



University of
Salford
MANCHESTER

Symptomatic social science : reflexivity, recognition and redistribution in the Great British class survey

May, TP

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/1467-954X.12288>

Title	Symptomatic social science : reflexivity, recognition and redistribution in the Great British class survey
Authors	May, TP
Type	Article
URL	This version is available at: http://usir.salford.ac.uk/35781/
Published Date	2015

USIR is a digital collection of the research output of the University of Salford. Where copyright permits, full text material held in the repository is made freely available online and can be read, downloaded and copied for non-commercial private study or research purposes. Please check the manuscript for any further copyright restrictions.

For more information, including our policy and submission procedure, please contact the Repository Team at: usir@salford.ac.uk.

APTARA	SORE	sore12288	Dispatch: March 31, 2015	CE: n/a
	Journal	MSP No.	No. of pages: 15	PE: XXXX

Symptomatic social science: reflexivity, recognition and redistribution in the GBCS

Tim May

Abstract

The article examines methodological and theoretical issues related to the GBCS. It acknowledges its importance for the public profile of sociology, whilst arguing that it needs to develop a better sense of what it stands for not only in terms of understanding societal changes, but contributing to human betterment. To achieve this it discusses the role of reflexivity in the GBCS with reference to position and disposition and accounts of its process. It then moves on to examine its normative basis in terms of an 'existential analytics' and suggests a series of ways in which it might advance its insights as the work develops.

Keywords: reflexivity, recognition, redistribution, transformation, methodology

Introduction

We exhibit a strong desire for tangibility: to make something real so that it becomes part of a familiar sense-making process. It then lies beyond our conscious thought and is placed in the realm of the taken-for-granted through a connection with experience. We need this process to navigate our way through the world. We know and shape events, things and relations and believe ourselves to be capable of acting on our environments. We define who we are through a capacity to act and we make claims about the sort of people we are in relation to what we have done and for what reasons: we act and justify our actions to ourselves and others utilizing the symbolic means at our disposal.

Through varying degrees of alignment between social positions, knowledge and being afforded recognition by others, a great deal rests. Chief Executives and senior managers of large organizations move from one to another based upon the value that is attributed to their leadership in terms of what are assumed to be unique qualities of character and experience; political leaders are elected because they extol claims about the world in which we should live and how they will apparently shape it to their rhetorical images; tasks are undertaken, in both public and private lives, where pride is taken in achievements no matter how small and invisible they may seem to others; close friendships

2 are sustained through honesty and reliability and we are able to act because
3 most of what we do is not subject to a close scrutiny whose exercise would lead
4 to an unbearable weight of uncertainty.

5 These practices are reflected in social structures where we find processes
6 of individuation that: ‘form the basis of social evaluations that are the so-
7 cial conditions constitutive of personal experiences of grace and abjection’
8 (Charlesworth, 2000: 285). To bring attention to these can shatter carefully
9 nurtured frameworks of justification for existing states of affairs and provoke
10 strong reactions: nowhere is this more apparent than when a powerful mi-
11 nority are measured against a disadvantaged majority. Here is the clearing in
12 which critical social science operates: between the weight of justificatory prac-
13 tices from those who gain from the causes it exposes and those who carry the
14 consequences of their symptoms. It is into this mix that the GBCS falls. We
15 need to examine the content and dynamics of these processes to further our
16 understanding of the role of social science in society and our dispositions and
17 positions as part of them.

18 This is where the work of Pierre Bourdieu becomes of importance to our
19 theoretical and methodological understandings. He is a key influence on the
20 GBCS (Savage *et al.*, 2013). In his studies we find reflexivity working to produce
21 an improved science, alongside the wish to transform social conditions. No
22 credence is given to the ‘usual somewhat fatuous discourse about “neutrality”’
23 (Bourdieu, 1993: 11), whilst mental states are seen as the embodiment of social
24 divisions. Therefore, the social sciences need to exercise an ‘epistemological
25 vigilance’ over the blurring of the boundaries between everyday opinions and
26 social scientific discourse (Bourdieu *et al.*, 1991) in order that a science of society
27 encompasses ‘both objective regularities and the process of internalization of
28 objectivity’ (Wacquant, 1992: 13).

29 Allowing cultural and social factors into class analysis, along with economic
30 and occupational influences, is a welcome feature of the GBCS. Its aim is to
31 reveal resulting forms of polarization and fragmentation and ‘recognise the
32 ongoing salience of social class divisions in the stratification of British society’
33 (Savage *et al.*, 2013: 28). Bourdieu’s ‘highly influential schema’ (Savage *et al.*,
34 2013: 5) is deployed in recognition that the GBCS alone does not provide
35 for a ‘representative model of class’ (2013: 7). Only by combining its results
36 with a subsequent quota sampled survey conducted by a market and consumer
37 research company (GfK), does a nationally representative model of seven
38 classes emerge.

