

## **New Wine in Old Bottles or Old Wine in New Bottles?**

### **Abstract**

The present paper offers a critical analysis of what its authors call a new approach to social class. The analytical framework concerned is based on a large BBC-sponsored Internet survey and co-authored by a team of researchers led by Mike Savage. In theoretical terms, the most relevant observation to be made regarding the approach under examination is its total dependence upon Pierre Bourdieu's concepts and ideas. This concerns first of all his theory of multiple 'capitals', two of which, e.e. social and cultural have been singled out by the exponents of the framework analysed in the paper as the building blocks of their own class theory. In other publications of the present author it has been shown that the purported Bourdesian 'capitals' are not any capitals at all, that they constitute misnomers, or even oxymorons. The consequences of this theoretical misunderstanding, to say the least, are as devastating in the case of Savage et al. as in the case of French thinker. The typology of social classes built upon such shaky grounds is found wanting in many respects; inter alia, such concepts as the middle class and the precariat are being criticised in more detail. Overall, the authors' shameless self-advertising campaign, their analytic framework contains scarcely any new insights or ideas and mirrors other people's errors and failings instead.

**Key words:** Bourdieu, social class, middle classes, precariat, working class, ownership, labour power.

### **Introduction – the battleground**

To make sense of the title given to the present paper, one should know some salient trends in the contemporary class analysis, notably in the British context. Now, for some time one particular analytic framework has, for all intents and purposes, monopolised the field of class analysis, not only in the UK, where its principal creator is based, but internationally. While in the Marxist, neo- and post-Marxist circles the approach by Erik Olin Wright enjoys a degree of currency, barring those milieus, the so-called EGP class schema constitutes the approach of choice in especially empirical research.

Monopoly or near-monopoly, for that matter, always stimulates those who wish to challenge the dominant framework and offer their own, purportedly superior alternative approach. As will be seen, both aims: critical toward the most widespread class taxonomy, and constructive: in the form of outlining a novel class framework figured prominently in the motivation of a bunch of British social scientists who set out to process the results of the great BBC's class survey. Regardless of any objections to the end result of their efforts, one should acknowledge that the underlying internet survey has attracted a record number of participants and thereby contributed to the renewal of interest in class theory. However, at the very outset one must also ask whether the strategy taken by Savage et al. (2013) – consisting in kind of jumping from the frying pan into the fire, as from the perspective of the present author it is in such a way that a substitution of Bourdieu's framework for that of John Goldthorpe and his associates' could be appraised. Below the reader will have an opportunity to see for herself whether in fact an ambitious attempt by Bourdieu's epigones has ended up in a failure.

What on the surface may seem to be a harsh judgment, upon scrutiny will be perhaps seen in a new light. Indeed, it is fair to say that it would be rather hard to find another research that would so singularly squander extent the unprecedented opportunities offered to it in the form of public resources and promotion.

The starting point for a group of British social scientists was – rather modest for our taste –critique of the dominant official, so to speak class scheme by Goldthorpe et al. The bulk of material for their study was going to be provided by – as they boast – the largest survey of its kind ever conducted in Britain, the BBC's 2011 Great British Class Survey, with 161400 web respondents. From a sociological viewpoint, this immediately raises the question of representativeness, which, however, does in no way detract from the wellbeing of the study's authors, as they do not shy away from registering how good they are feeling about themselves in the form of an importunate eulogy of themselves to the effect that their findings "will attract enormous interest from a wide social scientific community in offering an up-to-date multi-dimensional model of social class" (Savage et al. 2013: 220).

Well, hubris can be quite risky, as the voice not unrepresentative of that community shows, whose bearer is clearly repelled by rather than attracted to the allegedly path-breaking model: "It is so theoretically and methodologically flawed that it can contribute little of value to our understanding of the structure of systematic social inequality in the UK" (Mills 2013).

Apparently, what the aforementioned critics means does not include what constitutes the pivotal criticism that could be levied against Savage et al.' study – from our perspective, it

is imperative to call into question their fundamental premise and at the same time rationale. For Savage et al.' a negative frame of reference is constituted by the EGP schema, as a consequence of which their investigation remains highly dependent upon that alternative framework. Thus, Savage et al. argue that their own framework is wider than that of the EGP schema, especially with regard to cultural and social factors that are left out by the latter, as opposed to former. This speaks to a recent British major debate, our own position being that the kind of arguments named above are flawed; one does have to define one's units of class analysis first, which requires a theoretically grounded conceptual apparatus. John Goldthorpe and his associates employ to that end occupational and employment criteria, but this is by any means the only possible approach, as might be surmised on the basis of Savage et al.'s exposition. In a word, whilst Goldthorpe and his collaborators' approach is not immune to criticism, their basic perspective calling for definite economic relations by which to delineate class boundaries and only then proceed to an investigation of those non-economic phenomena, which enables the researcher, inter alia, to grasp how the latter are dependent on or conditioned by the class-relevant economic relations is sound. But, as suggested, there are also a number of alternative views on how to conceptualise given economic relations, including our own framework that focuses on economic property relations. As noted elsewhere, (Tittenbrun 2011b) from such a perspective one can investigate the relationship between the economic or class in this elementary, primal sense and any other factors that one wishes to capture, including class consciousness, cultural and political participation and so on. To pre-empt one particular kind of the criticisms that might be levied against the said perspective, this approach has nothing in common with any reductionism – an examination of what relations there are between the underlying class/property relations and all the non-economic phenomena that one happens to explore does not obligate one to negate whatever degree of autonomy given extra-economic processes or structures might enjoy. To us, this constitutes an elementary knowledge, but the fact is that again and again some major misconceptions and misunderstandings in that area cloud what seems a fairly straightforward picture.

## **Survey methodology and its perils**

To turn to the aforementioned specific shortcomings present in the framework of the study under consideration, it is incomprehensible. Given that all nine (sic!) authors are professional sociologists, why they had to wait till the completion of the survey to find out

that "the GBCS web survey suffered from a strong selection bias, with respondents being predominantly drawn from the well-educated social groups", as though this self-selection effect could not be foreseen. Somehow, only then it was decided to conduct a supplementary national survey (using quota sampling), with 1026 respondents, which is for sure a tiny percentage of the number of those who had bothered to answer the web questionnaire. And contrary to the authors' opinion, the statistical technique that was supposed to address this disproportionality is ill-suited to do the job, at least in their version; according to a peer review, "the model of latent classes resulting from the analysis is not coherent, with groupings that might be better distinguished as class fractions" (Bradley 2014).

Another member of the sociological community was even less impressed, as evidenced by the title of his appraisal "The Great Fiasco": "a theory free (though Bourdieu inspired) data dredging exercise. What they derive is an arbitrary typology determined by a contingent fact – the size of their sample" (Mills 2013). The critic rightly points out that whereas "with a probability sample there is a coherent procedure for making sample to population inferences, including, most importantly, inferences about uncertainty: with a quota sample there is none, unless one is prepared to assert that the 'correct' data generating model has been identified" (Mills 2013).

As a result "Savage et al. have a mountain of highly self-selected poor quality data sitting on top of a molehill of (slightly) better quality data. Ultimately they want to use the latter to make a sensible calibration of the former, but they have to do this without any basis for assessing the uncertainty surrounding the numbers they estimate" (Mills 2013).

