

# SOCIAL INEQUALITY (1): STRATIFICATION AND SOCIAL CLASS

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Introduction to sociology – session 9  
Anne Revillard

# Social inequality (1): stratification and social class

1. Stratification and inequality: definition, examples of measures and questions
2. Social class: theoretical debates and empirical measure

# 1- Stratification and inequality: definition, examples of measures and questions

- Stratification and inequality
- Multidimensional inequality
- Measures of economic inequality (examples):
  - Share of wealth owned by the X% richest
  - Lorenz curve
- Inequality: why and how?

# Stratification and inequality

Stratification system = “the *complex of institutions that generate inequalities* in income, political power, social honor, and other valued goods”. 3 components:

- (1) “the social processes that *define certain types of goods as valuable and desirable*,
  - (2) the rules of allocation that *distribute these goods across various roles or occupations* in the division of labor [...]
  - (3) the mobility mechanisms that *link individuals to these roles or occupations* and thereby generate unequal control over valued goods”
- (Grusky, 2007)

# Multidimensional inequality

What types of assets are unequally distributed? A multidimensional approach to social inequality  
(adapted from Grusky, 2007, Table 1 Types of valued goods and examples of advantaged and disadvantaged groups)

Assets		Examples	
Asset group	Types	Advantaged	Disadvantaged
Economic	Wealth Ownership	Billionaire Capitalist	Bankrupt worker Employed worker
Power	Political power Workplace authority Household authority	Prime minister Manager “Head of household”	Disenfranchised person Subordinate worker Child
Cultural	Knowledge	Intelligentsia	Uneducated
Social	Social clubs	Country club member	Non-member
Honorific	Occupational Religious	Judge Saint	Garbage collector Excommunicate
Civil	Right to work	Citizen	Illegal immigrant
Human	On-the-job	Experienced worker	Inexperienced worker
Physical (health)	Mortality Physical disease Mental health	Person with long life Healthy person Healthy person	A “premature” death Person with AIDS, asthma Depressed, alienated

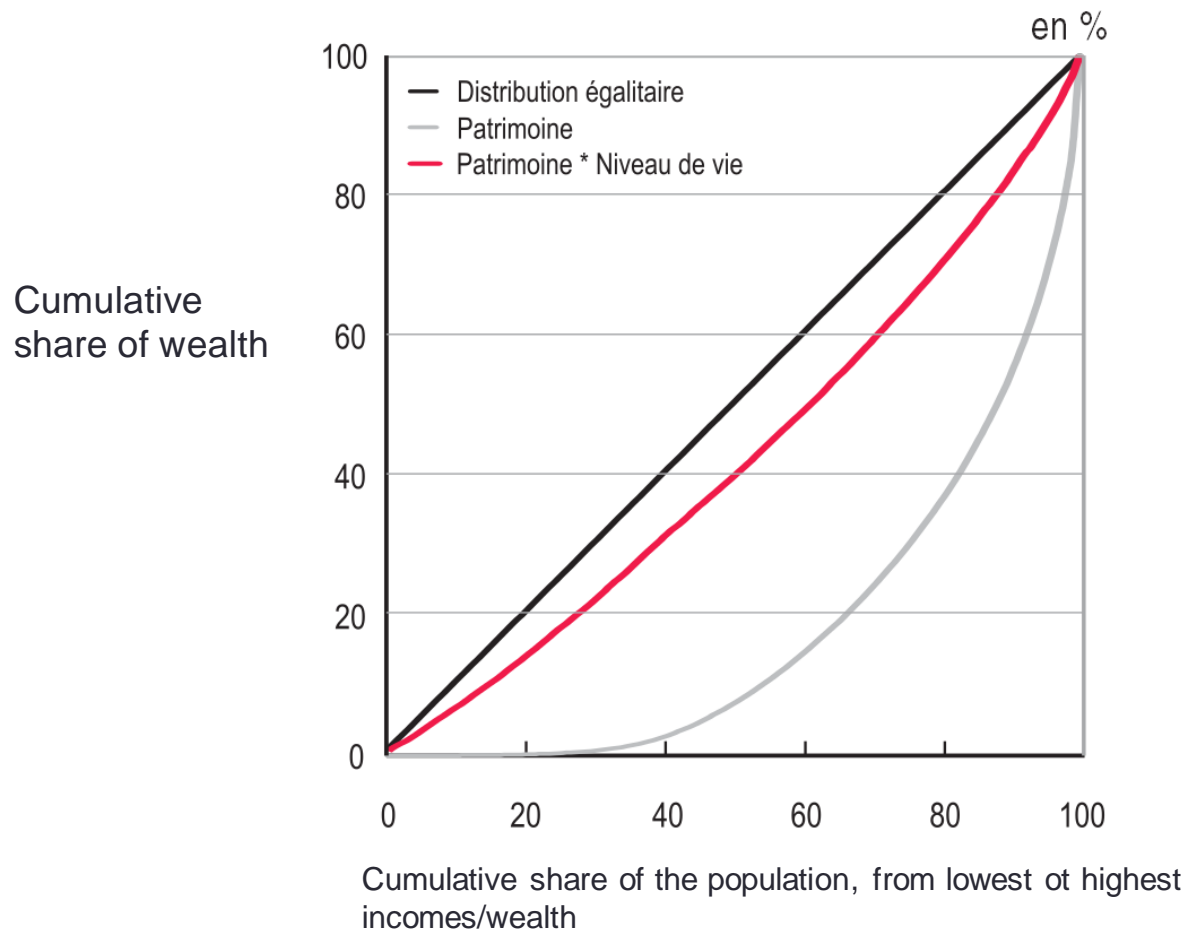
# Measures of economic inequality: share of wealth owned by the X% richest