39 With this explicit debt in mind, I wish to examine some methodological
40 and theoretical issues involved in the GBCS. In the first section I examine the
41 role of reflexivity in the process and focus on the endogenous domain: that
42 is, the ways in which the actions and understandings of researchers contribute
43 to how research practices are constituted. The second section considers how
44 the work has positioned itself in relation to the history of class analysis and
45 suggests some directions in which the connection between objective realities
46 and experiences in the work might be taken. I do so in the spirit of seeking

1 *Tim May*

2 a progressive research agenda in the referential domain of reflexivity: that is,
3 where the production of social scientific accounts meet contexts of reception
4 that seeks to render events, conditions and experiences intelligible.¹

7 **Reflexivity in process**

8
9 Whilst no single initiative can take on board the weight of the world, the GBCS
10 has received a great deal of attention and placed sociology on the media stage.
11 It falls into a deliberative and contested space populated by past understand-
12 ings and present conditions and the forging of possible futures. My interest
13 is in the context of this work in terms of its content. Reflexivity is not about
14 producing a relativism that celebrates context over content, but enables a more
15 rigorous social science. The relations between these require continual scrutiny
16 in order to develop ideas from new experiences and understand the relations
17 and possibilities for change that exist between the production, transmission
18 and reception of social scientific knowledge derived from research (May with
19 Perry, 2011c).

20 Reflexive social science encompasses how researchers submit to critique
21 their ways of thinking about the world not as some act of psychological reduc-
22 tionism, but how presuppositions are built into concepts and practices in order
23 to inform a ‘sociology of sociology’ (Bourdieu, 1990). The reason is not ‘to dis-
24 courage scientific ambition, but to help make it more realistic. By helping the
25 progress of science and thus the growth of knowledge about the social world,
26 *reflexivity makes possible a more responsible politics*, both inside and outside
27 of academia’ (Bourdieu in Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 194; original italics).

28 The flux and seeming chaos of the world is turned into explanatory frame-
29 works whose components are recognized within the methodological and the-
30 oretical canons of established disciplinary gazes. How this occurs, for what
31 reasons and with what effects, constitutes what it means to think and act within
32 a discipline. To guard against the reproduction of dominant ideas, a reflexive
33 vigilance is required to construct and retain a critical-scientific analysis. What
34 are taken to be useful for understanding the objects of inquiry are seldom
35 turned back upon those who deploy them, hence the ‘oxymoron of *epistemic*
36 *doxa*’ (Bourdieu, 1998: 129; original emphasis).

37 Justifying practices according to a method or following a rule makes sense
38 when called upon to represent our practices *as if* in conformity to a rule or
39 method. This was apparent in earlier representations of the GBCS (Savage
40 *et al.*, 2013). In Bourdieu’s overall approach this does not apply because it as-
41 sumes an unproblematic shift from implicit dispositions to explicit justifications
42 disguised as acts of objectification that are inevitably partial: ‘the real principle
43 of scientific practices is a system of largely unconscious, transposable, genera-
44 tive dispositions, which tends to generalize itself’ (Bourdieu, 2004: 41). In the
45 scientific field the ‘irenic vision’ of collaborative exchanges within normative
46 ideals bends and breaks in the face of reality: ‘what one observes are struggles,

2 sometimes ferocious ones, and competitions within structures of domination'
3 (2004: 45).

4 In terms of the importance of reflexive learning, an account of the origins and
5 process of the GBCS is welcome (Devine and Snee, **this volume**). Noting that
6 the purpose of the GBCS was not just to analyse, but 'generate debate' about
7 class in Britain and 'direct attention to the complex strategies of privileged
8 agents in their accumulation of capitals' (Savage, **this volume**), what were the
9 conversations that informed understandings and orientations among the team?
10 What was the purpose of their engagement and what was expected to happen
11 as a result? In the age of impacts and assumptions regarding the connection
12 between knowledge and action, along with academic reputations and careers,
13 how did the original contact between the BBC and the team occur and for what
14 reasons?

15 Reading this account did not illuminate me concerning a crossing from
16 the 'scholastic frontier' (Bourdieu, 2000: 58). Is it the case, for example, that
17 collaborations with GfK were 'pragmatic issues' when the administration of this
18 work is so important to understanding the cross-over between how people see
19 themselves against the categories then deployed to understand their position
20 in society? That process clearly relates to respondent 'disidentification' about
21 which we would have hoped to hear more. The role of GfK is not subjected to
22 a critical analysis which as Bourdieu put it:

24 Reflecting on the practices of polling organizations, together with analysis of condi-
25 tions of access to the scholastic posture, helped me greatly to become aware of the
26 effects of the gap between the intention of the questioner and the extrascholastic
27 preoccupations of the respondents, which is the source of the distortions performed
28 by the self-blind questioning of the doxosophers (2000: 59).

30 Here is a basis to populate the critical clearing and deploy concepts to
31 understand class which is 'fundamentally about politics' (**Savage, this** volume).
32 Not only does this beg questions concerning the process, perspectives and
33 negotiations that are missing from this account, but perhaps about how this
34 work was framed when politics itself begins with the 'denunciation of a tacit
35 adherence to the established order' (Bourdieu, 1992: 127).

36 Negotiations with the media are fraught with issues and the BBC is hardly
37 immune to these. We know, for example, that journalists tend to refer to sci-
38 entists in terms of 'reported' findings, as opposed to 'writings'. The former
39 carries connotations of detachment, with the latter signifying a more attached,
40 human element to its production process. Writing about the media and the
41 conservative revolution, Bourdieu notes: 'Even words are fashioned so as to
42 prevent our speaking about the world such as it is' (2008: 331). How social
43 scientists seek impact for their work in the media and the forms of language
44 that are used in the process enriches our understanding. Tactics and strate-
45 gies are deployed that include: priming ('how' the public sees issues), media-
46 tion (accepted vocabularies) and gate-keeping (what can and cannot be said)

1 *Tim May*

2 (Bastow *et al.*, 2014: 222). However, an account of these issues and their link
3 to the analysis itself is not presently forthcoming.

