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## From social class to inequalities: A shift in the sociological perspective?

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➤ **FROM SOCIAL CLASS TO INEQUALITIES:  
A SHIFT IN THE SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE?**

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# OUTLINE

General purpose: a review of how sociologists have addressed socioeconomic inequalities since the 1960s

Focus on France and the UK

- British and US sociology have addressed class in very different ways. Focus on the British case

1. Introduction
2. The 60s and 70s: social class is mainstream
3. The 80s and 90s: poverty and inequality come to the fore
4. Since the 2000s: new approaches of social class *and* inequalities

Reference paper

Serge Paugam et Marie Plessz, 2019, « Des classes sociales aux inégalités : le regard sociologique s'est-il déplacé? », *Revue européenne des sciences sociales*, 57-2. <http://journals.openedition.org/ress/5550>

# THE PUZZLE

- Cumulative inequalities
  - Positions in the distribution of income, wealth, education, health, life-expectancy, cultural consumption, exposure to environmental nuisances... are correlated
- Life-long inequalities
  - Dynamics of inequalities over the life course: persistence and accumulation of advantages /disadvantages
  - Even comprehensive welfare regimes have not eradicated the cumulative dimension of inequalities (even though they mitigate the level of inequalities)
- Reproduction of inequalities
  - Social mobility
  - Why do people inherit their parent's position?
- How to account for this?
  - It reflects the existence of social classes with (objectively) competing interests and different levels of (political, economic, symbolic) power



# DEFINITIONS

- Define inequality

A difference across persons or groups in the access to material or symbolic goods when there is general agreement that such deprivation is unfair and should be corrected (Galland et Lemel 2018, p7, my translation).

- Then, define social classes

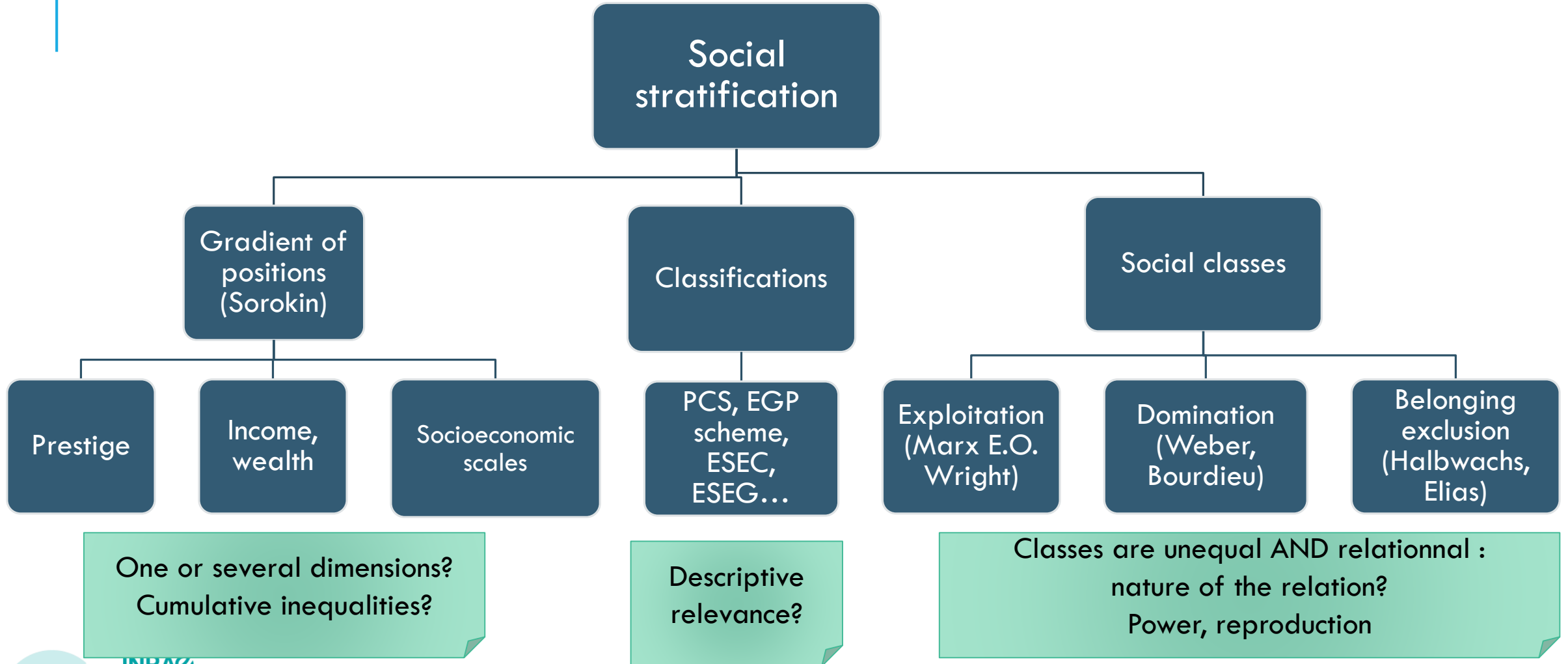
Categories of people :