And one do not have to be a rocket scientist to see that this is far from being inconsequential; "to take just one example of the difficulties this creates, much fuss is made about the discovery of a social class category they call the »elite«. They tell us that this is about 6 per cent of the population. If the data were from a simple random sample a rough 95% confidence interval would be  $\pm 1.5$  per cent. But that is foolishly optimistic and takes no account of any other source of variance inflating error. One could easily double this number. So the »elite« could, on the basis of these data, be 3 per cent of the population, but it could also be 9 per cent of the population. Nine per cent is so large that Savage et al. might want to think again about the appropriation of the »elite« label. They have no basis, other than wishful thinking, for favoring either number (or anything in between)".

As might be expected, this is not the end of Savage and Co.'s methodological trials and tribulations:

"The seven social classes that Savage et al. find fall out of a so-called latent profile model estimated on the GfK (the name of the survey firm involved) quota sample plus one case consisting of the 161,400 responses to the GBCS each given a weight of 1/161400. This means that the parameter estimates that determine how respondents are allocated to social classes are derived almost entirely from the quota sample. The GBCS respondents are then allocated to the latent class categories on the basis of the model. There will be a considerable amount of uncertainty in doing so because the parameters of the latent profile model will not be well determined" (Mills 2013).

More specifically, the reader of Savage et al. is kept almost completely in the dark as far as the process of discovery of their seven social classes is concerned. While they state that the Bayesian Information Coefficient is minimized when seven latent classes are assumed, we are not told what difference does it make-how much worse things are when, say, six or eight latent classes are assumed, "or the extent to which these solutions resemble the seven class solution. We are given no sense whatsoever of model uncertainty. In fact there is a dark secret" (Mills 2013). It follows that the selection of the aforementioned seven classes is simply a function of what is from this point of view accidental, i.e. the sample size of the GfK survey "and without well-articulated theoretical grounds for distinguishing the classes it could not be otherwise" (Mills 2013). The corollary is an inseparable aspect of stratification schemes, i.e. arbitrariness; "it is just as well that Savage et al. discard the GBCS data. If they had estimated their latent profile model with 161,400 cases they would conclude that there were rather more than seven classes. The number of classes is a consequence of a decision about how much data to collect" (Mills 2013).

The polemist being cited anticipates the possible response of those being criticized and confutes their invocation of induction as a purported vindication of the details of their methodology reported above:

"Savage et al. will no doubt claim that they are pursuing an open-minded inductive strategy but this simply won't do. A sensible model selection strategy must be based not only on formal statistical criteria but also on whether the model makes sense in terms of the configuration of variables that go into it; but it is just too facile to pass off unconstrained post-hoc interpretations as though they are facts of nature. This is particularly true when one allows oneself, as Savage et al. do, to go on a fishing expedition that encompasses variables external to the latent profile model itself. It is permissible to use external variables to validate a typology once you have made it, but peeking at them while making decisions about whether there are six, seven, eight or 77 latent classes is having your cake and eating it" (Mills 2013).

One could put forward an even stronger case for an approach alternative to such a pure inductivism in defining class and delineating the boundaries of classes. This is necessarily so, because class analysis is "the empirical investigation of the consequences and corollaries of the existence of a class structure defined *ex-ante*". By starting from a particular definition, sociologists can assess the extent to which such things as inequality in life chances among individuals and families are structured on the basis of class. This approach stands in contrast to one that discovers a class structure from the empirical distribution of inequality in society (Sorensen 2000 labels this the "nominal classifications" approach). In class analysis the theoretical underpinnings of the version of class that is being used have to be made clear at the outset, and the concept of class has to be operationalized so as to allow claims about class to be tested empirically. If we examine the two main varieties of contemporary class analysis - namely Marxist class analysis [...] and the neo-Weberian class analysis – we find that these two tasks are central to both" (Breen 2005: 14).

But even granting the researchers the benefit of the doubt does little to relieve their predicament – for even assuming – counter-factually that "the model is capable of allocating individuals in the GBCS data to the right classes, it does not allow the relationship between the class categories and any variable in the GBCS external to the latent profile model to be estimated without bias" (Mills 2013). This is significant, since it is precisely what Savage et al. set out to do; for instance, when they tabulate data on occupations conditional on class membership, or when they map the density of class membership by geographical region. The thing is, "calibration of the GBCS by the GfK only works for variables that have been observed in both surveys but it cannot make an appropriate adjustment for selection into the GBCS on the basis of unobservables" (Mills 2013).

The problem is that the aforementioned selection bias has far-reaching consequences. Even if "we correctly assign a GBCS respondent on the basis of the GfK to be a member of the »traditional working class«, they would, on average, have a »curiosity« score (i.e. a propensity to contribute to the web survey) that 'was higher than the average in their class and [...] they would also have a higher than average propensity to be a graduate than a non-graduate. The magnitude of the bias induced by selection into the GBCS on the basis of unobservables is unknown and, I believe, not estimable from these data. It would, however, be heroic to assume it didn't exist and doubly heroic to assume that it wasn't compounded by a similar selection bias affecting inclusion in the GfK quota sample" (Mills 2013).

Given the weight of the aforementioned criticisms, the reader could be forgiven for believing that they pretty much exhaust the matter. Unfortunately, this is not the case; even

on the methodological front one could additionally make clear what follows from the preceding argument: "it is highly likely that any comparison between Savage et al.'s class categories with respect to variables contained in the GBCS but not used to derive the class categories – such as educational attainment, type of university attended, geographical location and so forth – will be biased to a degree that may be substantively significant" (Mills 2013).

To pick up on that remark, the methodological objections – important as they are – pale into insignificance in comparison with a range of even more crucial flaws to the approach concerned.

## **Intellectual inspirations**

Its authors display an amazing lack of self-knowledge; two leading scholars in that team suggest they were influenced by Bourdieu, Marx, Weber, Giddens and several other – lesser or greater – social-science giants, as well as by what they – rather vaguely – call dis-identification, whose particular merit is that it is supposed to bring out the 'relationality' of class (Savage et al. 2013).

Obviously, there can be no denying that the authors of the study concerned owe a lot to Bourdieu, but one could be forgiven by being perplexed by the presence of the remaining names on the list, notably those of Marx and Weber. This is the case because, as argued above, they both may be regarded as the founding fathers of socio-economic class theory. Meanwhile, this is a far cry from the approach of Savage et al., which is by any means relational but, conversely, gradational. In other words, instead of the classics' complex structure of classes and their relationships we are presented with a rather simple, three-dimensional scale, which obviously is the hallmark of social stratification rather than class, which, parenthetically, the sociologists concerned seem to be aware of, as the phrase "the lower levels of the class structure suggests.

It should be emphasized that the point is not simply that the sociologists concerned do not follow in Marx and/or Weber's footsteps. The gist of the matter is, rather, that by abandoning the relational and economically grounded perspective Savage et al., as their report amply documents, lost any chance whatsoever of working out a theory that would capture the relationships between the economic and non-economic dimensions of social life,<sup>1</sup> which was precisely their goal, according to their own testimony. Although we do not share

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<sup>1</sup> An outline of a theory of interdependencies between the economic and extra-economic structures can be found in (Tittenbrun 2011a; 2011b).

the following critic of Savage et al.'s admiration for *postmodern perspectives in sociology*, this does not prevent us from appreciating her apposite comment targeting the study under consideration: "A major insight of the postmodern moment in sociology was that forms of social differentiation are marked by »othering«. My social identities (gender, class, ethnicity, etc.) are defined against those who are other/not-me. In a gradational account of class this process is lacking, or indeed concealed, although it is devastatingly revealed in [...] the habits of upper-middle-class private-school students sneering at working-class or state school students as »peasants« or »chavs«" (Bradley 2014). More broadly, "Savage et al. " underplay the importance of the various forms of economic capital which still lie at the center of class configurations. [...] Thus their empirical schema appears confused" (Bradley 2014).