4 Sources of continuity in practice to negotiate and mediate these pressures
5 derive from the institutional conditions that enable the scientific gaze. This
6 is where universities and the position of the team within them become of
7 analytic importance. Varying degrees of 'epistemic permeability' inform how
8 practitioners can draw boundaries around particular phenomena and lay claim
9 to its explanation without being seduced by the distorting effect of powerful,
10 external interests (May with Perry, 2011c). Forms of knowing become the
11 province of particular groups enabling them to constitute a separation and
12 control between production and other elements in the knowledge production-
13 reception process. What are the influencing factors? If dealing with the media,
14 these relate to the capability to keep the justification *for* research and the
15 application *of* research, separate. These conditions include: political economy
16 of research funding; institutional contexts of knowledge production; attributed
17 value afforded to the work by public and/or elite audiences; operating norms
18 within a research community as to what counts as good work; the organization
19 and power of a professional group to operate closure around the means of
20 production and the existence of intermediary organizations that work to apply
21 the results of research in the production-transmission-reception-application
22 process.

23 Here we have an instance of a powerful corporation embarking on a novel
24 piece of work where boundaries are inevitably questioned with consequences
25 for the process itself. Justification and application become blurred accord-
26 ing to attributed values of the work: the BBC for sponsoring it according
27 to some idea of public interest and academics according to their standing
28 in the field. What we have are points of view, but not the 'point of view
29 on points of view' (Bourdieu, 2000: 224). Elites with the power to exercise
30 their will over others and determine how the outcome will be evaluated can
31 find the justifications for their actions in a 'scientific practice' that relieves
32 them of responsibility. Resistance to this process is more or less success-
33 ful according to the position of a discipline within larger institutional pro-
34 cesses that are not normally part of the conscious elements of the work of its
35 practitioners.

36 If we turn to a reflexive analysis of these institutional positions, what were
37 the different pressures (time, changes of personnel, negotiations, communi-
38 cations in terms of consistency, coherence, etc.), particularly in terms of the
39 absence of funding for the academics involved and needing to 'fit in' with other
40 commitments? Here, there is little in the way of illumination. How time was
41 negotiated in institutional contexts given different positions and the content of
42 those negotiations in terms of expectation of impact/public engagement and
43 symbolic advance in the field is a core part of methodological reflexivity. These
44 are the contexts of the social organization of this work that informs the content
45 of its practice.

46

2 Here we can perhaps turn for analytic illumination to the work of the GBCS
3 and the role of elite universities. In view of the elitist retrenchment taking place
4 in Higher Education within the forward march of neoliberalism, such issues
5 are becoming ever more important for social scientific production. After all:
6 ‘there are many intellectuals who call the world into question, but there are
7 very few intellectuals who call the intellectual world into question’ (Bourdieu,
8 2007: 23). By taking such a reflexive route we may find ‘uneasy parallels’ along
9 with possibilities for improved critically engaged practices (May with Perry,
10 2011c; May and Perry, 2013a). What we find is a focus on the background and
11 trajectories of those who travel *through* elite universities but not those who
12 remain *within* them (Wakeling and Savage, this volume).

13 A reflexive vigilance takes account of the ways in which elite studies reflect
14 back on the institutions from which the analyses are derived and ask to what
15 extent they too are subject to the same pressures and with what consequences
16 for knowledge production? Do they not contain the very elites who are the
17 subject of the analysis itself? The average household income in Britain is
18 £23,000 per annum and a couple with no children who earn £160,000 per
19 year fall into the top 1 per cent. They earn only half of what is the mean
20 average household income of that group in the UK (Dorling, 2014)! With
21 the salaries of Vice Chancellors and their associated management teams of
22 varying titles reaching the levels they are now, accompanied by justifications
23 concerning competitive recruitment that have been mobilized by the banking
24 sector, it is time to ask questions about this neoliberal gamble with universities
25 (McGettigan, 2013) and its relationship to action, knowledge and advantage.
26 We cannot assume the existence of autonomy to produce social science; it is ‘a
27 historical conquest, endlessly having to be undertaken’ (Bourdieu, 2004: 47).

28 Epistemic boundaries become more difficult to maintain in the face of ne-
29 oliberal pressures on universities with implications for forms of engagement
30 (May and Perry, 2013b). Engagement and impacts are regarded as the symbolic
31 means to measure the status of its products and this means that the vigilance
32 necessary to provide for a distinctive gaze can be easily compromised. There
33 are all sorts of moves to avoid these issues and they exist across all dimensions
34 of research from the humanities, through to the social and physical sciences.
35 We can easily end up with the symptoms of this form of objectification being:
36 ‘the blank surface on the back of the skull that has become *indistinguishable*
37 from the purely external’ (Brunkhorst, 1996: 98; original italics).

38 All too easily we can enter the terrain of antiseptic analysis that has nothing
39 to say of the issues of the world and that would be surprising given past wishes
40 not to gloss over distinctiveness in the name of generalization (Savage *et al.*,
41 2005). In the next section of this article, therefore, attention is turned towards
42 issues associated with the content of the GBCS in relation to experience and
43 analysis. In particular, I wish to draw attention to areas that I believe are fertile
44 for it to engage with in the spirit of seeking greater insight into a politically
45 contested terrain; contested, we should remember, because the stakes matter
46 to those who benefit from the existing state of affairs.