- which exhibit stronger between-group inequality and lower inside-group heterogeneity
- whose definition and persistence depend on the relationships between one another

Various accounts of social classes

- Work / lifestyle / both?
- Class in itself (class condition) vs class for itself (class consciousness)
- conflict?

# A BIRD'S EYE VIEW OF SOCIAL STRATIFICATION THEORIES



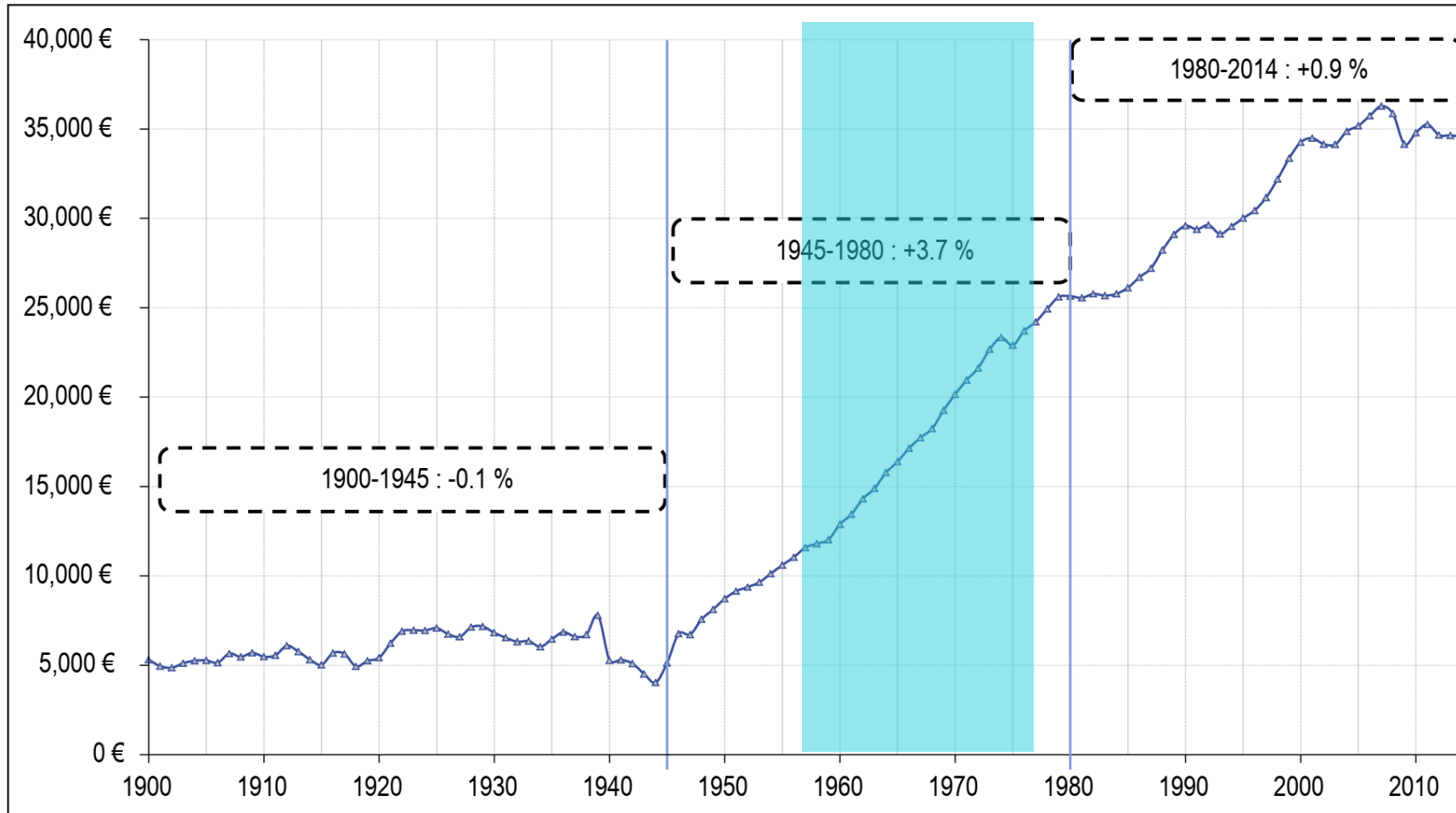
# THE DEATH OF CLASS?