And indeed, this charge (including the relevance of the concept of economic, that is, the only capital that exists) seems go to the heart of Savage et al.'s approach that is incapable of conceptualising the economic in an objective fashion and, by extension, of capturing the real interconnections between the aspects of social life to which their, or rather Bourdesian "capitals" vaguely refer.

The underlying reason of the above incapacity is, sure enough, their stratificatory approach whereby Class is reduced to "a scale, on which individuals are placed in terms of their possession of more or fewer elements of capital. The relation between the classes then is gradational, and the cut-off points between the classes concomitantly arbitrary, as Bradley (2014) notes, by the same token endorsing our earlier diagnosis. Interestingly enough, this is at least indirectly acknowledged also by the culprits themselves, who declare that they "are using their various indicators to differentiate 'parsimoniously' statistical clusters of people and thence locate the main class boundaries" (Savage et al. 2013: 229).

To be sure, the aforementioned lack of epistemological self-knowledge prevents Savage et al. from adopting the terminology best suited for the hierarchic framework, i.e. that of social strata, which leads to the predictable result, e.g. a heterogeneous patchwork rather than a coherent analytic framework.

With the difference in relation to stratification perspectives lying in the nomenclature only, Savage et al. group people into clusters on the basis of the possession of different forms and degrees of three types of capital: economic, cultural and social, which is, of course, the "unholy trinity" originated with Bourdieu; though they number as many as nine full-time researchers, they have been not able to enrich the Bourdesian scheme by even one slot.

While it is safe to say that Savage et al. would not agree, pointing to many-to their mind-ways in which their scheme is innovative, this claim can be refuted by indicating that



modifications, if any, concern merely the content of particular categories, not to say otherwise that they are for worse rather than for better. The so-called economic capital refers simply to income and wealth-both being standard stratification determinants. Savage et al. stress the purported advantage of their research over other approaches: "The questions on economic capital asked not only about household income, but also savings and the value of owner-occupied housing, so allowing unusually detailed measures of economic capital".

The authors, as well as perhaps the reader, should be disabused-one cannot automatically equate each and every income and/or wealth item with capital. A complete list of criteria by which to differentiate between real, and merely formal ownership of capital is presented elsewhere (Tittenbrun 2011b), so for the sake of parsimony we will refer at this point to just one condition – if and when a given pool of savings, be they a bank account or a bundle of securities, is for a given individual a more important source of livelihood than her wage or salary, then it may be said to constitute the real – as opposed to formal-economic ownership.

It is no brainer that the authors of the study concerned do not draw any such comparisons, being moreover complacent about the quality of their data; meanwhile, it is widely known that questions about wealth or income pose special difficulties in sociological surveys, which is totally ignored by Savage et al., who would make us believe that their data – contrary to what is (almost, as Savage et al. at least are excluded from this overwhelming majority) universally known – are credible.

Add to the usual list of misgivings concerning social surveys' reliability some technical complaints-for instance, expecting respondents to provide an accurate estimate of the value of their pension is "a stretch too far" (Mills 2013).

This being said, it is impressive that Savage et al. succeed in a veritable coup, conceptualising – as they do – the two remaining forms of "capital" in an even more problematic manner.

Thus, their report makes one believe that there is something to be said for an otherwise strange decision of the French theorist about putting the form of capital, made famous mostly by others, on the back burner.

Savage et al. define social capital as "contacts and connections which allow people to draw on their social networks" (2013). In practical terms, the questions on social capital – clarify Savage et al. – "mainly take the form of »position generator« developed by the American sociologist Nan Lin (2001) to measure the range of people's social ties. We asked respondents whether they knew anyone in 37 different occupations, which is the most

complex and granular question of its type ever used in social research in any part of the world" (2013). While their self-marketing ability is incontestable, there are no grounds not to take Savage et al.'s word but there is a snag; the paramount objective of the whole project based on the BBC's Great Class Survey was to challenge the monopoly enjoyed, notably in Britain, by the EGP occupational scheme. Indeed, the rationale of using occupational labels for research purposes is increasingly undermined by their purportedly unrestrained inflation, discussed in the chapter on the aforementioned scheme.

So it appears to be both an unconventional and controversial decision on the part of Savage et al. to "used what respondents wrote about the occupations of their acquaintances in their assessment of everyone's class" (Dorling 2014).

But it still may well be that Savage et al.'s ambitions to "shed more light on how cultural and social boundaries operate in Britain and how this might suggest new lines of class division" (2013) will be fulfilled thanks to the next section in their research report, may it not? After all, judging from their self-identification in terms of "cultural class analysis" (Savage et al. 2013) it is exactly this section that occupies particularly prominent position in the research project concerned.

So it must be disappointing for anybody cherishing such high hopes that Savage et al.'s discussion of the respective portion of their findings replicates the same – associated with their inadequate methodological self-awareness-baffling slip.

Namely, Savage et al. criticise the EGP "schema [as being] of less use in explicating the wider cultural and social activities and identities... which do not appear to be closely linked to people's class position, as defined by the Goldthorpe class schema (2013: 222).

And again, analogically as in the case of social capital discussed above, this claim happens to be contradicted by their own evidence. Consider Savage et al.'s Figure 1 (2013:227). and Figure 2 [Fig. 1 [about here<sup>2</sup>]] (2013: 228). It could be shown that the categories of the conventional EGP scheme fall from top to bottom, corresponding to the particular points along the cultural dimension drawn.

In a word, "Savage et al.'s initial belief is wrong. We are told that one of the motivations for the project is that conventional class categories are inadequate for the sociological analysis of the sorts of cultural tastes and practices they are interested in. But when their own data show that they are mistaken, rather than abandoning their initial premise they carry on regardless" (Mills 2013).

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<sup>2</sup> <http://soc.sagepub.com/content/47/2/219.full.pdf+html> [10.10.2015].

To make matters worse, the second dimension in Figure 1, labeled "emerging cultural capital", leaves out "in what sense it is emerging and what it is emerging from. [...] it distinguishes the sorts of things that young people like doing from the sorts of things that older people dislike or don't do. There is no doubt that younger people do and enjoy things that older people don't but what has this to do with social class? Do people's tastes and activities change as they get older? Yes. Do people's tastes depend on when they were born? Yes. What dimension 2 represents is a mixture of life-cycle and cohort differences. Nobody denies that the young and old are different. It's a novel claim, however, to assert that they are different social classes" (Mills 2013).

Thus, supporters of Savage et al.'s claims for novelty may feel satisfied, though it is less than certain that it is this kind of novelty that the authors of the study originally meant.

In brief, the good old economic relations reassert themselves, demonstrating that one cannot choose whatever phenomena one pleases as the foundation of class locations. Regarding the above-mentioned "new lines of division" ostensibly discovered as a result of their research, the "Cultural Capital" section of Savage et al.'s investigation is based on, conversely, a traditional and conventional partition of given activities into two classes: "highbrow" and "emerging". It is paradoxical that the study aimed at discovering new lines of class divide should end up reinforcing class-based stereotypical divisions. Such a conclusion follows also from another apposite critique of the study: The markers of cultural capital are highly selective and therefore inappropriate for empirical operationalising, skewing instead the empirical findings, and leading to a negative view of working-class culture [...] there is a strangely old-fashioned feel to their choice, harking back to the old debates about 'high' versus 'popular' culture. This seems odd, since Savage et al. have already identified the 'middle class' as omnivores, consuming theatre/opera/ratatouille and rap/football/fish and chips" (Bradley 2014).

Furthermore, as Bradley argues, "there is an ambivalence about the working class": on the one hand they are portrayed as one-sided consumers of low-brow cultural genres and varieties, and on the other, they are treated as culturally deprived.