1 *Tim May*

2 **In the spirit of critique and transformation**

3

4 The above processes all seek a refinement of methodological insight through
5 the endogenous domain of practice, but it should not easily split itself off
6 from, nor spill over into, the referential realm. If we take these boundaries
7 seriously, experience suggests it is not easy to achieve once it is recognized to
8 exist and taken into practice in a conscious manner that seeks to overcome
9 the individualism in academia (May and Perry, 2013c; Perry and May, 2015).
10 Here we find an ambivalence in the missing middle between the production
11 and reception of social scientific knowledge (May, 2011; Perry and May, 2010).
12 Such ambivalence can be avoided through a focus on engagement within the
13 endogenous conditions set by a discipline. At one level that is a condition of
14 a mature social scientific discipline. At another: 'Any politics that ignores the
15 probable that it seeks to prevent is exposed to the risk of collaborating to
16 bring it about despite itself; whereas a science that reveals the probable has at
17 the least the virtue of disclosing the function of *laissez-faire*' (Bourdieu, 2008:
18 111).

19 As it currently stands, the GBCS is a science of the probable. To move into
20 the realm of the critical there is an issue: 'Social regularities present themselves
21 as probable chains of events that can only be combated, if this is deemed
22 necessary, on condition of their being recognized' (Bourdieu, 2008: 195). From
23 the point of view of social scientific analysis, forms of recognition start with
24 the analytic frames that are used by researchers. These lie within domains
25 of creativity within cultures of inquiry that draw upon and seek to transcend
26 established attempts at representing social reality. The success of these falls
27 within the realm of epistemic cultures where particular forms of judgement
28 are found (Lamont, 2009). The potential for transformation, however, lies
29 within a more general domain of reception and how works are taken up as
30 part of the attempts through which society seeks to understand itself and its
31 possible futures. In the tension between these we find the potential to develop
32 Bourdieu's 'existential analytics' (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1993).

33 To achieve a critical practice means more than differentiating between the
34 'noise' and the 'signal' (Silver, 2013). In the history of class analysis, one means
35 has been to allude to pre-theoretical phenomena as a constant. In the case of
36 particular variants of Marxist class analysis this concerns 'interest' as residing
37 in the working class. Therefore, whilst the noise of the symptoms of capitalism
38 grows ever louder through its insatiable appetite for profit, causal continuity
39 in scientific gaze is enabled by having a basis for comparison over time and
40 critical intent with an alignment of interest. However, the idea of interest as
41 somehow unmediated by predominant normative frameworks does not seem
42 to be a basis for critique unless, of course, it is assumed to arise in an intellectual
43 class who are supposedly free from such influences. As indicated in the first
44 part of this article, this is not a tenable position. This begs questions concerning
45 the possibility for critique that is also sensitive to change.

46

1
2 In Bourdieu's work, sensitivity to historical change is accompanied by the
3 view: 'It is only by being scientific, in other words revealing the hidden . . . that
4 sociology has a critical effect' (Bourdieu, 2008: 69). To reveal the hidden means
5 to engage in class analysis in a manner that does not accord with dominant
6 justifications. It is one thing to describe patterns of cultural value, it is quite
7 another to question those in the name of transforming the very conditions
8 that produce them. With the latter, the hidden becomes revelatory in some
9 way due to uncovering elements in society that have not been viewed before
10 or are reframed deploying explanatory resources. We know that practices of
11 representation contain a set of implicit values that have consequences for how
12 groups are seen in contemporary capitalism (Skeggs, 2004). There is a need
13 to recognize aims that are in tension when operating in the political terrain of
14 class analysis: to analyse positions objectively, understand points of view and
15 do so in a manner that does not set up the 'objectivising distance that reduces
16 the individual to a specimen in a display case' (Bourdieu in Bourdieu *et al.*,
17 1999: 2).

18 In the critical clearing there is a responsibility to deploy concepts that have
19 value for those to whom they are meant to apply. They create experiential
20 spaces that cannot simply be dismissed by those who have the power to judge
21 others: 'The concept of cultural capital, for instance, shifts power and agency
22 back into the hands of those who have restricted access to it. It helps explain
23 why some groups are not in the position to formulate academic concepts'
24 (Skeggs, 1997: 166). It may be accepted that a prior deficit of class analysis
25 resided in its reliance upon an 'industrial paradigm' (Savage, this volume) that
26 did not take account of financial and corporate elites in conceptually adequate
27 ways. However, just who is this work for and what is it trying to achieve given
28 recognition that it resides in a politically contested terrain?