<u>Share owned by :</u>	<b>Share of the total wealth (%)</b> <i>(patrimoine)</i>	<b>Share of the total volume of available income (%)</b> <i>(volume des niveaux de vie)</i>
The 10% <u>richest</u>	<b>48</b>	24,9
The 20% <u>richest</u>	65	39
The 30% <u>richest</u>	77	<b>50,6</b>
The 40% <u>richest</u>	86	60,8
The 50% <u>richest</u>	<b>93</b>	69,8
The 60% <u>richest</u>	98	77,9
The 70% <u>richest</u>	99	85
The 80% <u>richest</u>	100	91,3
The 90% <u>richest</u>	100	96,5

**Share of total wealth and available income owned by the X% richest in France, 2010**

Source: INSEE, [http://www.insee.fr/fr/themes/tableau.asp?reg\\_id=0&ref\\_id=NATnon04244](http://www.insee.fr/fr/themes/tableau.asp?reg_id=0&ref_id=NATnon04244) and [http://www.insee.fr/fr/themes/tableau.asp?reg\\_id=0&ref\\_id=NATnon04246](http://www.insee.fr/fr/themes/tableau.asp?reg_id=0&ref_id=NATnon04246)

# Measures of economic inequality: the Lorenz curve



The distribution of wealth (patrimony and available income) in France in 2004  
Source: Pujol, Jérôme and Magda Tomasini. 2009. "Les inégalités de niveaux de vie entre 1996 et 2007." *INSEE Première*, n.1266 [http://www.insee.fr/fr/publications-et-services/default.asp?page=dossiers\\_web/inegalites\\_sociales/inegalites\\_sociales.htm](http://www.insee.fr/fr/publications-et-services/default.asp?page=dossiers_web/inegalites_sociales/inegalites_sociales.htm)

# Inequality: why and how?

Analyzing the processes that generate inequality / systems of inequality:

- Class
- Race
- Gender



## 2- Social class: theoretical debates and empirical measure

- What is social class (and what is at stake) ?
- Theoretical perspectives on social class
  - K. Marx
  - M. Weber
  - L. Warner
  - P. Bourdieu
- The empirical measure of social class in France: socio-occupational categories (PCS)

# What is social class?

Working definition (drawing on Barbusse and Glaymann, 2004; Vitt, 2007): Social class =

- a stratification system that divides a society into a hierarchy of social positions
  - a particular social position within a class stratification system (lower class, working class, middle class...)
- A large social group sharing common socio-economic characteristics (wealth, status, power) and similar lifestyles.