Bradley makes a compelling case for the recognition of "distinctive working-class cultural life: betting shops, pubs, greyhound racing, darts, pigeon-fancying, seaside trips, package holidays, DIY skills, professional playing of football, reading of sports papers and »true life romances«. What I see as a vigorous enjoyment of cultural forms in working-class communities is missing from this particular strand of Bourdieusian analysis, so that working-classness appears as a lack, a cultural deficit" (Bradley 2014). Her final remark indicates that

the source of those cognitive biases and errors lies in the vicious circle created by the "capitalist" framework: "It can be argued that the reason for ignoring such cultural forms is that they do not carry social legitimacy, so cannot be considered as symbolic capital" (Bradley 2014). Thus, one form of "capital" accounts for the deficiencies in the approach to another form. But all this makes such satirical interventions as that cited below are more than welcome as an antidote to class labeling and stigmatizing.

In his column in the Independent newspaper, comedian Mark Steel put his finger on the chief reason why the project concerned has failed and why the members of the privileged classes and estates might read it complacently: "One question the survey didn't seem to bother asking was what job you did, although it does ask for the jobs of your friends. So if you're a cleaner who knows some teachers, that makes you middle class for having teacher friends, but those teachers will be working class for having a friend who's a cleaner" (Dorling 2014).

Given our earlier criticisms, it is not surprising that the overall result of Savage et al.'s classificatory labours falls into the same trap as the above-mentioned chunks of the study.

As suggested above, Savage et al. build their classification on the critique of the EGP scheme: "rather than seeking to locate class fundamentally in occupational »blocks«, the time is now ripe – they emphasise – for a different, multi-dimensional perspective" (2013).

Yet the said multidimensional approach results in two essential effects: "the seven classes are categorised in fairly conventional economic and occupational terms: »technical middle class«, »emergent service workers« and so forth. Yet because the classes consist of clusters of individuals grouped in terms of social contacts and cultural activities, people from the same occupations appear in different »classes«: care workers pop up in three of them. Looking at the occupations seen to predominate in each identified class, one has to ask whether there is anything which really binds them together into a coherent body" (Bradley 2014).

This is not surprising at all, given that not only in the case of this particular classification its under-theoretisation can scarcely be counterbalanced by the sheer proliferation of classificatory descriptors; what the latter produces is simply confusion. Even conceding that "there are differences between the classes" (Mills 2013), the awkward question immediately arises: "which differences are important?" (Mills 2013).

At this juncture some critical level as regards rising the above identified self-contradiction like a phoenix from the ashes again and again seems to have been reached, so perhaps instead of persisting in chastising our "Magnificent Nine", we should congratulate

them on their consistency? Anyway, another witness to the spectacle of the aforementioned unending reproduction confirms that "in fact the interpretation and certainly the labels applied to the classes actually come from information quite extraneous to the latent profile analysis itself (Table 7: 231). Bizarrely, one of the key ingredients is the percentage classified in the NS-SEC categories that Savage et al. claim are inadequate" (Mills 2013).

And the above critic contributes also to the above reported incoherence debate, noting that "Age also seems to play a prominent part in the construction of the classes. While this would be unobjectionable if the objective was market segmentation, it is difficult to see how it can be reconciled with conventional understandings of social class. Usually, classes are thought of as groups within which individuals could potentially spend the whole of their lives. However, Savage et al.'s inductive method allows classes to be distinguished by tastes and activities that have a strong age gradient. The implication is that individuals can either grow out of their class because they become too old to get down to the gym, or become stuck because of the cultural tastes they acquired during early adulthood.

Table 7 is a critic's gold-mine. Take for instance the »traditional working class«. The average age of this group is 66! They have modest incomes, are low on »emerging cultural capital«, yet 30 per cent have, or had, jobs that would be classified as professional or managerial. A large proportion of this group are pensioners. Pensioners are an important interest group, but what analytical insight do we get from calling them a social class?" (Mills 2013).

Irrespective of whether one agrees with the final statement, to which we come back below, the presence of pensioners in the ranks of the class concerned explains what otherwise may appear to be rather puzzling – Savage et al. treat nearly identical percentages in a very different fashion, depending on which class is at issue: thus, the precariat is, as they put it, "a relatively large social class, with 15 per cent of the population". But when it comes to the class previously mentioned, their wording radically changes "the surviving rump of the working class [...] they now only comprise 14 per cent".

Be that as it may, statistical issues are relatively independent of the authors' clearly biased language as regards the working class is concerned, which suspicion we shall come back to in somewhat different context. Mills, meanwhile, goes on to argue that:

Life cycle plays a role in distinguishing what Savage et al. term the 'elite' and the 'established middle class'. The latter differ from the former principally by having smaller incomes, less savings and living in cheaper houses. In terms of social and cultural capital they don't differ at all. When we look at Table 7 we find that the 'established middle class' are on

average 11 years younger than the elite and other differences are quite marginal. A substantial part of the difference could plausibly be attributed to life-cycle stage and having a stake in the south-east's housing market. Again we must ask: what is gained by relabeling age and now geography as »class«? Life cycle also plays a role in the identification of the 'emergent service workers'. These are young people who go to gigs, join a gym and watch sport.

They have few savings and little invested in home ownership. If you were to say that this is a lifestyle group, say young single people or young childless couples then there would be little to object to: but a social class? It's a strange sort of social class that people will grow out of simply by ageing, getting married and having kids.

In short, Savage et al. fail to take the content of their typology seriously. If they did they would have to confront consequences which should give them cause to rethink their approach. For example, they would have to accept that people could change their social class at will simply by turning off the Beatles [this example is rather outdated, perhaps more appropriate candidate for the role of favourite in the eyes of today's young would be Bon Jovi, AC/DC or another such a band – the Liverpool five have managed to date to attain an almost high-brow status] and turning on to Beethoven. Of course people do change class but if it was as easy as this the solution to Britain's so-called 'social mobility problem' would have been spotted long ago" (Mills 2013).

While many of Mills' criticism appear to be sound, there are some exceptions; he has no theoretical grounds on which to define pensioners as a social class or reject such a definition. In our own theory of social differentiation these are classed as a typical social estate, though of course this refers to kind of model source of livelihood – which does not take account of possible other income sources pertaining to individual members of that category. This points to, as will be seen, a key flaw to Savage et al.'s classification.

## **Classification**

Let us put aside, for the sake of argument, the extra-economic determinants of societal differentiation as depicted by the above classification. Let us consider the topmost class (labeled "the elite") which in terms of occupations consists primarily of "chief executive officers, IT directors, marketing and sales directors, financial managers and management consultants, along with elite professions of dentists and barristers".

Their label notwithstanding, a closer look at the basis on which the aforementioned economic agents are grouped together shows that those are predominantly stratificatory criteria. Whether a stratum, a class, or whatever, Savage et al.' elite leaves out traditional business owners, which is sure enough manifestly unfounded. It is true, as argued elsewhere that top corporate managers epitomise the modern capitalist class, yet a rentier or an owner of a firm does not need to be its CEO (which in the former instance is by definition ruled out). From this point of view the characterisation of the group in question Savage et al. provide leaves much to be desired: "contrary to their opinion it falls short of comprising "the most privileged backgrounds" (2013), and owing to the gaps mentioned above it is Savage et al.'s wishful thinking that it "also is an important demonstration of the accentuation of social advantage at the top of British society" (2013).

Such are deficiencies of methods for which occupational categories, however understood, constitute a key, if not a paramount analytical tool. Class 2, "Established middle class" is, according to the classification concerned, the second most advantaged class has a household income of £47k a year, owns a relatively expensive house worth £177k, and has moderately good savings of £26k (Savage et al. 2013).