29 It is difficult to know where the GBCS stands. The current tendency is to
30 engage in comparison with past approaches in order to formulate its place
31 in the history of class analysis. However, these past forms of analyses often
32 had explicit normative aims. Whilst the organized working class provided a
33 foil on which capitalism could be occasionally blunted and concessions drawn,
34 the new spirit of capitalism is said to undermine these defences (Boltanski
35 and Chiapello, 2005). So when it comes to understanding the emergence of
36 a supra-managerial class, we can see the growing significance of systems of
37 impersonal possession from the late twentieth century where control now rests
38 with financial institutions, whilst property-holders find ever greater means of
39 diversifying their investments (Scott, 1997). What does this mean for power
40 and how we resist and transform it? Bourdieu approvingly quotes Spinoza's
41 observation that 'true ideas bear no intrinsic force', but sociologists can engage
42 in debates about the role that they can play in these new divisions of labour. In
43 so doing they can provide: 'a *visible and sensible* form to the *invisible but sci-*
44 *entifically predictable* consequences of political measures inspired by neoliberal
45 ideology' (Bourdieu, 2010: 185; original italics).
46

1 *Tim May*

2 With attention oriented towards disciplinary standing, practitioners can be
3 relieved of reflexivity and refer to the objects of their attention over the course
4 of a particular history. In the case of the Great British Class Survey (GBCS),
5 this is manifest through reference to the NS-SEC model (see Mills, **this vol-**
6 **ume**). That model is not seen to be superseded by the analytic approach of
7 the GBCS, but complemented (**Devine and Snee**, this volume; **Savage**, this
8 volume; Savage *et al.*, 2013). In the previous model we find a motivation to
9 explain the persistence of symptoms over time whose ‘major task’: ‘must be
10 seen as that of accounting for the long-term stability of class relations and as-
11 sociated inequalities – for, in effect, their inherent self-maintaining properties’
12 (Goldthorpe, 2000: 181).

13 Whilst John Goldthorpe and his associates are credited with innovative
14 studies on social mobility, the so-called ‘problem of the proletariat’ in studies
15 of class is compared to those who have been inspired by Bourdieu. Here we
16 find an emphasis upon divisions within occupational classes that leads to dif-
17 ferentiation between professional-executive and middle and lower managers
18 (**Savage**, this volume). Elite studies need to be located in class analysis *with* an
19 emphasis upon social and cultural capital. Yet does this not point to a major
20 deficit in the overall approach? For instance, in terms of the deployment of rational
21 action theories, Bourdieu found these to be symptomatic of ‘deductivist
22 epistemologies’, ‘intellectualist philosophies’ and ‘atomistic’ and ‘discontinuist’
23 in furnishing the idea of a ‘perfect market’ (2005: 220–221).

24 Clarification arises in the endogenous realm, but can easily spill over into the
25 idea of resolution in the referential domain. In the referential domain engage-
26 ment and the possibility of transformation arises. Here is a direct confrontation
27 with technocracy and its media manifestations that seek to disguise politics. A
28 knowledge that is limited and abstracted can meet one that is: ‘more respectful
29 of human beings and the realities which confront them’ (Bourdieu, 2010: 107).
30 In this space of possibility what we witness are celebrations of innovative flu-
31 idity with indifference to consequence that often find justification in antiseptic
32 scientism. Neoliberal doctrine has no place for government in the conduct of
33 firms, whereas business being influential in the conduct of government seems
34 perfectly permissible. Chief executives of large companies can rely on finan-
35 cialization as an intermediary strategy to justify their activities (Savage and
36 Williams, 2008; Froud *et al.*, 2006) which leaves the reproduction of advantage
37 without any apparent link to performance (Hildyard, 2014).

38 If the symptom of which politics speaks in the clearing occupied by the GBCS
39 is the need to change lines of domination to bring voices and recognition to
40 those who are not in the economic mainstream, it hits a serious impediment:
41 exploitation. Politics concerns the denunciation of the concrete other, embod-
42 ied as a representative of a class whose interests are dominant. Running under
43 this practice is a concern with affirmation of recognition that can leave the
44 transformation of redistribution unaffected (Fraser and Honneth, 2003). If the
45 struggle is then over cultural goods, we would expect the forward march of
46 investment by the wealthy to be in assets, not production as such and against

the background of constant attempts to reduce the barriers of distance and movement in capitalist development (Harvey, 2010).

So now we have the 'cultural industries'. These form part of the desire for urban growth with a new set of elites operating as its gatekeepers in the hope of providing sufficient attraction to places for inward investment, with scientific activity operating in a similar manner (May and Perry, 2011b). Whilst seeking to understand how the practices of this accelerated form of capitalism is (dis)organized in the name of an undefined future and a permanent struggle for ever greater concentrations of wealth, we also need to connect it to the consequences it produces: precarious employment and increasing inequality. These are symptoms of conditions where experiences of being upwardly mobile are less frequent and downwardly mobile more common (Bukodi *et al.*, 2014), with the result that: 'It may be harder to change places in a society where the rungs of a ladder are further apart' (Hills, 2009: 323).

When thinking about inequality without a connection to class, Mike Savage refers to a tendency to 'moralize'. His direction of interest is again towards other studies, yet this is very much alive in the constitution of class and often reduced to an exchange-value as groups compete from their place in the social structure. In the analysis of class, morality does need attention (Skeggs, 2004) as well as how, in general, it links with power (Sayer, 2011). The terrain should not be passed over to those who base it on self-interest with an all-pervasive idea of who we are and thus what we must become. As Zygmunt Bauman argues, we can easily enter into the terrain of adiaphorization as exemption from the realm of moral evaluation: 'A consumerist attitude may lubricate the wheels of the economy; it sprinkles sand into the bearings of morality' (Bauman in Bauman and Donskis, 2013: 15).

