological certainty.

When the occasion demands, the distribution of the sensible, as Rancière (2005) points out, resorts to 'police' power (*la police*), including the kind of sheer brute force that is inherent to all imperializing projects. This observation notwithstanding the concept as it used by Rancière refers not to the 'police force' as such (although it does involve formal authorization of the police force, judiciary, legal systems and prisons), but to the functional ordering of social reality that is responsible for the right and proper distribution of societal places and roles. The function of *la police* is to determine the field of *intelligibility* concerning the distribution of the sensible by maintaining the symbolic power of all things, which obey 'conventional' rules of discourse. Put simply, the assigned role of *la police* is both absolute and totalizing and its function is to make

sure that the order of things – what is visible, sayable, doable, imaginable, and crucially, by whom – remains unambiguous.

People might be divided but the distribution of the sensible is one where *everyone* sees, hears, feels and has the same understanding of the world, everything divisive melts away into an essence of equivalence – it is the affiliation of this essential inequality, each social group separate and different but in essence bound with everyone else to the same hierarchal conditions, which sustains the status quo. Such a world is bound up with an ontology of totality: the scene is set, the script is written and the facts of life are given. In this regard, the concept of the distribution of the sensible brings to light the socially constructed nature of identity, and especially the idea that appearance makes some social groups *disappear* – that they don't have a place in the univocal order of things. What this means is that identity is not self-determined, but shaped by a more radical foundation, which is the tacit knowledge that in all cases people *know* who they are and who they are not. What this means is that to be an individual, to be someone different is in all cases accompanied with Otherness (who you are not) as the radical guarantee of authenticity. This is what Rancière understands as the dialectic of the distribution of the sensible and what ultimately guarantees its power and authority.

In this kind of world everyone also knows their place. The social world is squared and ruled. The essential point is not simply the clarity of things. It is the similarity between the order of things and the people who inhabit the world. The sensible world is one where orientation has both a social and a moral dimension. Everybody cares about what is right and wrong. They also care about hierarchies. There is a difference between 'the working class' and 'the middle class', the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, but also between groups *within* classes. Everyone has a finely tuned sense of class. Your class identity means who you are, it gives a clear indication of what you are worth; it suggests something about you as an individual and your character, about your self-awareness and grasp on moral responsibility for your place in the order of things. It is assumed to be an absolutely reliable index for what the world needs to know about you and, crucially, what you should expect out of life. If you are from 'the working class' your social inferiority is already pre-determined. As a result, those above you are perpetually aware of your distance from people 'like them'.

What this tells us is that the elbow room that the new bourgeoisie are on the lookout for in this sensible world is more than just about social mobility – or even celebrity. What they crave once they have made it to the Promised Land is recognition in the bourgeoisie, a solid validation of a new found status. In this regard Hanley and Louis embody a specific archetype. It is a sort of 'hero's journey': the hero undertakes a quest to leave his or her appointed place and emerges in the distribution of the

sensible transformed *and* with mutual recognition from within its order of things. Of the many divisions in twenty-first century world – men versus women, insider versus outsider, gay versus straight, white versus black, left-wing versus right-wing, and so on – only one is immutable in the distribution of the sensible: the demarcation middle class versus working class, the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. To paraphrase an insight from Fredric Jameson's reading of Heidegger (cited in Banville 2016), these two aspiring journalists not only emerge from the 'scandalous rift' between 'the working class' and 'the middle class' – a radical distinction whose time would come, Marx and Engels thought, when there would be only two classes: the bourgeoisie and the proletariat – but indeed hold apart in tension the two sides of that 'scandalous rift', and thus open a space in which everyone is called upon to live *within* this tension and to affirm its reality.