Again, one wonders what is the point of all this extended discussion of economic standing, social connections and cultural consumption (not reproduced here) – which all in Savage et al. are supposed to substantiate their joint categorisation, inasmuch as it ultimately turns out that "It might be seen as comprising the bulk of what Goldthorpe identifies as the professional and managerial »service class«; it has a higher proportion of members working in it management and the professions than any other class except the elite" (Savage et al. 2013).

It must be said that Savage et al. represent a peculiar method of analysis – first they pay what proves later to be lip service to a much trumpeted wholesale dismissal of Goldthorpe's scheme, on which seemingly discredited source they then extensively draw. Naturally, however, consequences of that odd policy bring to light the deep-seated weaknesses of their approach. In the above case, for instance, what is striking is the absence of any objective criteria by which to decide what percentage of Goldthorpe's class is to be included in Savage et al.'s Class 2, and what in class 1. And recall that arbitrariness has been identified above as a hallmark of social stratification research.

Because of what must be regarded as an undeserved popularity of the middle-class label, it is also useful to get to know Class 3: Technical middle class.

It is marked by fairly high mean good household incomes (£38k), excellent household savings (£66k) and houses worth considerable amounts of money (£163k). It competes with the established middle class to be the second most prosperous class in terms of economic capital.

Socially and culturally, however, it is much more restricted than the established middle class. It reports the lowest number of social contacts of any of the classes (an astonishingly low average of four out of 34 possible contacts, compared to 17 for the established middle class), its social circle is much more restricted than other social classes, and it presumably socialises nearly exclusively with other professional experts. This is an interesting riposte to those who think it is the poor or disadvantaged whose social networks are the most restricted. Meanwhile, on the bias of Savage et al.'s data, those counted in the category under consideration are by far the most limited here. This class is distinguished both by its relative social isolation and its cultural apathy. According to the authors, it comprises "those doing research, scientific and technical forms of work" (2013).

Granted that the kind of information reported above reflects the socio-economic situation of the conceptual class and a couple of social estates (scientists in research centers and academicians), as well as-possibly-some direct producers or performers of material labour (technicians), one must take issue with Savage et al.'s contention that "the technical middle class are also a powerful reminder that not all those with economic capital have extensive social networks" (Savage et al. 2013).

The above claim may or may not be true regarding the range of social contacts characteristic of the bourgeois class, but it is safe to say that among those counted in "the technical middle class" true capitalists constitute sure enough a small minority. Apart from those members of that category whose shareholdings qualify as real economic capital, in a concrete, case-by-case investigation one should look at their house ownership, - e.g. with London property prices at a record high, the practice "buy to let", just as the business of letting out in general, becomes – at the time of writing-increasingly popular, which may alter whatever class position a given houselord/lady otherwise occupies-although it still does not transform her into a capitalist, as we are dealing here with a peculiar proprietary class (needless to say that the above reasoning may refer also to other segments of society).

More broadly, it is high time to clear up an misunderstanding involved in the notion of social and cultural forms of "capital", as these are used within the framework concerned. Of course, both the range of one's social circle and cultural participation are legitimate objects of class analysis, but not in those terms that Savage et al. adopt. If one wants to



preserve some order and coherence in one's research, this kind of investigation should follow the step of class determination on an economic basis. In fact, in our socio-economic structuralism we have been long engaged in precisely this sort of research-in terms of rigorous theoretical apparatus, distinguishing two basic forms of societal activities a given class is engaged in: class-dependent phenomena, most directly influenced by one's ownership position and class-conditioned ones, more indirectly dependent on the latter, whose dependency on their class base could be also dubbed soft. By way of illustration, the former category includes income, while the latter the size of one's home book collection. It needs to be emphasised that the prerequisite for any such research is a former distinguishment of a given socio-economic class. Absent this step, one's research is bound to end up in a chaotic confusion of phenomena pertinent to distinct levels of the social world – as, by the way, is the case of the French thinker standing behind much of this confusion, (cf. Tittenbrun 2013a; 2013b) as well as other theorists employing "capital" categories.

From the point of view espoused here, for instance, instead of Savage et al.'s differentiation between Class 4: New affluent workers and Class 5: Traditional working class, whose composition is unclear, to say the least, one should determine first on the basis of economic criteria what working classes are there, and only then characterise their non-economic parameters. This would be an optimal, efficient procedure, yielding relatively most cognitive benefits, as only in this case it would be known concretely what groups manifest what behaviours, which knowledge must remain unavailable within frameworks such as those analysed earlier.

Likewise, in the absence of any exact determination of their relation to ownership, including ownership of labour power, one is unable to say whether Savage et al.' "class of people who are »making their way« in a range of relatively insecure occupations" (2013) in the service sector ought to be separated from another service class, as well -due to the aforementioned "insecurity" – from the next and final class on the list.

This is Class 7, dubbed Precariat. Savage et al. estimate that it comprises 15 per cent of the population. As they would have it, "occupationally", they encompass the unemployed, van drivers, cleaners, carpenters, care workers, cashiers, postal workers, as well as and shopkeepers.

Thus, the British researchers put very different categories in one bag; even abstracting from the question whether an unemployment qualifies as an occupation at par with airline pilots, journalist, carpenters and a myriad of others, their particular groups making up the purported social class include a proprietary class (shopkeepers), as well as classes standing at

the opposite side of the class divide, though not all of those -contrary to Savage et al. – work in services: e.g. van drivers, as the transport employees generally, constitute a separate class, whose distinctiveness was clear both for Marx and Weber.

The transportation employees' class position shows, however, many features in common with the industrial proletariat. Members of both classes are owners of material labour power (as they are involved in material labour), and, secondly, they both possess abstract labour power, i.e. are capable of producing surplus-value. Marx elucidates this question in *Grundrisse* asking himself the following question:

“[...] can a surplus value be extracted from the transport costs? Let us deduct the constant part of the capital consumed in transport, ship, vehicle etc. and everything which falls under the heading of their application, since this element contributes nothing to the question, and it is irrelevant whether this is posited as = 0 or = x. Is it possible, then, that there is surplus labour in these transport costs, and that capital can therefore squeeze a surplus value out of them? The question is simple to answer if we ask a further question, where and which is the necessary labour or the value in which it objectifies itself? The product must pay (1) its own exchange value, the labour objectified in itself; (2) the surplus time, which the shipper, carter etc. employs on its transportation. Whether he can or cannot extract the surplus value depends on the wealth of the country into which he brings the product and on its needs etc., on the use value of the product for this land. In direct production, it is clear that all the surplus labour which the manufacturer makes the worker do is surplus value for him, in that it is labour objectified in new use values, which costs him nothing. But he can obviously not employ him during transport for a longer time than is required for the transporting. Otherwise he would throw labour time away instead of realizing it, i.e. he would not objectify it in a use value. If the sailor, the carter etc. require only half a year of labour time to live a full year (if this is generally the proportion of labour necessary for subsistence), then the capitalist employs him for a whole year and pays him a half. By adding a whole years labour time to the value of the transported products, but paying only  $\frac{1}{2}$ , he gains a surplus value of 100% on necessary labour. The case is entirely the same as indirect production, and the original surplus value of the transported product can come about only because the workers are not paid for a part of the transportation time, because it is surplus time, time over and above the labour necessary for them to live. That an individual product might be made so much more expensive, owing to the transport costs, that it could not be sold—on account of the disproportion between the value of the product and its surplus value as a transported product,

a quality which becomes extinguished in it as soon as it has arrived at its destination-does not affect the matter” (Marx 2015).