Key issues/dimensions in the definition of social class:

- Objective/subjective dimensions (being a member of a class based on objective criteria vs feeling of belonging)
- Income-based definition vs multidimensional perspectives (including status, power, prestige, culture...)
- Conflict vs gradation of strata
- Small/large number of classes
- Social reproduction vs mobility

# Marx on social class

« The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles. Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary re-constitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes.

The modern bourgeois society that has sprouted from the ruins of feudal society has not done away with class antagonisms. It has but established new classes, new conditions of oppression, new forms of struggle in place of the old ones.

Our epoch, the epoch of the bourgeoisie, possesses, however, this distinctive feature: it has simplified the class antagonisms: Society as a whole is more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other: Bourgeoisie and Proletariat ».

Marx, K., 1977 [1848], “Manifesto of the Communist Party,” in Tucker, R., *The Marx-Engels Reader*, Norton, p. 474

# Karl Marx (1818-1883)

- In the **capitalist** mode of production, the **relations of production** are organized as followed:
- The means of production are owned by a small number of people who don't need to work to earn a living : the **bourgeoisie**
- All other people (the **proletariat**) must sell their labor force in order to earn a living



Conflictive  
interests  
Exploitation  
and class  
struggle

# Karl Marx (1818-1883)

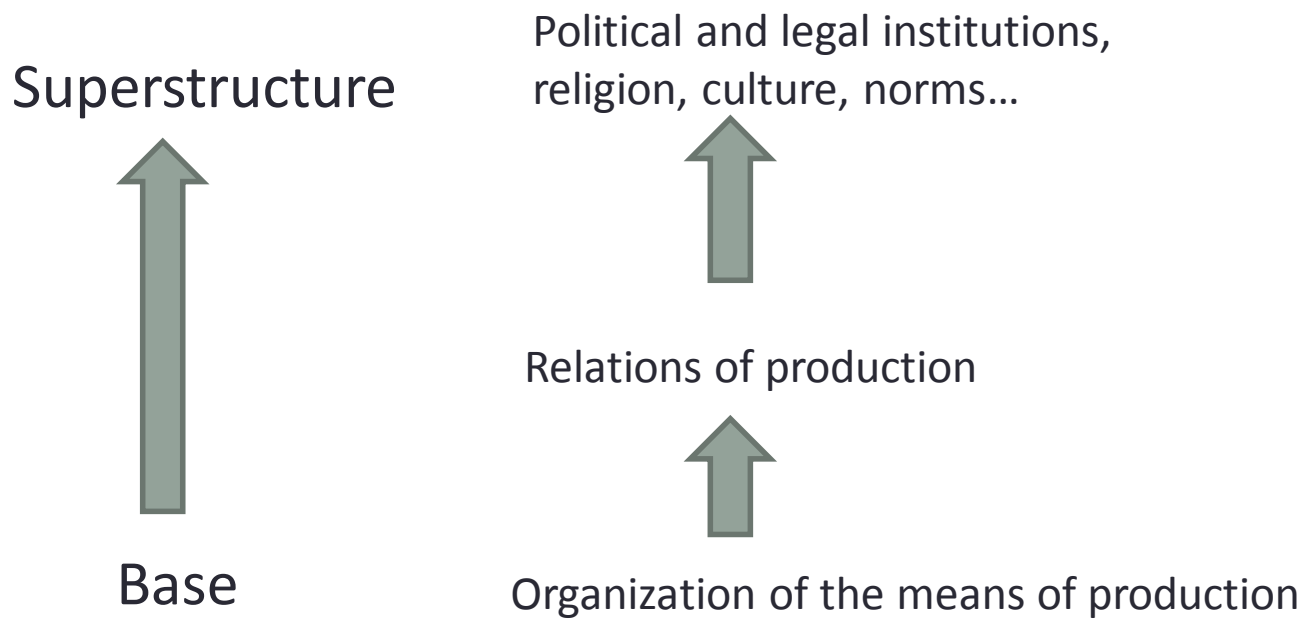
Distinction between class « in itself » and class « for itself » (class consciousness) → objective/subjective dimensions of class belonging

Bourgeoisie



Proletariat

# Karl Marx (1818-1883)



→ Everything in the superstructure (culture, norms, ideology...) is meant to ensure the bourgeoisie's power and oppression of the proletariat / the proletariat's acceptance of this domination

