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# 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.<sup>1</sup>

## 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,

1  
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:

23  
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).

29  
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**

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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

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

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

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

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

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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).

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