It is thus only transport of persons, not goods, that constitutes a service. As do some other examples mentioned by the authors as constitutive of Class 7, such as care work – as opposed to the sort of work the cashiers are engaged in, for instance. The latter is employed in the sphere of circulation, or commodity-money exchange. As such, this kind of labour does not add new value, does not impinge on the use-value of a given good, which-socio-economically-entails that its bearers possess a labour power quite different than that held by the industrial working class.

## **Job ownership**

It is also the concept of labour-power ownership that allows one to pinpoint a characteristic feature of this so-called precariat. The purported class distinctiveness of the latter is usually being related to uncertainty in labour markets which has increased. Now, these and other similar phenomena express one's difficulty in realising the value of one's labour power; if one is being employed at a series of part-time jobs – as distinct from a fixed term contract then one sure enough will be underpaid relative to the value of one's labour power. By default, too, such employees are excluded from another important ownership relationship in which a portion of their more fortunate fellow employees are engaged in flexibility, precariousness (dispossession of employee ownership of jobs), and the diffusion of part-time is a form of sharing waged work at the social level and at the same time a compulsion for its intensification and extension. Thus, a growth rate of part-time and temporary (para-) work which is higher than the growth rate in employment implies, *ceteris paribus*, a reduction in the average waged working time. This, however, is not true if the income earned by part time and temporary workers is less than the value of labour power, i.e. insufficient to make ends meet. As precariousness compels part-time and temporary workers to have a "portfolio" of jobs, the overall effect could be an increase in average waged working time and a corresponding reduction in the average wage rate.

The ownership of jobs on the part of employees<sup>3</sup>, is revealed in, among others, guarantees of employment, conditions of lay-offs (severance, outplacement), etc.

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<sup>3</sup> "This situation finds itself in a polar opposition to "the extreme case of 'spot market' labour, where labour is hired on a daily basis according to the 'going rate' [which, however,] is relatively rare" (McGovern et al. 2007: 47).

How important not only in practical (for the persons involved and the policy-makers) but also in theoretical terms is the category of ownership of labour power and its corollary in the form of the above-mentioned notion of ownership of jobs is shown, amongst others, by some claims put forward by Ulrich Beck believing that it is the notion of risk that is constitutive of modern society. Arguably:

“an increase in patterns of flexible working has intensified the degree of risk involved in acquiring and maintaining employment. In modern society, employees are required to be adaptable and receptive to change in a fluctuating labour market. In support of the risk society perspective, flexibilization has eaten away at standardized full-time contracts and facilitated the diversification of employment practices. In Britain, over six million people are currently employed on a part-time basis, with self-employment becoming an entrenched trend.

Although predominantly located within manual and service industries, 'self-employment' has also seeped into the professions, with employment agencies supplying lecturers, accountants, and computer analysts on demand. Again, at a surface level we can agree with Beck's line of reasoning. It is probable that employment risks are impacting upon a wider section of society than in previous eras. However, from this axiom, Beck superinduces that risk and insecurity are becoming universal features of employment. It is at this deeper structural level that the risk society thesis comes unstuck” (Mythen 2005).

According to Beck, the overarching purpose of the Fordist system was to eliminate scarcity by producing sufficient goods to meet the collective needs of society. Hence, the central dynamic (or logic) of the Fordist regime revolved around the concept of class. Beck argues that the distributional patterns of the class society were noticeably interrupted in the 1970s, when the distribution of social goods became augmented by a cachet of “social bads”, such as endemic unemployment, mass pollution and nuclear hazards. Underlying the division between “goods” and “bads” is a rudimentary distinction between social priorities under the two modes of organisation: class societies are bound up with issues of scarcity, risk societies are preoccupied with the problem of insecurity (Beck 1992: 49).

In the risk society perspective, labour market insecurity is emblematic of a new fleet of risks which undermine social structures and threaten established cultural practices. The most obvious manifestation of employment risk is the social diversification of joblessness. With the emergence of cyclical global recessions, unemployment and job insecurity no longer blight only the poorest and least academically qualified groups in society. In times of economic uncertainty, labour market fluctuations universalise the threat of redundancy: “you

can run into anyone down at the unemployment office” (Beck 1992: 55). Not only does employment insecurity undercut established class and gender divides, the new logic of risk produces a circular motion of “boomerang effects,” as risks return to haunt their original generators. For example, high-status business elites well-schooled in dispensing with labour, themselves become dispensable. In this way, the sectoral effects of the class society are juxtaposed with the universalising effects of the risk society: “poverty is hierarchic, smog is democratic” (Beck 1992: 36). Owing to the purported diffusion of unemployment across traditional class lines, combined with the flexibilization and casualization of labour the traditional logic of the wealth distributing society is being superseded by a burgeoning logic of risk. In the risk society, new inequalities and alliances emerge while class positions come to be replaced by “risk positions.” As risk and insecurity become routine features of the employment system, the distributive motor of the class society misfires, leading to widespread uncertainty. What Beck considers as a marked rise in cross-class unemployment in Europe prompts his apocalyptic vision of “capitalism without work” as the destiny of today's postindustrial societies: “Insecurity on the labour market has long since spread beyond the lower classes. It has become the mark of our times. The old 'lifetime profession' is threatened with extinction. No one wants to admit that with it an entire value system, a society based on gainful employment, will disappear” (Beck 1992: 55).

From the viewpoint of socio-economic structuralism, the key weakness of Beck's argument lies in its lack of the category of ownership of labour power. From this perspective, it is clear that the phenomena depicted by Beck refer to various degrees of expropriation from that ownership, its extreme form being an employee's long-term unemployment leading to deskilling and eventually to elimination from the labour power market. Similar considerations apply to Manuel Castells' approach which addresses the issue under consideration and would greatly benefit from the notion of ownership of labour power. Castells' labour is divided into networked labour, which serves the goals of the network, and switched-off labour, which has nothing to offer the network and in the context of the network economy is non-labour. On the other hand, short-term contracts, casual labour practices and other processes considered under the rubric named “individualisation” express depriving a given worker of his or her property in the form of either his/her labour power or job. Even granted the wide incidence of such practices, Beck's far-fetched conclusion about his “risk society” as replacing “class society” is untenable. However, in a nutshell, the crux of the matter boils down to the question whether there has been a discernible shift from a sectoral logic of class to a universal logic of risk.

Unless one indulges oneself in abstract philosophical or even metaphysical deliberations or in other way dissociates oneself from reality, the latter speaks for itself – the logic of class demonstrates remarkable continuity (Goldthorpe and McKnight 2003; Mackintosh and Mooney 2004, 93).<sup>4</sup> Interestingly enough, Beck is far from being unaware of the resilience of economic inequalities (1992, 35), and in spite of this he holds his ground that risk positions are steadily supplanting class positions as principal markers of identity and experience. Lest there be no misunderstanding, one should keep separate two aspects of the matter. It cannot be ruled out then that social classes lost some of their previous relevance as subjective groups of reference. Yet class identity is one issue, and class location determined by the relation to the ownership of means of economic action and labour power is quite another; its impact on not only economic but also extra-economic aspects of life of a given individual is beyond question – the following are just two items from what constitutes a long list of studies documenting the social potency of class (Tittenbrun 2011b). Since the diffusion of employment risk is strikingly uneven, labour market insecurity is universal in a strictly hypothetical sense. Regarding some of Beck's specific claims, the ball is in his court to demonstrate empirically how many CEOs do actually frequent unemployment offices; in point of fact, of course, the class composition of those who are routinely dependent on social security is no secret, and it is at all honesty discreditable for a sociologist to preach the ascendancy of "the risk society", disregarding the scientific evidence to the contrary. If one does not want to conduct research of one's own, there are numerous studies that show that vulnerability to unemployment depends on one's class position in a big way (see: Gallie et al. 1998; Goldthorpe 2002). Again, one should not commit the *pars pro toto* fallacy and confound the issue of risk perception with that of risk real impact. While, to list a couple of usual culprits, globalisation, recession, offshoring, automation, etc. sure enough contribute to a widespread sense of job insecurity, particular social classes and estates bear the real-world consequences of those processes in nothing but equal measure. Indeed, as the reader of volume one knows only too well, the socio-economic divide is expanding, rather than contracting in virtually all advanced capitalist societies.