Those who are the economic beneficiaries of this consumerism may well exhibit geographical patterns in terms of their location (Cunningham and Savage, this volume). In terms of position, however, one can be 'in' but not 'of', society and that requires an understanding of the dimension of belonging that, again, was apparent in earlier work (Savage *et al.*, 2005). They are neither of, nor in, society, but exist over it and through it. It is not necessary to live with the consequences of one's actions for these can be anaesthetized through acts of cognitive dissonance ably supplied by justifications of entrepreneurship, entitlement and 'trickle down' or 'radiating out'. Social withdrawal into safe and homogenous communities, or even islands, guarded by private security organization, is another route through which to separate oneself from the world. For those concerned with the future and the ethics through which we live, this is a form of play that does not release human dignity, but excludes it by separating itself off from a relation to the real that defines us (Jonas, 1984).

Given the difficulty of access and researching elites and the current data produced by the GBCS, an understanding of the dynamics of these processes is likely to remain within a quantitative-extensive dimension of social research. Therefore, it will be a positive development to complement this work with qualitative research. That means the GBCS is less likely to remain at the

1 *Tim May*

2 level of methodological perspectivism and move into the terrain of engaged
3 critique in the spirit of Bourdieu's ethos as a necessary guard against repeating
4 generally accepted reasons for structural symptoms. A fusion of internalist and
5 externalist perspectives can put it within a place in which it is content neither
6 with a reflection of people's views on social life, nor an objectification born of
7 distance. These need holding together: 'the point of view of the agents who
8 are caught up in the object and the point of view on this point of view which
9 the work of analysis enables one to reach by relating position-takings to the
10 positions from which they are taken' (Bourdieu, 2000: 189).

11 That stage has yet to be reached. When it comes, the GBCS cannot escape an
12 inevitable outcome where we can expect to see: 'discoveries swept aside as trivial
13 observations that have been known for all eternity, and violently contested,
14 by the same people, as notorious errors with no other basis than polemical
15 malevolence or envious resentment' (Bourdieu, 2000: 190). The fusion may
16 be obtained through a concern with the dimensions of both recognition and
17 redistribution which would enable a link with social suffering, moral discontent
18 and injustice in the critical clearing (Fraser and Honneth, 2003). It is Pierre
19 Bourdieu's enduring legacy to understand how economic and political elites
20 seek a monopoly on cultural traditions with a resulting effect on what feelings
21 of social injustice are then manifest and recognized as being legitimate. Whilst
22 any illumination of these matters requires social research, it cannot escape
23 the point that: 'all investigations of this kind are informed, via categories and
24 criteria of relevance, by a theoretical pre-understanding' (Honneth in Fraser
25 and Honneth, 2003: 126).

26 The representations of this analysis are inputs into the forms of reception
27 through which we seek to understand ourselves. To be critical, the GBCS need
28 to be more than a reflection of forms, but a contribution informing transformation.
29 When it comes to this possibility it is not just instituted in the dimension of
30 representation, but of 'intention' and 'affect' (Castoriadis, 1991). If representation
31 is content to remain at the level of a probabilistic science, it is inadequate
32 without reference to the affects that are part of social life: that is, the ways we
33 live with ourselves and the world. This is the intensive-qualitative dimension
34 that checks against the theoretical imputation of motives and reasons that people
35 deploy in their everyday lives. To this we add the 'intentional vectors': the
36 push and drive of society that is not about conservation, but a past-present that
37 contains within it the seeds of a future that is being fashioned now. Here we
38 find a critical clearing of possibility: 'which invests with meaning the biggest
39 unknown of all: that which is not yet but will be, the future' (Castoriadis, 1991:
40 154).

41 **Summary**

42
43
44 If universities and the social science that is practised within them are to continue
45 to be distinctive sites of critical knowledge production that are not regularly
46 produced in other places, practices require a reflexive scrutiny and that means

Symptomatic social science: reflexivity, recognition and redistribution in the GBCS

more open dialogues about how work is done *and* what is studied. These methodological issues need spaces that should not be exceptional, but more routine in order that we can refine practices and know their limitations, as well as strengths. Fields of endeavour have always contained tensions, but pressures upon them are intensifying in the name of narrowly constituted neoliberal ideas. In terms of class analysis, where one is positioned is part of the possibilities that are held open for the future. We can learn in better ways from each other. We can put aside the conventions of method and open up our methodological imaginations to factors that are too often hidden by selective accounts of the research process. Symptomatic social science is not just the confusion of effects with seeking to establish causes, but a process of co-optation to which we are all subject that should be open to analysis. Academic careers are made on the back of reproducing conventional wisdom with neologisms which are attributed with insight by those who benefit from them.

The GBCS is inspired by the work of Pierre Bourdieu and its team need to ask just how far they intend to take his practices on board. We cannot doubt the sincerity with which he sought to resist the symptom and exercise a reflexive vigilance in order that the epistemic boundaries of social scientific practices remains as clear as possible. That is difficult to maintain when public profiles and impacts are regarded as symbolic means to measure the status of disciplinary products. The vigilance necessary for distinction and the validity upon which its interventions into public debates rest, can be compromised in the desire to achieve this status. We all have a responsibility to seek to create the practical conditions in which the 'collective intellectual' (Bourdieu, 2010) can function as effectively as possible and some have better positions in which to try and achieve that.