- Several authors have announced *The death of class*
    - Clark & Lipset 1991, Pakulski & Waters 1995
  - In French sociological journal *Sociologie* in 2010-2018: more occurrences of 'inequality' than 'social class(es)'.
    - In Sciences Po library (French and English) rising number of titles containing 'inequality/ies'.
  - Paradox: social class as a concept has thrived in a period of economic growth and declining inequalities
- ➔ What happened? In sociology, in society
- ➔ new ways of thinking class and inequality



# NATIONAL INCOME PER ADULT SINCE 1900, FRANCE

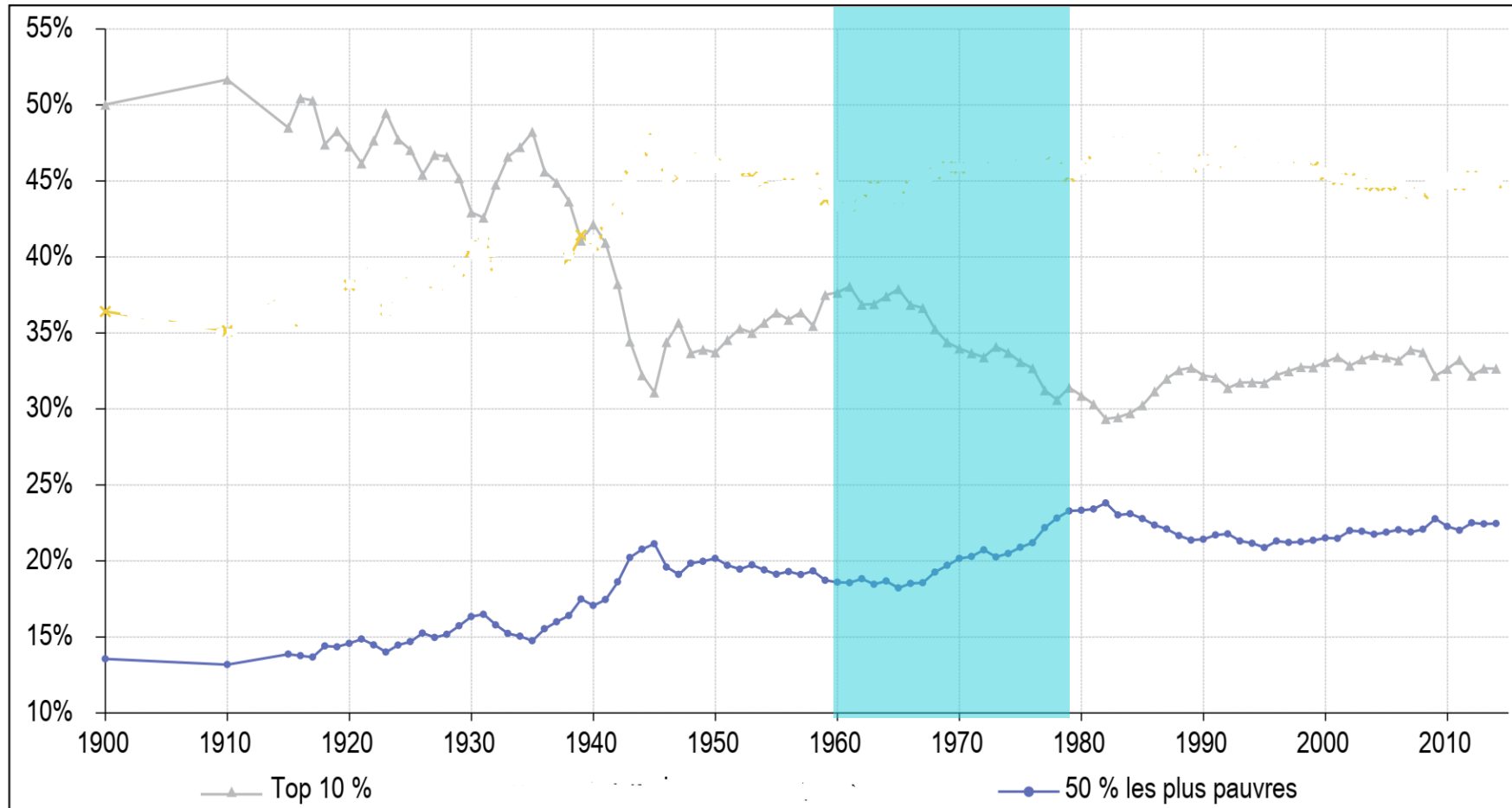
La hausse irrégulière du revenu national par adulte en France, 1900-2014, euros 2014