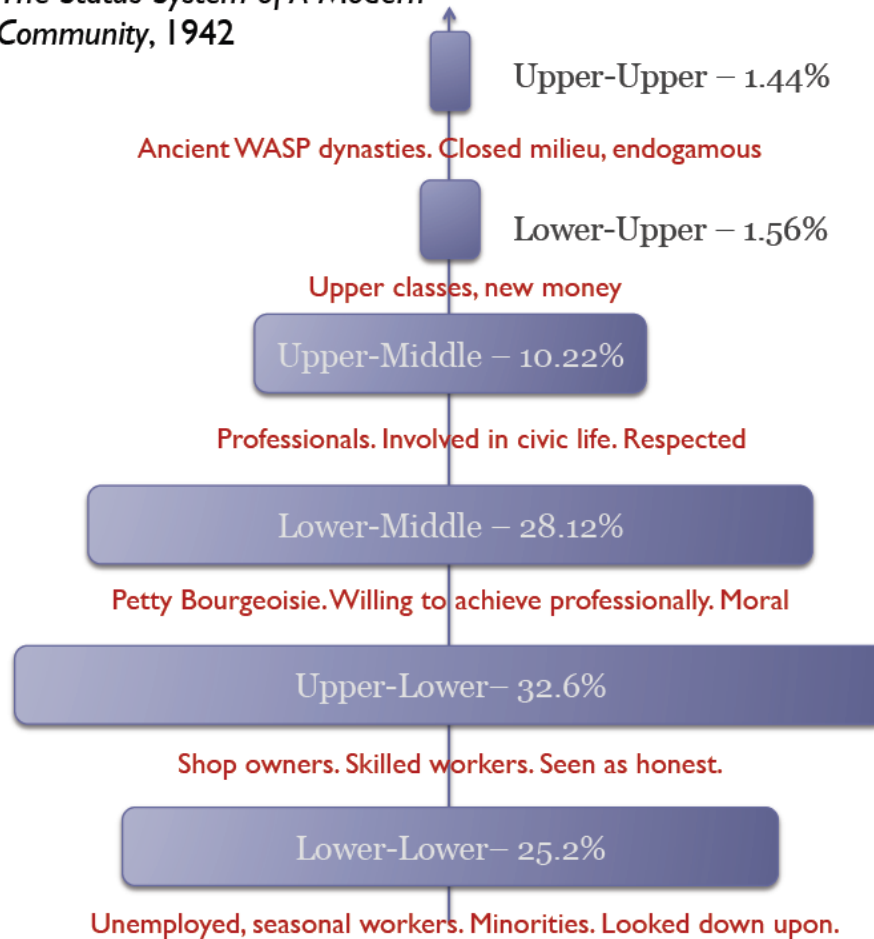
# Weber on social stratification

A more complex view of social stratification, combining

- Class (economic situation)
- Status (prestige)
- Power

# Lloyd Warner (1942) on social stratification

W.L. Warner, *The Status System of A Modern Community*, 1942





# Bourdieu on social class and habitus

## **Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002)**

- Born to a modest family in the southwest of France
- ENS, philosophy diploma
- 1955-1960 Drafted into the army and sent to Algeria → ethnographic research in Kabylia
- 1964 Position at EHESS; from 1968 on, head of the *Centre de sociologie européenne* (CSE)
- 1975 creation of the journal *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*
- 1981 Sociology chair at the Collège de France

## **Main publications** [date of original publication in French in brackets]

1979 [1964] *The Inheritors: French Students and Their Relations to Culture*, University of Chicago Press.

1990 [1970] *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*, Sage

1977 [1972] *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, Cambridge University Press

1984 [1979] *Distinction: a Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, Harvard University Press.

1999 [1993] *Weight of the World: Social Suffering in Contemporary Society*, Polity.

1996 [1992] *Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, Stanford University Press.

1998 *State nobility: Elite Schools in the Field of Power*, Polity

1998 *Practical Reason: On the Theory of Action*, Stanford University Press.

2001 [1998] *Masculine Domination*, Polity.

2005 *The Social Structures of the Economy*, Polity

# Bourdieu on social class and habitus

???

[(habitus)(capital)] + field = practice

???