I have suggested that issues of reflexivity, recognition and redistribution are important in the development of the GBCS and its critical potential as an example of existential analytics in action. In the process a two-stage analysis is implied between internalist and externalist approaches. First, there is an analysis of the relations that exist between identity, experience and actuality within class relations. Taking the GBCS forward in a complementary intensive-qualitative phase would therefore be welcomed. Second, there is a probabilistic analysis that reveals the class effects of contemporary society and the ambivalences and oscillations that inform our actions and aspirations. These hold out the possibilities for change. Engagement is more than pointing out the deficits of other approaches and traditions. It requires the GBCS to formulate its own position more clearly and link with current issues of injustice and social suffering and move beyond the current constraints on potentiality imposed by existing configurations of class.

University of Salford

1 *Tim May*2 **Acknowledgements**

3
4 Thanks to Bev Skeggs for her helpful insights and to the anonymous reviewers for comments on
5 an earlier draft of this article. Thanks also to Beth Perry with whom I have worked for many
6 different funders in the last 12 years and these experiences have enabled the development of ideas
7 on scientific practices.

8
9
10 **Note**

11
12 1 For discussions of endogenous and referential reflexivity and their implications for the practice
13 of social research please see: May (1998, 1999, 2005, 2006, 2011); May and Perry (2011a); May
14 with Perry (2011c).

15
16 **References**

- 17
18 Bastow, S., Dunleavy, P. and Tinkler, J., (2014), *The Impact of the Social Sciences: How Academics
19 and their Research Make a Difference*, London: Sage.
20 Bauman, Z. and Donskis, L., (2013), *Moral Blindness: The Loss of Sensitivity in Liquid Modernity*,
21 Cambridge: Polity Press.
22 Boltanski, L. and Chiapello, E., (2005), *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. G. Elliott, London:
23 Verso.
24 Bourdieu, P., (1990), *In Other Words: Essays towards a Reflexive Sociology*, trans. M. Adamson,
25 Cambridge: Polity Press.
26 Bourdieu, P., (1992), *Language and Symbolic Power*, ed. and intro. J. Thompson, trans. G. Ray-
27 mond and M. Adamson, Cambridge: Polity Press.
28 Bourdieu, P., (1993), *Sociology in Question*, trans. R. Nice, London: Sage.
29 Bourdieu, P., (1998), *Acts of Resistance: Against the New Myths of our Time*, trans. R. Nice,
30 Cambridge: Polity Press.
31 Bourdieu, P., (2000), *Pascalian Meditations*, trans. R. Nice, Cambridge: Polity Press.
32 Bourdieu, P., (2004), *Science of Science and Reflexivity*, trans. R. Nice, Cambridge: Polity Press.
33 Bourdieu, P., (2005), *The Social Structures of the Economy*, trans. C. Turner, Cambridge: Polity
34 Press.
35 Bourdieu, P., (2007), *Sketch for a Self Analysis*, trans. R. Nice. Originally published in 2004 as
36 *Esquisse pour une auto-analyse*, Cambridge: Polity Press.
37 Bourdieu, P., (2008), *Political Interventions: Social Science and Political Action*. Texts selected and
38 introduced by F. Poupeau and T. Discepolo, trans. D. Fernbach, London: Verso.
39 Bourdieu, P., (2010), *Sociology Is a Martial Art: Political Writings by Pierre Bourdieu*, ed. G.
40 Sapiro, trans. P. P. Ferguson, R. Nice and L. Wacquant, New York: The New Press.
41 Bourdieu, P. et al., (1999), *The Weight of the World: Social Suffering in Contemporary Society*,
42 trans. P. P. Ferguson, Cambridge: Polity Press.
43 Bourdieu, P., Chamboredon, J.-C. and Passeron, J.-C., (1991), *The Craft of Sociology: Epistemo-
44 logical Preliminaries*, ed. B. Kraus, trans. R. Nice, New York: Walter de Gruyter.
45 Bourdieu, P. and Wacquant, L. J., (1992), *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, Cambridge: Polity
46 Press.
47 Brunkhorst, H., (1996), 'Critical theory and empirical research', in D. Rasmussen (ed.), *Handbook
48 of Critical Theory*, Oxford: Blackwell.
49 Bukodi, E., Goldthorpe, J. H., Waller, L. and Kuha, J., (2014), 'The mobility problem in Britain:
50 new findings from the analysis of birth cohort data'. *British Journal of Sociology*, published
51 online at: <http://www.lse.ac.uk/BJS/home.aspx>

1 *Symptomatic social science: reflexivity, recognition and redistribution in the GBCS*