In all her work Hanley provokes us to think again about the social inequality of our time, but always in a way that is related to maintaining the two sides of the 'scandalous rift':

> When Britain exposed its deep divisions in last year's [Brexit] referendum, it was tempting to view "leave" and "remain" voters as opposing factions in a culture war. Mail readers versus Guardian types; town dwellers versus city dwellers; pub-goers versus tapas-eaters. Tempting, yes, but too easy. Britain's cultural divide is an expression of another, more pernicious divide that has been growing for decades, that of social class (Hanley 2017).

In Louis's (2017b) grimly impoverished sensible world, culture emerges from and is only for the elite. In his vision, culture is constantly on tap, although it rejects the working classes, who in turn reject it, using rebellion and dissent to fuel their own subjugation, and that of ethnic minorities:

> Culture, the education system, books had all given us a feeling of rejection: in return, we rejected them. If culture paid us no attention, we would have our revenge. We despised it. It should never be said that the working classes reject culture, but rather that culture rejects the working classes, who reject it in turn. It should never be said that the working classes are violent, but rather that the working classes suffer from violence on a daily basis, and because of that they reproduce this violence by, for example, voting for the Front National. The domination comes first; those in positions of dominance are always responsible.

This sense of being trapped in the working class permeates Louis's account. Here the working classes are unable to break free from the generations of social and cultural baggage they are burdened with. In Bourdieu's language, they can't escape, but not just because they don't have

the right social and cultural capital. One of the main social tasks of *la police* is to ensure the reproduction of class *dispositions* and the *habituses most* advantageous for maintaining the order of things. In other words, symbolic violence is one of the tools which enables *la police* to impose a *cultural arbitrary* as an arbitrary power – it does this by making class inequalities seem both natural and necessary. What Rancière's thesis suggests is that without ostensibly denying anyone an iota of agency, the distribution of the sensible operates as a *totality*, in which everyone and every institution, exists in some relation to every other – the distribution of the sensible is both a sharing and division of the world – and people behave according to the limits and choices they find set before them, more than according to whether they deviate from the norm in Foucault's (1977) sense.

Yet Louis's account offers very little that is concrete or geared to representing the social and cultural conditions under scrutiny. His interpretation fails because it never interprets. It simply accepts a stereotypical characterization of 'the working class'. What it does instead is lock 'the working class' into a singular, self-contained *world*. In so doing, what it fails to recognize is that 'the poor', in common with most other men and women in twenty first century societies, actually inhabit pluralized *worlds* where there are different possibilities. In the twenty-first century, *everyone* wears many hats and inhabits many worlds. It is the bourgeois media-sociology hybrid that wishes to lock them into a single, disadvantaged world. Its victims are subordinate, both in a symbolic sense (demonized and turned into monsters) and in a material sense (lacking the means of self-determination). The bourgeois media-sociology hybrid's response to the result of the Brexit referendum is a crowning example of such an eventuality. About Brexit, it concluded from on high that in voting to leave Europe in their droves, the traditional (white) working class were not only racist but also idiotic in acting contrary to their best interests.

Hanley goes further, however. She develops what might be referred to as her own 'pet story', a story that provides a unifying emotional logic to a set of beliefs about 'the working class' upheld by the bourgeois media-sociology hybrid. The story that Hanley creates for her audience is a parable that has its roots in Richard's Hoggart's (1992) classic study *Uses of Literacy*. It begins with an image of an organic working-class culture, whose 'public values and private practices are tightly intertwined', and which bears all the hallmarks of a folk society that is free of the spoils of manufacture, starts to give way to a new mass popular culture, which displays all the 'shiny barbarism' of a 'candy floss world', when era had come to an end, the era when – at the risk of being tautologous – world and being-in-the world were of

two kinds: the moment when a way of life was altered and diminished permanently. This still looks like a cosy, contented world but if you scratch beneath the surface there are all the signs that we associate with poverty: insecurity, uncertainty, anxiety, apathy, fatalism. But an even greater indignity pervades in the form of consumerism, which not only robs the working classes of their literacy but also their jobs. Meanwhile they start to find themselves reviled for their lack of social and cultural capital (read: 'chavs', 'bogans', and so on) but more so for their lack of aspiration for the leaving the world their forebears were once taught to honour from birth.