# INCOME SHARES OF TOP 10% AND LOWEST 50% SINCE 1900, FRANCE

Part des revenus selon le niveau de richesse en France, 1900-2014



# 60s-70s: SOCIAL CLASS IS MAINSTREAM

## ■ Context

- Sociology expands as an academic discipline
- Economic growth, very low unemployment rate, comprehensive welfare regimes

## ■ Sociologists discuss social class rather than inequality

- Famous French sociologists started their career with a social category: Bourdieu (students), Touraine (blue-collar workers), Mendras (farmers), Crozier (clerks)
- Example on educational achievement: Bourdieu & Passeron, *La reproduction* (1970) vs Boudon *L'inégalité des chances* (1973)

## ■ Even when material inequalities reduce, hierarchical relations matter

- UK: Goldthorpe + Lockwood = *The Affluent worker*

Qualitative study of the working class in an expanding industrial area

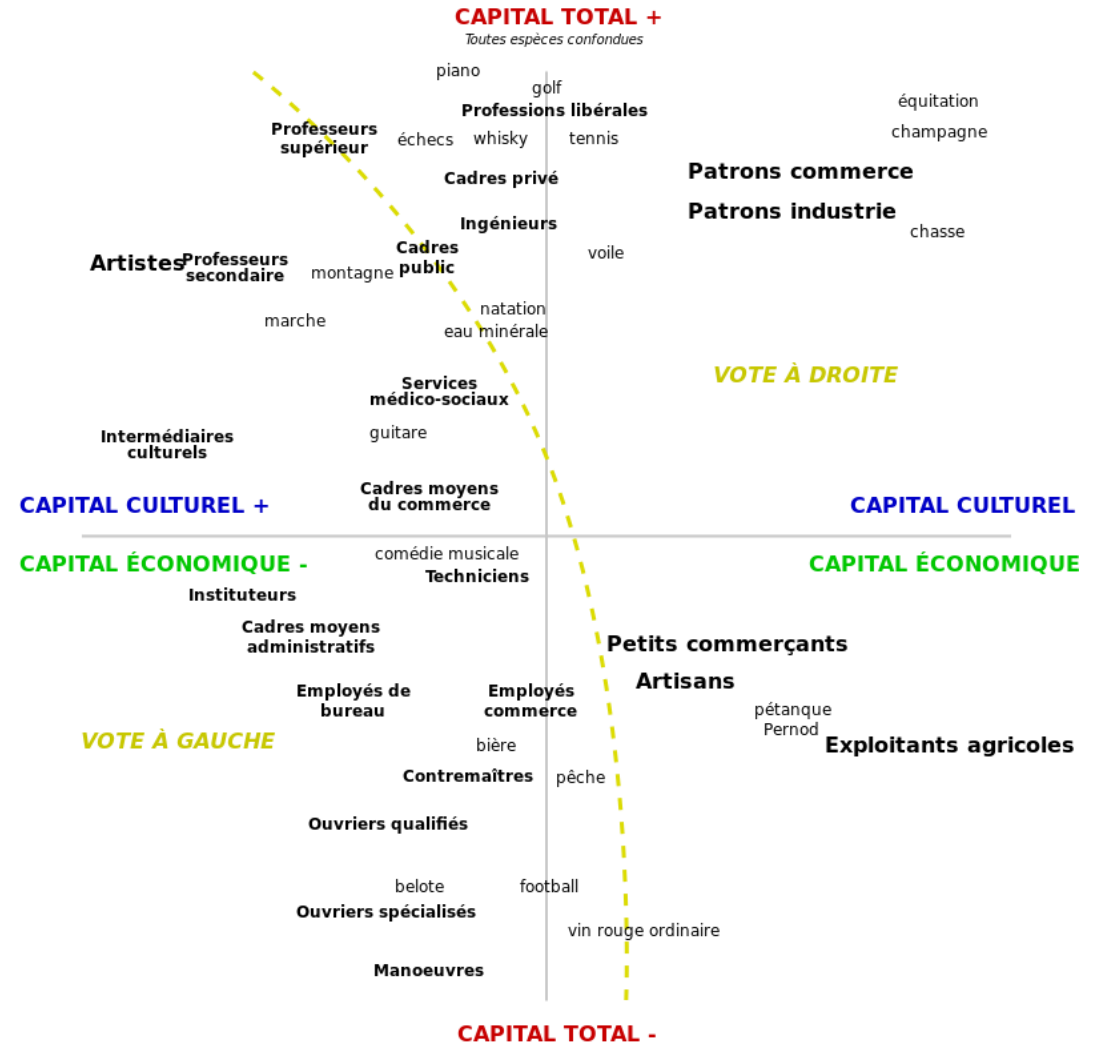
When manual worker wages rise, do manual workers live like bourgeois?