Goal: understanding the causes and consequences of social **practice**: why and with what effects do people behave and think the way they do?

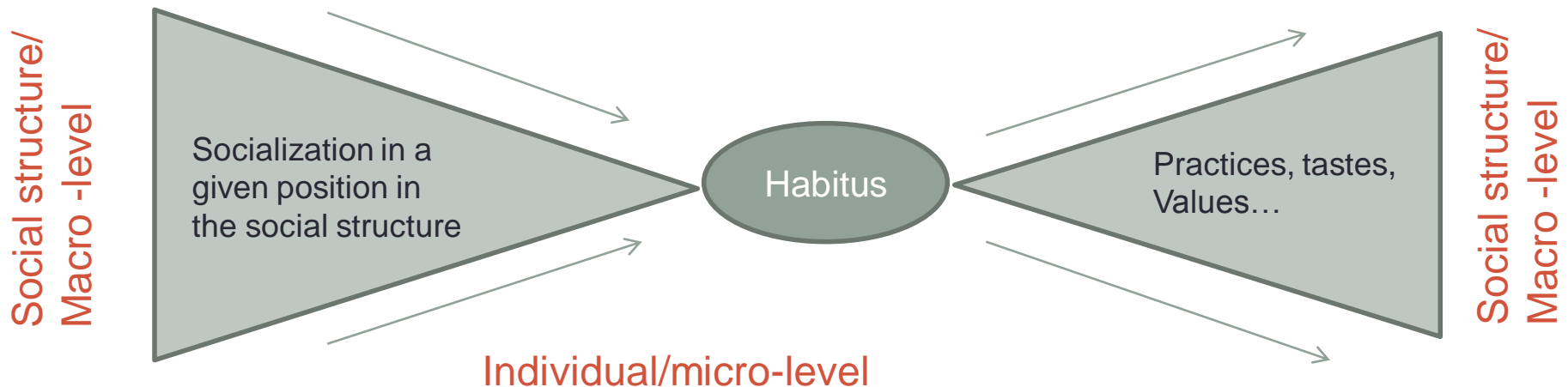
→ Cultural tastes and practices in a very broad sense

Practices are determined by **habitus**, which is class-specific, and unfolds in specific **fields** in which each individual's position derives from the characteristics of their **capital** (volume, composition, and change in these over time).

- Habitus
- Field
- Capital

# Bourdieu's concept of habitus

- A **system** of dispositions that results from an individual's socialization and determines this individual's practices, values, beliefs...  
(1980, *Le sens pratique*; trad. 1992 *The logic of practice*)



- For Bourdieu, socialization typically takes place within a **coherent** social group (social class), hence the habitus forms a **system** and favors the reproduction of this class's practices, values, beliefs, from one generation to the other

# Bourdieu on social class and habitus

Habitus as class-specific:

« [...] one must return to the practice-unifying and practice-generating principle, i.e., class habitus, the internalized form of class condition and of the conditionings it entails. One must therefore construct the objective class, the set of agents who are placed in homogeneous conditions of existence imposing homogeneous conditionings and producing homogeneous systems of dispositions capable of generating similar practices; and who possess a set of common properties, objectified properties, sometimes legally guaranteed (as possession of goods and power) or properties embodied as class habitus (and, in particular, systems of classificatory schemes »

*Distinction*, p. 101

# Bourdieu on social class

Each individual's class position derives from the characteristics of their **capital** (volume, composition, and change in these over time).

**Capital** = material and immaterial resources possessed by individuals

**Types** of capital:

- *Economic*
  - *Cultural* (diploma, cultural references...)
  - Symbolic (prestige, honors)
  - Social (one's social network/relations)
- Hence an individual's capital is not only defined by its volume but also by its **composition** (a CEO has more economic capital than an academic, but the academic has more cultural capital...)
- Moreover, class experience will vary depending on each individual's **social trajectory**, i.e. how the volume and composition of their capital has evolved over time (an academic who is the son/daughter of an academic will have a different experience/habitus than an academic who is the son/daughter of a CEO)
- A 3-dimensional social space (volume of capital, composition of capital, change in these over time)