In this 'pet story' the closing up of distance between the bourgeois media-sociology hybrid brought about by the social inclusion of these new bourgeois journalists and the world they are describing implies that 'working class' life is no longer just another story told from above. This way of telling we are informed provides a challenge to stereotypical imagery and it is supposed change perceptions. Nothing could be further from the truth. The overall effect is so full of its own virtuousness that it gives the impression of showing little regard for those about whom it talks, and the arch structuring the analysis – with its inability to grasp the existential contingency of the individual lives at stake in the commentary – renders it critically inert. To paraphrase some insights from Jean-Paul Sartre (1947: 121 and 125):

> Eager to make a name for themselves in the bourgeois media journalists such as Hanley and Louis set themselves up as being, in principle, independent of any sort of ideology. As a result, they retain their abstract aspect of pure negativity. They do not understand that what they write is itself ideology; it wears itself out asserting its autonomy, which no one contests. This amounts to saying that it has no privileged subject and can treat any matter whatever. There is no doubt about the fact that one might write felicitously about the condition of the working class; but the choice of this subject depends upon individual circumstances, upon a free decision of the artist.

Having found out that much, Sartre warns, but 'the solitude of the artist [is] doubly a fake: it cover[s] up not only a real relationship with the great public but also the restoration of an audience of specialists' (*Ibid*: 125). This is because the ultimate goal of such artistic effort is not really to abolish social class inequality, but to maintain it, coupled with the induced desire to maintain the 'scandalous rift' between 'the working class' and 'the middle class', the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. Having made her own lonely journey from the one class to the other, Hanley not only 'feels a mixture of gratitude and elation to have had the chance to do so … I somehow got to the other side, to the place where life is easier,

in one piece' (cited in Steedman 2016), but also a responsibility to uphold the 'scandalous rift'.

This observation leads to a further troubling aspect of the bourgeois media-sociology hybrid. This is the argument that despite their claims to the contrary, new bourgeois journalists such as Hanley and Louis do a double disservice to 'the poor', by not only being resolutely determined to 'give voice' to the conditions of their subjugation, but also by judging 'them' as oppressed creatures, who have not a cat in hell's chance of making it 'to the other side'. As Rancière (2004) would say, in the sensible world produced by the bourgeois media-sociology, there are no 'thieves', only 'the possessors and the disposed'. One of the consequences of this is that in trying to understand social inequality, the world of 'the poor' is always bound to remain partial to say the least, and if the bourgeois media-sociology hybrid is one that is successful in giving voice, the only voices really heard are those of the new bourgeoisie journalists. As that most discerning critic of this fixation with turning subjectivity into objectivity and converting people from subjects into objects of investigation, Jacques Derrida once put it, 'One cannot say: 'Here are our monsters'', without immediately turning the monsters into pets' (1990: 80).

What is perhaps most problematic with the bourgeois media-sociology hybrid, then, is that it ends up overstating the significance of the relationship between difference and subjugation. This constitutes the limit of a particular sort of thinking, for which true freedom is only that of the interpreter, and which is conceivable and functions as the exact opposite of the ostensible powerlessness of those who are subjugated. As Rancière would say, here thinking ends up as the very thought of inequality because by posing social inequality as the primary fact that needs to be explained it ends up explaining its necessity.

What the bourgeois media-sociology hybrid also does in this regard is deny the interpretive role of thinking sociologically since its conception of reflexivity (in common with Bourdieu's), foregrounds social inequality at the expense of understanding worlds through the self-understandings of social agents. In fact, the bourgeois media-sociology hybrid and Bourdieu's sociology are mirror images of each other. The awareness of what is lost, overlooked, and distorted in the process of transforming people's everyday worlds into good copy; and what it shares in common with Bourdieu's sociology, is the inability to escape the tendency to impose its own narrative order on all kinds of untidiness – worst of all, the necessities of class theory above the identification with and compassion for those whose worlds it claims to be explaining – while failing miserably to reflect on the process by which that order has been achieved.