In a word, there is strong disconfirming evidence of the emergence of a “universalising logic of risk”. "A fortunate group of employees remain insulated against risk, whilst the unlucky numbers find themselves episodically out in the cold. From a theoretical point of view, the distinction between class and risk positions is far from drum tight. At best,

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<sup>4</sup> Comprehensive critique of the thesis concerning the alleged demise, or even death of class can be found in (Tittenbrun 2011b).

the risk society thesis makes an unclean separation between class and risk effects. At worst, Beck's presentation of distributional logics is internally inconsistent, with his vista obscured by an unrelenting fixation with risk" (Mythen 2005).

Thus, to refer back to Beck's aphoristic summary of the thrust of his theory, it is, sure enough, manifestly unfounded; to cite a cogent rebuttal to what Beck claims: "the wealthy were protected from scarcity and remain protected from risk; 'protection' here being understood as 'relative protection'. Smog is just as hierarchical as poverty so long as some places are less smoggy than others" (Scott 2000: 36).

Moreover, Beck's claim that long-term stable employment is a relic of the past is not born out by empirical research as well. To exemplify, Doogan (2001) on the basis of EUROSTAT data demonstrates that average job tenure in Britain remained relatively constant between 1992 and 1999, with long-term employment showing a significant increase from 7.4 million in 1992, to 9 million in 1999. Thus, the British case shows that the general trend toward downsizing (taking place in the 1990s) can co-exist with an extension of long-term employment. Similarly, McGovern et al. (2007: 50-51) report that "the proportion of full-time, permanent jobs held by males fell between 1986 and 1994 (by 6 points), as Grimshaw and Rubery reported in their account of the 'well-known shift' to flexible employment. It has, however, remained quite stable for the period between 1994 and 2004. Meanwhile, the proportion of such jobs held by women has increased, though somewhat modestly. Or, to put it another way, the proportion of all 'flexible' jobs has not changed dramatically since the mid-1990s.

Bringing these points together, "we must reject the notion of an ever increasing trend or shift to non-standard forms of employment (e.g. Beck 1992; Gorz 1999). The »well-known shift« that was evident in the earlier period may have been simply a response to the recession of the early 1990s and could yet be reversed by the sustained period of economic prosperity that has followed" (McGovern et al. 2007).

Given both the popularity of the notion of precariat and its ideological salience, it is useful to dwell on it a bit. The view contested above underlies a myth according to which changes in capitalism have made workers virtually powerless. In the academic press, as well as the general media, one can without any difficulty find a wide range of claims made by political commentators and academics to the effect that permanent jobs are in principle a thing of the past and that everyone now faces a world of constant turbulence, flux and evanescence, a world whose sole fixed attribute is its changeability, which in concrete economic terms translates into transient work and rootless employment conditions. This has

clear implications for the class balance of power; if the great majority of the working population are permanently insecure at work, the balance of power has swung massively towards the employers.

One of the most prominent exponents of such views is Guy Standing, whose most influential book is *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class* (2011), in which he argues the case for the presence of a global Precariat – an emerging class comprising the rapidly growing number of people facing lives of insecurity, moving in and out of menial jobs that give little meaning to their lives. The instabilities this could lead, Standing contends, to a "politics of inferno".

The only option in the face of those technologically determined necessities is an attempt to adjust to them by reconstructing the concept of work in the 21st Century.

As suggested above, however, this kind of views have not gone unchallenged. The most compelling counterevidence has been provided by Kevin Doogan (2009). He most emphatically disagrees with all the theories of increasing precariousness in employment. We are bombarded on a daily basis with the ever increasing mountain of news about offshoring, outsourcing, job migration to China and India, the upshot being the doctrine of job for life is most definitely a thing of the past. Doogan's response is that the resulting precariousness cannot be regarded as a natural consequence of a fast changing global economy, but a manufactured set of insecurities engendered by neoliberal policies entailing marketisation, commercialisation and commodification.

Doogan rejects the very idea of "societal shifts based on a more tenuous connection between employers and workers" (2009: 3) on the basis that "it privileges discontinuity and it 'overdetermines' the role of technological change. In stressing the significance of global flows of finance, and the integration of capital beyond the national economy, it greatly exaggerates the mobility propensity of non-finance capital and neglects the continuing significance of the role of the state in the workings of the market economy" (2009: 6).

It must be pointed out that this is not an academic debate, although on the other hand it needs to be realised that it is by no means just open apologists for capitalism who have spread such ideas. Particularly harsh words are in Doogan's book directed against Michael Hardt and Tony Negri (who receive their fair dose of criticism another book of ours (Tittenbrun 2011a, 2011b) as well for providing "the presence of left wing harmonies in the neoliberal chorus" (2009: 11). Even in this publication's first volume the reader can find examples of corporate tactics consisting in a series of attacks against the workforce and its union representation followed by kind of black-mail: if there is any resistance, the firm will



move overseas or substitute agency workers for its recalcitrant employees. The class function of the belief that companies can flit around at will and that it is always easy to find an alternative workforce is manifestly clear “The spectre of capital mobility and the economic insecurity it engenders has served to constrain wages and union activity in a period of tight labour markets” (2009: 76). Those who promulgate the myth about the emasculation of labour brought about by such a labour power arbitrage should put it to the reality test.

“Doogan points to, inter alia, "the labour force survey data from North America and Europe [which] shows that job stability has not declined and that long-term employment has increased in many sectors of the advanced economies” (2009:4).

The figures speak for themselves: “over both shorter and longer time frames, the growth of the long-term workforce has been significant in Europe and North America. This is all the more remarkable as it has occurred during a period of substantial employment expansion” (Doogan 2009: 177), as one would expect expanding employment, and lots of new starters, to drive down the length of time people stay in jobs. But this simply has not happened. There is no denying that in some sectors, notably manufacturing, one can encounter some examples of corporate relocation, outsourcing and downsizing, but such practices are virtually unknown in retail or health and education – which are the areas of the greatest growth in employment. Doogan rightly argues, too, that the claim that companies have abandoned all domestic attachments and move around the world at will is implausible. “The domestic economy provides the key market and base of operations” (2009: 72) even for many top multinationals.

In fact, the annual surveys of multinationals conducted by United Nations agencies shows that the top 100 non-financial corporations have a transnationality index of approximately 50 percent. This means that their sales, employment and value added in the home economy are as important as their combined operations in overseas markets.

Data gathered by the Bureau of Economic Analysis on US multinational firms show that investment and employment in the domestic economy have kept pace with expansion overseas. It turns out that three decades of corporate globalisation have left little impression on the balance between the domestic and foreign activities of US multinational corporations. Furthermore, Doogan notes that analysis of global foreign direct investment patterns also reveals two interesting and counter-intuitive trends. In the first instance FDI [foreign direct investment] expands during boom periods and contracts during recessions. Thus, to blame job losses on capital migration is highly questionable.