graphique 5—Espace des positions sociales

graphique 6—Espace des styles de vie

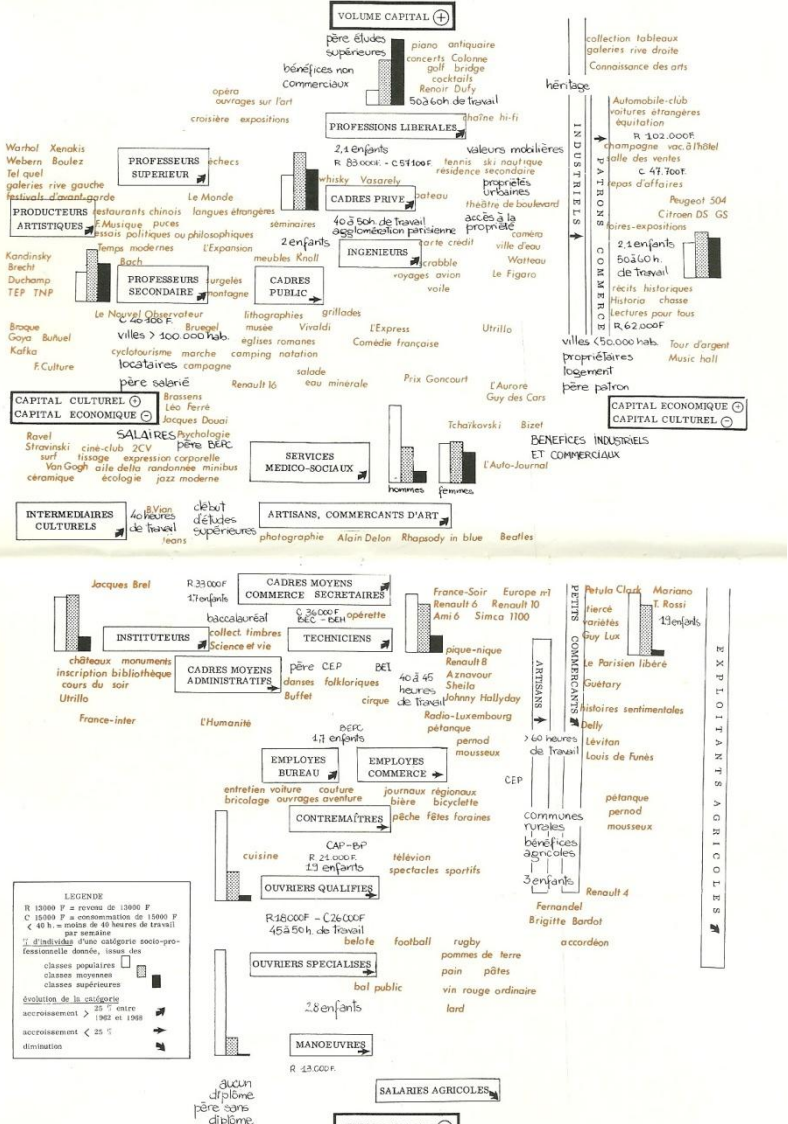


Figure 5 (shown in black)  
The space of social positions.