Rethinking social inequality

The argument developed in this article suggests that, in sociology and in the bourgeois media-sociology hybrid, 'the poor' (read: 'the working class') have to stay in their place: on the one hand, they have no time to go anywhere else because work won't wait for them, which is an empirical fact; and on the other, their immovability rests on the belief that 'God mixed iron in their makeup while he mixed gold in the makeup of those who are destined to deal with the common good' (Rancière 2009: 276). This second reason is not an empirical fact, but it provides the alchemical myth ('the story of the deity who mixes gold, silver, or iron in the souls') that underpins the distribution of the sensible and which sustains the idea that 'the poor' – Hanley's Sun-reading nan and granddad and Mirror-reading mum and dad who live on the Chelmsley Wood Estate she was brought up on and feature in *Estates* and *Respectable* come to mind – have to remain in their assigned places. In other words, in order for sociology to function it has to rest on the idea that the social divisions and the inequalities emanating from these are performed by those who endure them 'as their life, as what they feel, and what they are aware of' (*Ibid*). To use one of Rancière's analogies, the identity of someone from 'the 'must fit like a handmade pair of shoes, but the type of shoe is never in question.

Obviously, Rancière doesn't think that 'the poor' actually believe that God mixed iron in their souls and gold in the souls of those higher in the system of social stratification, but it is enough that they *sense* it and as a result feel obliged, responsible and actively committed to this idea *as if* it were true. In other words, for Rancière, social divisions are not only a reflection of actually existing conditions of existence, but also the extent to which sociologists believe that they are natural and inevitable. In Rancière's scheme of things 'myth' and 'reality' and 'activity' and 'passivity' are not opposed; just as a 'reality' always goes along with 'myth', so 'activity' always goes along with 'passivity'. In other words, for Rancière, sociologists give their *own* meaning to the world through the patterns of hierarchy and order which appear in their theories and which they help to create and sustain. Indeed, 'the poor' not only have a fixed past but do not have a future as their destiny has been foretold. They have come into existence only with the functionalist epistemic we see them in. The world of 'the poor' is a self-enclosed universe devoid of any human mysteriousness. To have a fixed past and a destiny foretold means only suspension, not perception – the objectionable erasure of democratic narrative, or any formal structure that would help normalize the milieu which constitute hitherto unexplained lives. In the event, sociology only 'helps its users in the academic world and the open intellectual market alike to

maintain the pretense of critique by providing them with a means of reducing the manifold vertical differentiations of 'society' to the simple matrix of the privileges of power – be they... capital owners, material or symbolic' (Sloterdijk 2013: 181).

Rancière (2009) argues that what sociologists need to grasp is that actually existing reality and the ability to transform it lies not in their theories but in the collective passion of individuals. What he also argues is that when the status quo of actually existing reality is challenged, 'a break of epistemology as the qualifying perceptual criterion for political participation' (Panagia 2010: 98) takes place, which leads to a demand for a share, a place, a *part des san-part*, in the social order by those who do not have one. To this extent, Rancière understands politics as a form of disruption of the established order of things by those who challenge their own invisibility, silence and unimportance within that order. Here Rancière is not talking about the empowerment of a group that already has a subordinated part or a place. Rather, that 'politics is the emergence of a claim to enfranchisement by a group that has been so radically excluded that its inclusion demands the transformation of the rules of inclusion' (Martin 2005: 39). What this suggests is that people acting politically not only demand to be included in the world in ways that have previously not been open to them, but that they are also intent on a total transformation of the ways in which they are *seen* in this new 'part' or role – that is, they are after a radical transformation of experience. In other words, in order for them to be included, the world has to be transformed to accommodate them in different ways than it has done previously, and in order for the world to be transformed, people acting politically need to conjure a different world.