“Secondly the lion’s share of overseas investment goes to the rich rather than poor countries. Between 1980 and 2006 the developed economies’ share of global FDI inward stock has grown from 56 percent to 70 percent, consolidating their position as the prime target for overseas investment. In other words, capital moves abroad primarily to access rich markets rather than exploit cheap labour. This shows that fears of exporting jobs are misplaced, misunderstanding – as they do – the aforementioned corporate tactics; "Research in America, where fears of overseas job loss have a much higher profile than in Europe, shows that companies use the threat of corporate relocation in order to maintain the compliance of trade unions during contract negotiations”.

To be sure, Doogan's analysis is hardly a pioneering one (which does not detract from its value); suffice it to point to a study that found that “Many of the commonly held assumptions about today’s world of work need to be seriously questioned. A wide gulf exists between the over-familiar rhetoric and hyperbole we hear daily about our flexible and dynamic labour market and the realities of workplace life. The evidence simply does not sustain the view that we are witnessing the emergence of a ‘new’ kind of employment relations, seen in the ‘end of the career’ and the ‘death of the permanent job for life’” (Taylor).

Nevertheless, never enough such well-founded endorsements of the continuing potential power of workers to resist their class opponents. Doogan calls attention to some elementary facts pertaining to the capitalist economy: “capital needs labour. Despite all the rhetoric of foreign competition and threats to relocate and outsource, employers generally prioritise the recruitment and retention of labour. Otherwise it would be difficult to explain the international evidence of job stability and rising long-term employment” (Doogan 2009: 206). On the other hand, one should not overstate the case against the received wisdom and deny that there are the some areas where the number of workers on non-permanent contracts of employment is genuinely high. This reality was already clear in a European-wide study from 1998 which showed that in countries such as Spain (40 percent non-permanent), France (22 percent non-permanent) and Greece (18 percent non-permanent) the scale of non-permanent employment was at a level which would penetrate deeply into workers’ consciousness. It follows that there is a need for a class breakdown of the term “non-permanent”, as it can cover a wide diversity of situations: it is safe to presume that, e.g., the consultant on 1,000 euros a day will not despair if his contract means only six months work. Such cases, however, should not be over-generalised; studies by the Institute of Manpower Studies in the 1990s demonstrated the insecurity and inequality of the "new economy" of

flexible labour markets, outsourcing, contract working and self-employment. Self-employment, the British institute in question found, was characterised by extremes of high and low pay, with the better-off over-represented in banking, finance and business, and the poorest in personal and domestic services such as hairdressing and cleaning. It was not only exacerbating wider social inequality, according to the institute; the economic penalties it carried persisted into old age. And for many "flexibly employed" people, the new economy was not an invigorating world of economic freedom and dynamism – the picture neo-liberal and other champions of capitalism like to portray. At the bottom end of the market, in particular, it was a universe of constraint and financial penalty. In turn, a study of the Italian labour power market found that “while full-time permanent employees account for almost 51 percent of the Italian labour force and ‘standard’ workers for 72 percent, the extent of atypical workers varies according to the definition adopted... they represent between 8.1 percent and 20.5 percent of the Italian labour force according to the particular definition. Non-standard employment contracts are more likely among young people aged 15 to 29 years and those living in southern regions of Italy. Women are more likely than men to work on such contracts” (European Foundation 2008).

Secondly, it is evident that the economic crisis has intensified some alarming trends such as the rise in the number of workers who are part time simply because they cannot get a full-time job, as, inter alia, the number of under-employed Americans shows. A recent TUC analysis of official statistics found that one in nine (11.2 percent) of people in part-time work are in this position. The number of involuntary part-time workers has recently increased sharply to 829,000.

The lack of full-time work is demonstrated in Jobcentres across the UK, with government statistics showing that over one in four (27 percent) of vacancies are for less than 16 hours a week. The majority of involuntary part-time workers are female (451,000 women compared to 378,000 men), reflecting the fact that around 80 percent of the UK’s part-time workforce are women. However, one in five (21.2 percent) men working part time are doing so because they cannot secure full-time unemployment.

It follows that Doogan's debunking of some myths around the present-day job market is highly useful, yet one should keep the pendulum from swinging too far in the other direction.

To revert to the sociologist who sort of prompted the above discussion. One may wonder how such critically acclaimed scholar could commit such empirical blunders. At a deeper structural level an answer can be found, we surmise, at a deeper epistemic level; the

risk theory stems from the same intellectual roots as, for example, Parsons' general value system theory or Lukacs' notion of alienation or reification as an overriding principle of capitalist society. Suffice it to point out that *reification is conceived of as a universal, affecting all of society equally*. All these conceptions, and our list could be easily extended, (consider the French cases discussed above) conceive of the relationship to society of their selected idea just as Hegel conceptualised his "spirits." Well, the term itself may be outdated, but this by no means applies to the underlying notion. All the essentialist conceptions, establishing one all-pervasive principle permeating the entire social world bear thus strong resemblance to Hegelian explanations. Hegel's philosophy of history is termed objective idealism, belonging to one family with, for example, Platonism; and Plato's cave is not necessarily the best vantage point from which to observe and describe external reality. From this standpoint, the above-mentioned errors are not accidental, which of course constitutes no justification.

## **Conclusion**

To round off our discussion of the theory forming the chief subject of the present paper, the preceding suggests that we are sorry not to be able to share Savage et al.'s ebullient mood; they appear to be not even a little edified by the significance of their findings: "our new model of class offers a powerful way of comprehending the persistence, yet also the remaking of social class divisions in contemporary Britain. Our multi-dimensional analysis reveals the polarization of social inequality (in the form of the elite and the precariat), and the fragmentation of traditional sociological middle and working-class divisions into more segmented forms. [...] We hope that our new model of class will prove a valuable resource for future social researchers in exploring the complex and multi-dimensional nature of social class inequality in the UK in a way which permits us to recognize the ongoing salience of social class divisions in the stratification of British society" (2013).

Thus, inadvertently, Savage et al. vindicated in the end our assessment of the theoretical nature pertinent to their typology, though they would perhaps protest about this qualification, pointing to the use of "class" (the distinction between stratification and class was clarified in Tittenbrun 2011b, and other publications from this author). But this only adds insult to injury, as it is suggestive of a wide diversity of conceptual frameworks they draw upon-(tacitly) stratification, which tacitness does little to improve their modus operandi; as to class theory, it is present in their study primarily, if not exclusively, in the form of

incessant polemics with John Goldthorpe, as though his schema represents an apogee of class theory (which definitely does not, as demonstrated in another publication – Tittenbrun 2011b), which is baffling when compared with only scant attention given to the founding fathers of the whole perspective.

Finally, to account for what is hardly a resounding success, to put it mildly, it might be useful to call in the sociology of knowledge: "this culture-led version of Bourdieu is misguided, a product perhaps of decades of prosperity and consumerism" (Bradley 2014).

And returning to the question of the title of the chapter, it appears to be justified – not only the authors of the study considered above simply took over the Bourdiesian tool kit, without any attempt at shifting the perspective, but also duplicated all the flaws of his approach, such as the proliferation of empty concepts that at the very best could be treated as abortive metaphors,<sup>5</sup> but which are intrinsically incapable of serving as genuine research tools. What is more, the net result of their efforts resembles Bourdieu's mixing up miscellaneous concepts belonging to very different perspectives – strata, classes and elites (their "creative" contribution to this mixture boiling down to the backdoor introduction of age groups or perhaps generations). As they say, the apple doesn't fall far from the tree.

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<sup>5</sup> A comprehensive critical analysis can be found in (Tittenbrun 2013a; 2013b).

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