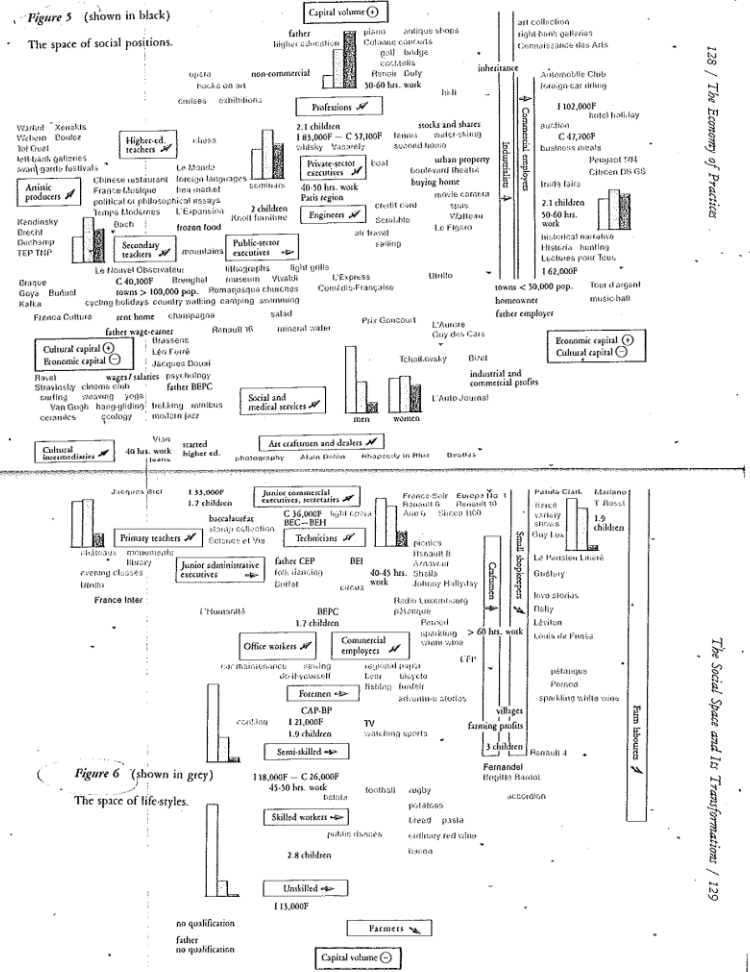


Figure 6 (shown in grey)  
The space of lifestyles.

128 / The Economy of Practices

The Social Space and Its Transformations / 129

«P. Bourdieu, « The space of social positions and the space of life styles » in *La distinction*, p. 140-141 (French version; p. 128 in English version) on the right)

# Bourdieu on social class

Social practices unfold in various **fields**, in which agents compete and position themselves in a hierarchy according to field-specific criteria: examples:

- Educational field (Grandes écoles vs mass university)
- Artistic field (Picasso vs Sunday painter)
- Economic field (Fortune 500 vs local grocery shop)
- Religious field (pope vs deacon)

# Bourdieu on social class

- **Distinction** and symbolic domination
- The dominant classes use their practices to distinguish themselves and exert social domination over the lower classes (playing golf rather than football, drinking champagne as opposed to beer, listening to classical music as opposed to pop)
- Highbrow or « omnivore »? (Peterson and Kern, 1996 ; Coulangeon, 2005)



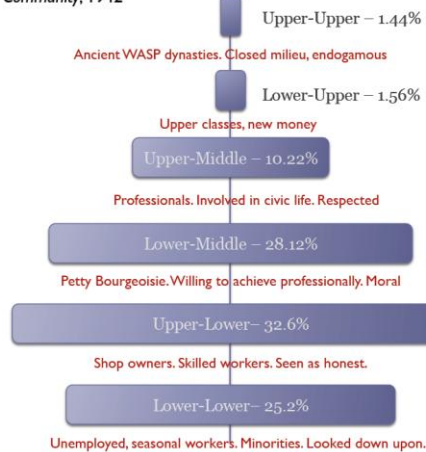
# To sum up: competing theoretical models of stratification

Bourgeoisie

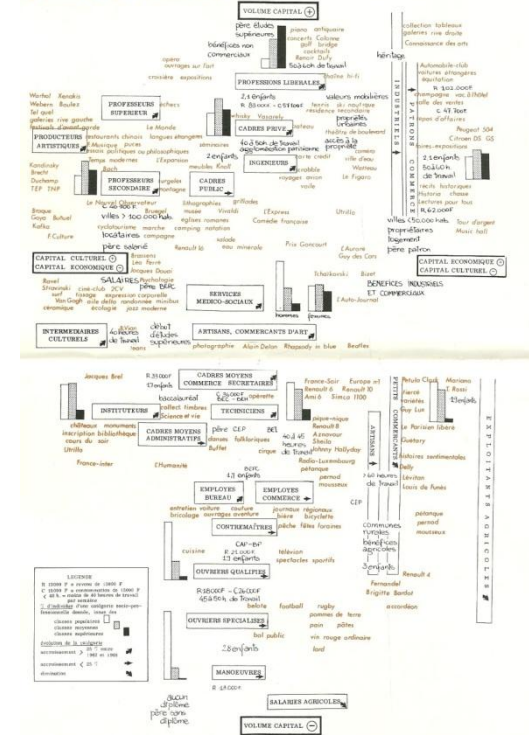


Proletariat

W.L. Warner, *The Status System of A Modern Community, 1942*



graphique 5—Espace des positions sociales  
 graphique 6—Espace des styles de vie