# BOURDIEU: SOCIAL CLASS + HABITUS = SOCIAL REPRODUCTION

Social reproduction = the children achieve social positions similar to their parents'.

Why is it so strong in societies where everyone has equal rights? En France everyone goes to the same schools?

- Social classes have different level of capital, with different mixes of cultural and economic capital.
- Everything we learn from our parents, our folks, our experiences, shapes what we like, expect, or avoid = habitus.
- People inherit material capital AND incorporated cultural capital, which they convert into formal cultural capital more or less successfully.
- Even when there is change, social hierarchy persists. *“Plus ça change, plus c’est la même chose”*
- Factor analysis, French style (*analyse géométrique de données*)



# 80s-90s: POVERTY AND INEQUALITY TO THE FORE

- Context: stagflation, unemployment, rising inequality and declining state welfare, employment destandardisation, postcommunist transitions, weaker unions
- Study of social class changes
  - quantitative and individual-level analyses
  - From factor analysis to regressions and “ceteris paribus”
  - Focus on the transformation of social structure, mobility
- Emerging research on inequality and poverty
  - Poverty – welfare reforms – social exclusion/integration
  - investigate welfare regimes and their crisis : Castel (*La métamorphose de la question sociale*, 1995), Esping-Anderson (*The three worlds of welfare capitalism*, 1990)
- France and UK: different starting points
  - In France: (Un)employment status as a key dimension of social stratification – “*précarité*”
  - In the UK: low wages, poor working conditions – “poor jobs”
    - Goldthorpe and colleagues develop a criterion-based classification (EGP) into social classes. Criterion: contract type

# SOCIAL CLASS IS NO LONGER TAKEN FOR GRANTED

- Research addresses various forms of inequality
  - Employment careers and trajectories
  - Urban segregation
  - Social disqualification, social exclusion
- life-courses and social mobility seem increasingly dependent on a large number of circumstances, that a single social-class indicator cannot capture
  - Social vulnerability is not specific to some very deprived social groups (Beck, *Risk Society*, 1992)

## → 3 views

- Postmodern (death of class): classes no longer exist, people achieve economic conditions that depend on the conjuncture and their individual skills and endowments, and they adopt life-styles based on their personal tastes.
- Mainstream: old-school classes no longer provide a sense of belonging but inequalities and social reproduction remain strong.
- “class is not dead”: class power and class relations have transformed and we need to unravel its new forms

# 2000s-NOW: NEW APPROACHES OF SOCIAL CLASS *AND* INEQUALITIES

How have sociologists made social class relevant in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

- 1) Back to basics: social class as a matter of work *AND* lifestyle
- 2) Inequalities and social integration
- 3) New class schemes
- 4) intersecting class/ gender/age/ race relations