The essential point I want to make here can be made by briefly discussing some of the findings from my study of the 'Inbetweeners', the intermediary generation that provide the focus of a life history interpretation of working-class life in northern England in the period after the Second World War (Blackshaw 2013). Amongst other things, this study explores the extent to which a generation of working-people found through their leisure interests and activities the means to transform a world in which they had hitherto been predisposed to remain invisible. As this study shows, through the life course this generation would re-discover life as unintended and contingent and they would as a result set about re-making new worlds in their own image, and discovering also, by extension, that leisure is often pivotal to these reconstructions.

What the evidence emerging from my study suggests is that when the balance of work and leisure tilts over from the former to the latter, as it did for many working-people in England in the post-war period, the distribution of iron and gold is disturbed. Indeed, by stealing 'a certain

sort of gold, a sort of gold which is at once more and less precious than the gold which is supposed to be mixed in the soul of the rulers' (Rancière 2009: 278), the Inbetweeners were at the vanguard of the dawn of a new order of things in which leisure moved steadily into its position as the principal driving force underpinning the human goal of satisfying its hunger for meaning and its thirst for giving life a purpose (Blackshaw 2010). In other words, what the findings of this study demonstrate is that leisure was key to understanding the interruption of a tacitly accepted order of things by working-people who had hitherto been invisible in it. The result was, as the evidence of the study demonstrates, in the post-war period, that leisure as a certain kind of gold, instead of being out of the reach of most working-people, began to take up a more central and radical place in their lives.

Conclusions

Amongst all the issues that emanate from the cognitive dissonance found in sociology discussed in this article, the following stand out. First and foremost, the prevailing discourse underpinning sociologically informed interpretations of class is premised upon situating 'the poor' in a singular, self-contained world. This social group figure in this world at the periphery, sometimes out of focus or only by omission. That is, sociology is weak on understanding 'the poor' and what 'they' might choose do with their individual agency. Sociology is alert to recognizing that social inequality is relational and has multiple dimensions, but it does this at the expense of understanding that everyone today – notwithstanding whether they are 'the poor' or not – inhabit pluralized *worlds* where there are different possibilities.

The crucial move is to identify as 'the working class' what turns out to be only some of 'the working class' – 'the working class' Hanley encountered growing up in a council house just outside Birmingham and Louis in his small village in the north of France. It has been demonstrated that class is a dangerous concept, which can turn in an instant from being an asset to a liability for those people on whom it is bestowed. We saw the bourgeois media-sociology hybrid equipping 'the poor' with an excess of the most unattractive, but also most necessary features of 'people like them' – features that while purporting to 'give them voice' actually turn them into monsters (Louis), or even worse still, pets (Hanley).

It is important to qualify something at this point. I am not suggesting for a moment that social inequality is by now unimportant to sociology. That is not my argument. Of course social inequality continues to have a massive bearing on people's lives and the opportunities afforded to some groups are clearer very different to others. This is exactly the

sort of situation Miriam Pawel identifies in her study which reports the plight of farmworkers living in the canyons of Carlsbad north of San Diego in California who have to 'burrow into the hills each year, covering their [plastic] shacks with leaves and branches to stay out of view of multimillion-dollar homes' (cited in Noah 2015: 33). These farmworkers have to live without running water, toilets, refrigeration, yet they live within hearing distance of the fireworks and music from nearby LEGOLAND that regularly perforate the night skies. Here the juxtaposition of two kinds of existence – the rich at leisure and the poor having to eke out a subsistence existence – couldn't be starker.