# From model to measure: socio-occupational categories (PCS) in France

- PCS = Professions et catégories socio-professionnelles (initially “CSP”)
  - A classification created at the INSEE in 1954 (revised in 1982 and 2003), massively used since then.
  - An original classification, based on the combination of 3 criteria:
    - Employment status
    - Occupation or trade (*métier*)
    - Skill
- (Desrosières et Thévenot, 2002 [1982], Desrosières, 2009)

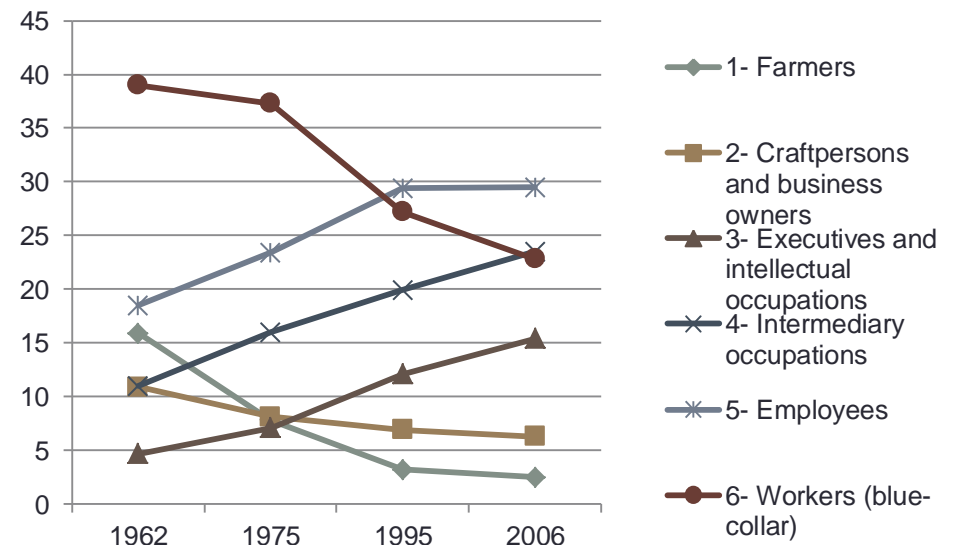
# Socio-occupational categories (PCS) in France

<b>Occupational categories</b> ( <i>Professions et catégories socio-professionnelles, PCS</i> )
1- Farmers ( <i>Agriculteurs exploitants</i> )
2- Craftpersons, small traders and business owners ( <i>Artisans, commerçants, chefs d'entreprise</i> )
3- Managers and intellectual occupations ( <i>Cadres et professions intellectuelles supérieures</i> )
4- Intermediary occupations ( <i>Professions intermédiaires</i> )
5- Employees ( <i>Employés</i> )
6- Workers ( <i>Ouvrier</i> )
7- Retired
8- Unemployed who have never worked and other inactive

# Socio-occupational categories in France (PCS)

Occupational categories ( <i>Professions et catégories socio-professionnelles, PCS</i> )	1962	1975	1995	2006
1- Farmers ( <i>Agriculteurs exploitants</i> )	15,9	7,8	3,2	2,5
2- Craftpersons, small traders and business owners ( <i>Artisans, commerçants, chefs d'entreprise</i> )	10,9	8,1	6,9	6,3
3- Executives and intellectual occupations ( <i>Cadres et professions intellectuelles supérieures</i> )	4,7	7,1	12,1	15,4
4- Intermediary occupations ( <i>Professions intermédiaires</i> )	11	16	19,9	23,5
5- Employees ( <i>Employés</i> )	18,5	23,4	29,4	29,5
6- Workers ( <i>Ouvrier</i> )	39	37,3	27,2	22,8

Source : based on Desrosières Alain and Thévenot Laurent, *Les catégories socioprofessionnelles*, 5<sup>e</sup>éd., Paris, La Découverte « Repères », 2002, tableau p.99 and INSEE data 2006 (<http://www.insee.fr>)



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