- 2 Castoriadis, C., (1991), *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy: Essays in Political Philosophy*, ed. D. A.
3 Curtis, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- 4 Charlesworth, S., (2000), *A Phenomenology of Working Class Experience*, Cambridge: Cambridge
5 University Press.
- 6 Dorling, D., (2014), *Inequality and the 1%*, London: Verso.
- 7 Dreyfus, H. and Rabinow, P., (1993), 'Can there be a science of existential structure and social
8 meaning?', in C. Calhoun, E. LiPuma and M. Postone (eds), *Bourdieu: Critical Perspectives*,
9 Cambridge: Polity Press.
- 10 Fraser, N. and Honneth, A., (2003), *Redistribution or Recognition: A Political-Philosophical Ex-*
11 *change*, London: Verso.
- 12 Froud, J., Johal, S., Leaver, A. and Williams, K., (2006), *Financialization and Strategy: Narrative*
13 *and Numbers*, Abingdon, Oxford: Routledge.
- 14 Goldthorpe, J. H., (2000), *On Sociology: Numbers, Narratives, and the Integration of Research and*
15 *Theory*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- 16 Harvey, D., (2010), *The Enigma of Capital and the Crisis of Capitalism*, London: Profile Books.
- 17 Hildyard, L., (2014), 'Pay at the top has become a self-enriching racket', available at:
18 <http://leftfootforward.org/2014/10/pay-at-the-top-has-become-a-self-enriching-racket/>
- 19 Hills, J., (2009), 'Future pressures: intergenerational links, wealth, demography and sustainability',
20 in J. Hills, T. Sefton and K. Steward (eds), *Towards a More Equal Society? Poverty, Inequality*
21 *and Policy since 1997*, Bristol: Policy Press.
- 22 Jonas, H., (1984), *The Imperative of Responsibility: In Search of an Ethics for the Technological*
23 *Age*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- 24 Lamont, M., (2009), *How Professors Think: Inside the Curious World of Academic Judgement*,
25 Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- 26 May, T., (1998), 'Reflexivity in the age of reconstructive social science', *International Journal of*
27 *Social Research Methodology: Theory and Practice*, 1 (1): 7–24.
- 28 May, T., (1999), 'Reflexivity and sociological practice', *Sociological Research Online*, Special
29 Section on 'The Future of Sociology', 4 (3), available at: <http://www.socresonline.org.uk/socresonline/4/3/may.html>
- 30 May, T., (2005), 'Transformations in academic production: context, content and consequences',
31 *European Journal of Social Theory*, 8 (2): 193–209.
- 32 May, T., (2006), 'The missing middle in methodology: occupation cultures and institutional condi-
- 33 tions', *Methodological Innovations Online*, 1 (1), available at: www.methodologicalinnovations.org
- 34 May, T., (2011), 'Urban knowledge arenas: dynamics, tensions and potentials', *International Jour-*
35 *nal of Knowledge-Based Development*, 2 (2): 132–147.
- 36 May, T. and Perry, B., (2011a), 'Urban research in the knowledge economy: content, context and
37 outlook', *Built Environment*, 37 (3): 352–367.
- 38 May, T. and Perry, B., (2011b), 'Contours and conflicts in scale: science, knowledge and urban
39 development', *Local Economy*, 26 (8): 715–720.
- 40 May, T. with Perry, B., (2011c), *Social Research and Reflexivity: Content, Consequences and Con-*
41 *text*, London: Sage.
- 42 May, T. and Perry, B., (2013a), 'Universities, reflexivity and critique: uneasy parallels in practice',
43 *Policy Futures in Education*, 11 (5): 505–514.
- 44 May, T. and Perry, B., (2013b), 'Translation, insulation and mediation: the shifting sands of univer-
- 45 sity life', in P. Benneworth (ed.), *Universities Engagement with Socially Excluded Communities*,
46 Dordrecht: Springer.
- 47 May, T. and Perry, B., (2013c), 'Reflexivity and data analysis', in U. Flick (ed.), *Handbook of*
48 *Qualitative Data Analysis*, London: Sage.
- 49 McGettigan, A., (2013), *The Great University Gamble: Money, Markets and the Future of Higher*
50 *Education*, London: Pluto Press.
- 51 Perry, B. and May, T., (2010), 'Urban knowledge exchange: devilish dichotomies and active inter-
- 52 mediation', *International Journal of Knowledge-Based Development*, 1 (1/2): 6–24.

1 *Tim May*

2 Perry, B. and May, T., (2015), 'Creating urban knowledge arenas and active intermediaries at SURF
3 – examples and experiences from Manchester', in M. Polk (ed.), *Transdisciplinarity in Action:
4 Practical Guidelines for Joint Knowledge Production for Sustainable Urban Futures*, London:
5 Routledge.
6 Savage, M., Bagnall, G. and Longhurst, B., (2005), *Globalization and Belonging*, London: Sage.
7 Savage, M., Devine, F., Cunningham, N., Taylor, M., Li, Y., Hjellbrekke, J., Le Roux, B., Friedman,
8 S. and Miles, A., (2013), 'A new model of social class: findings from the BBC's Greater British
9 Class Survey Experiment', *Sociology*, 47 (2): 219–250.
10 Savage, M. and Williams, K. (eds), (2008), *Remembering Elites*, Oxford: Blackwell.
11 Sayer, A., (2011), *Why Things Matter to People: Social Science, Values and Ethical Life*, Cambridge:
12 Cambridge University Press.
13 Scott, J., (1997), *Corporate Business and Capitalist Classes*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
14 Silver, N., (2013), *The Signal and the Noise: The Art and Science of Prediction*, London: Penguin.
15 Skeggs, B., (1997), *Formations of Class and Gender: Becoming Respectable*, London: Sage.
16 Skeggs, B., (2004), *Class, Self, Culture*, London: Routledge.
17 Wacquant, L., (1992), 'Toward a social praxeology: the structure and logic of Bourdieu's sociology',
18 in P. Bourdieu and L. Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, Chicago: University of
19 Chicago Press.
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46

Please quote the article DOI when citing SR content, including monographs. Article DOIs and "How to Cite" information can be found alongside the online version of each article within Wiley Online Library. All articles published within the SR (including monograph content) are included within the ISI Journal Citation Reports® Social Science Citation Index.

Author Queries

- Q1:** Author: Please confirm that given names (red) and surnames/family names (green) have been identified correctly.
- Q2:** Author: reference not cited in text