# SOCIAL CLASS AS A MATTER OF WORK *AND* LIFESTYLE

## In the UK

- Class cultures
  - Mike Savage and his team in Manchester
  - Class is first and for all a matter of class culture
  - Revive the research from the 70s in the light of the cultural turn + Bourdieu
- ‘Neo-Weberian’
  - John Goldthorpe and team
  - ‘Neo-Weberian’ (work = class, culture = status)
  - Service relationship vs labour contract
- Hard-core Bourdieusian: Will Atkinson, Bristol
- Lively debates
  - The Great British Class Survey/fiasco : Savage vs Goldthorpe
  - Fights over Bourdieusian heritage: Will Atkinson vs Flemmen on cooking and class

## In France

- Updating working class
  - “classes populaires” (Olivier Schwartz 1998)
  - Routine blue, white and pink collar workers
  - Work : subordinate position
  - Lifestyle : ~~dominated~~ separate culture
- Spurred research on
  - Working class
  - Intermediate positions (Cartier et al, *The France of the Little-Middles* 2016, Bernard on precarious white collars)
  - Elites ( Pinçon Pinçon-Charlot)
- Mixing qualitative and quantitative methods, on work and lifestyle

# INEQUALITIES AND SOCIAL INTEGRATION

Serge Paugam and his team

- categories that are hierarchical, related, but non conflict-laden
- 4 types of social bounds:
  - Filiation
  - Election
  - Work-related [participation organique]
  - Citizenship
- Levels and types of social integration
  - Higher class position <-> stronger social bounds (= higher integration)
  - Spatial inequalities in social integration



# NEW CLASS SCHEMES

While classes are supposedly “dying” and class schemes are subjected to critiques, new class schemes emerge and the debate on their purposes and descriptive power is livelier than ever

- ISCO is not enough for Eurostat
  - ISCO is an occupational classification not a *socio*occupational classification
  - Eurostat felt the need for a socio-something classification
- ESEC
  - Based on the labour contract (Goldthorpe)
  - Deprecated: descriptive power is not good enough in various European countries
- ESEG
  - Inspired from French PCS, but coded from 3 existing variables (French PCS requires 1 page of questions)
  - Hypothesis: Occupation and employment status are predictive of differences in various areas of social life
- Used in Huguée, Spire, Pennissat (see presentation today)
- How to classify dual-earner households? See [Cayouette et al 2019](#)

# INTERSECTING CLASS/ GENDER /RACE... RELATIONS

- In feminist and gender studies
  1. Gender relations are *like* class relations (exploitation, alienation, false consciousness)
  2. Gender relations are *more important* to study than class relations
  3. Gender relations *intersect with* class relations
- Intersectionality:
  - Black and White women do not live the same oppression just because they are women. Their interests differ (Crenshaw 1989).
  - Everyone is located *at the same time* in several power relations, either as dominant or as dominated
  - each *intersection* of such locations creates a different experience, different life chances
  - Policies tend to overlook the heterogeneity among the dominated category.
- In France gender studies, class is a key dimension of these intersecting power relations
  - Along with gender and race/ethnicity. Also age/generation, handicap...
- Power relations are between categories of people
  - underscores the collective and relational dimension of class
  - Mostly qualitative research which did not stem from the field of social stratification
  - Helps think the margins of the labour market



# CONCLUSION

While a lot of sociology today is about inequality, inequality has not replaced social class in the sociology of social stratification

- Inequality is a topic for various fields of sociological research
- Social stratification focuses on the description and explanation of inequalities and their persistence
  - Social class has been an answer, once hegemonic, now more contested
- Various ways of thinking with social class
  - Common ground: differences in individual endowments and strategies are not enough to explain social inequalities
  - Various mixes of work and lifestyle
  - More or less conflict-oriented
  - Connects with other forms of inequalities/power relations (gender, race...)
- Thinking with social class is only possible if empirical tools exist to capture social class: class schemes
  - Harder to use when employment rate is low
  - Collaboration between academics and (supra)national statistical offices

# EXTRA: MAX WEBER'S SOCIAL STRATIFICATION FRAMEWORK

- 3 dimensions : economic, social and political (not shown)
- Social order is the order of honorability, consideration, or contempt
- Economic order is ruled by market relations
  - class position describes the objective and functional position on a market (labour, goods...)
  - The market “knows nothing of honor”
- Status groups try to capture chances of profit, and to exclude new members:
  - Reject the “new rich”
  - Secure chances of profit (monopoly on occupations)
  - create legal barriers (nobility, citizenship)
- Constant tension between status groups and classes, the social order is never reduced to the economic order because status groups constantly try to shield their position from the market mechanisms