The respective divisions between what kinds of leisure are available to the rich and the poor are indeed often very different. But what we need to recognize is that what human agency does not respect is the divisions placed on 'the poor' by sociology. My argument is that sociology too readily accepts the shapes that capitalism, patriarchy, racism and convention have forced our lives. To understand the implications of social inequality we have to look at the present day context in which it takes place. Being 'poor' today is radically different to being 'poor' in the past in the sense that it is experienced in a world in which contingency takes the place of necessity. One of the upshots of this is that old forms (read: social classes) that used to explain social inequality no longer provide accurate insights of our experiences – there is too much of a slippage between word and world. The truth is that today, notwithstanding our social origins, we *expect* more from life than our forebears did. We get frustrated or feel let down when our expectations rub up against much the same, but the difference in the twenty-first century is that we don't succumb. Instead we stand-up and fight in order to try to shape our lives on our own terms. That TINA dictum, 'There Is No Alternative', is confronted daily by myriad tiny, irrepressible grenades that explode deep inside countless imaginations. Some of us are better placed, and for that reason more successful than others in overcoming the obstacles that capitalism, consumerism, patriarchy, racism and convention have forced into our lives, but whatever cards we have been dealt we ensure that our destiny takes shape in a way that accords with our own sense of things. In this way we are able to find some agreement between what life throws at us and our own expectations.

Mainstream British sociology as to date failed to recognize any of this. Subsequently there is now an unacceptable gap between sociological accounts and quotidian experience of social inequality. This gap has arisen as a result of sociology's anxious reluctance to let go of the 'zombie categories'– zombies frighten us by being both dead and alive – associated with social class, which have a strange ghost-like presence sociological discourse, which still uses them as if they represent something, includ-

ing power; and to some extent they do still represent power. But the social networks and patronage, the paddings of privilege and the stereotypes leftover from modernity in its 'solid' phase do not carry the same power that they once did – even if sociology carries on 'business as usual'.

So how to refresh sociology in a way that thinks outside social class?

The disorderly continuity of modern life is infinitely less predictable and more strangely ambiguous than any sociological theory would suggest. Sociologists must face up to the fact that each and every one of them is standing in a moral quagmire as they try to illuminate the lived life through their work. As such, to paraphrase Sloterdijk, we must recognize that as sociologists we must be prepared to be challenged where our own tacit assumptions are interrogated. When there is no solid ground under the sociological enterprise, no basis for moral certainty, the truth is that the only other way the authority of any work can be enhanced is through the acknowledgment of its predispositions.

The effects of social inequality, we can agree, continue. In this regard we have learned from Giddens (1984), the two-way process by which everyday experience is turned into sociology and sociology is turned into everyday experience should always be promoted by sociologists as a democratic activity. Any sociologist intent on revealing the effects of social inequality must try to ensure that they are showing us *both* of these things. There is no one theory or 'rule of method' in this regard; the genuinely reflexive sociologist will write these the way that they must write them. In the most compelling accounts the writing will be clear and the ideas will be based on things *seen* by the sociologist and *spoken about* by their research respondents rather than on what they think as a professional sociologist and is excited to think they now understand it all.

Sociologists have a responsibility to complicate their interpretations by questioning what it is possible for them as researchers, or anyone else for that matter, including bourgeois journalists, to finally 'know' about other people. It is all too easy to feel and to theorize people less fortunate than yourself as part of a mass – or any other kind of social grouping vulnerable to political manipulation. It is also all too easy to disapprove of what that mass do in *their* free time. But that kind of feeling and theorizing is as foolish as the disapproving is reprehensible. To put some additional gloss on James's (2009: 9) perceptive observations, the mass are *us*: a multitude of individuals. They just happen to be leading less fortunate lives. Any sociologist or journalist who speaks about social justice from their privileged position will not be able to do so in any compelling ways unless they can dispel with class ideology. In order to do this, they will not only have to replace this attitude with compassion – as Paul Taylor (2009) observed, identifying with those less privileged than yourself is not enough, you need to really feel their plight: 'to identify is merely to

love one's neighbour as oneself; to empathise is to love one's neighbour for himself or herself' – but just as importantly recognize that their own fortune begins with their own freedom.

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