

## **Uprooting Class? Culture, world-making and reform**

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### **Abstract**

The paper opens up the issue of how to relate culture to class in the UK. First, problematizing the conflation of class with status – inherent to stratification models like the GBCS – we theorise culture as ‘world-making’ rather than artistic or individual possession. Second, exploring culture in the wake of reforms aimed at local and institutional ‘cultures’ – said to hold back economic growth – we explore power relations between class and culture. After clarifying how Weber’s analysis of stratification keeps economic relations underpinning class distinct from the cultural mores of status groups, we point to his emphasis on *parties* – across all modes of life – as the ‘house of power’. Contrary to his supposition of homogeneity, however, we suggest legitimation today requires contesting parties to recruit from across class and status groups. Arguing recruitment here is enhanced by a mood of endless reform – in which modernity appears bent on tearing up its own foundations – we indicate how the resulting sense of precariousness is augmented by the stratifying technologies of grading and ranking. The pertinent question is: Who benefits from endless reform? And if the answer is no more than to recognise how benefits are skewed to an ‘elite’ working on behalf of owners of capital, then it is time to put aside stratification for an analysis of class relations that pointedly attends to wider notions of culture by asking: Who gets the say in world-making?

**Key words:** class, culture, modernity, parties, power, precariousness, reform, stratification, world-making

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## Uprooting Class? Culture, world-making and reform

### Introduction

In theorising the welter of contemporary reforms aimed at UK institutions as bringing about a general sense of precariousness, our aim is to explore culture as *world-making* (Bourdieu, 1989) and so avoid treating consumption as limited to 'placing' others in terms of class. Certainly any reading of each other in terms of class – pervasive as it is often imperceptible (Pascale, 2008) – is critical to an enactment of culture that grounds itself in terms of such matters as 'who is she to me?' But what matters to Bourdieu, as it did to Weber, is to ask who gets the say over which 'worlds' get created and reproduced? And who, in consequence, gets marginalised, disadvantaged and even abandoned?

In beginning with Bourdieu's insights on world-making – rather than his notes on different forms of capital – we stress the issue is not differentials in the consumption patterns that stem from class divisions but rather the *agency* which structures such as class grant over what he calls 'world-making' (Bourdieu, 1989). This is relevant when the relations underpinning class appear up for grabs – when class-making itself is in flux. In the minutiae of battles over which is the next bridge and how best to cross it, it is not class alone that helps grant agency. What matters in the struggle for power is how *parties* (those factions and interest groups contesting each other across all modes of life) disseminate agency as they reorder themselves and their agendas around the issue of 'reforming' institutions and 'modernising' cultural mores.

Critically, neo-liberal inspired reforms in the UK have been reversing any virtuous flows in the circle of wealth since the 1980s. The outsourcing of production (relegating manufacturing to the global economy), the policy of importing cheap labour (holding down wage demands), changes in the law such as the Landlord's Act of 1988 (transferring occupancy advantages from tenants to landlords), and curbing sanctions available to the Unions (outlawing for instance 'sympathy' strikes), have all radically altered the balance of power between capital and labour. Also significant is the huge switch in taxation policy away from 'redistribution' towards 'incentives', where the latter slants rewards to those deemed to help economic growth. Far from asymmetries in wealth being culturally unacceptable, inequalities are now maximised through a bewildering range of bonus payments, investment incentives and tax breaks – all consolidated through historically low rates of income tax for top earners.

Our concern is therefore to extend understandings of culture by taking account of these changes and so move beyond theories reliant on patterns of consumption as defining class differentials. Picking up on the turn to consumption in sociology since the 1980s, it is arguable that capitalism has been re-appropriating identity away from the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century class relations explored by Bourdieu (see also Skeggs, 2011). Similarly it is possible that what Thrift (2012) calls the 'new industrialisation' is re-forging belongings into a more nuanced and targeted production. Recognising that social groupings do use

goods as materials to evidence identity and belonging (Douglas and Isherwood 1980), we focus more on the pressing question of what conduct and belonging gets made acceptable by the few – in their chase for power or wealth – and how is advancement mobilised and made possible for some and not for others?

In thinking through the relations between class and culture as world-making, we draw on our studies of on-going reforms of institutions within the UK over the last thirty years. As we explain, the process of a modernity bent on tearing up its roots – and so making almost everyone precarious – alters how advantage is commodified or acquired. For example, a key building-block of modernity – central to much 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century political philosophy in the US – is not merit; assessment of which is likely skewed by educational privilege (Young, 1958). Instead, the demanding relation is ‘response-ability’ (Latimer, 1999), a readiness to answer calls by contesting parties to work *on* modernity’s formations, rather than simply benefit from them. Far from a free lunch, opportunities for world-making involve would-be members attaching themselves to one agenda or another whenever a call for this or that reform is issued.

Here we outline how technologies of grading and ranking help dominant parties, including all kinds of factions and interest groups, to recruit new members by first sensitising employees to success and failure and, second, by alerting them to how advancement is tied to ‘delivery’ of reform agendas. In such ways do reform and reconfiguring intensify a sense of precariousness by inciting and intensifying competitiveness over success and achievement, whereby a Premier League rating indexes anything from a footballer to a research paper. Rankings alone, of course, do not form class. Rather, class thrives on *relations*; and, while smart technologies work alongside audit cultures to excite competition in the quantification and ranking of self and others (Swan, 2012), it is only if people engage with forms of grading – as cultural devices to self-identify and make visible their value to others – that status indicators map into class.

Ahead of examining Savage et al’s (2013) interpretation of the BBC class survey, we discuss how key features of contemporary culture come to the fore through endless programmes of reform. After returning to how Weber (1978) distinguishes status from class, and establishes the link between parties and power, we outline how abandoning ‘benign capitalism’ makes way for a cultural dynamics in which struggles between parties centre on vested interests created by an ‘uprooting’ of modernity’s foundations. We then consider how class relations get altered and appropriated in ways that enable reform to act as a key instrument through which parties muster recruits to deliver such demands as transparency and efficiency.

### **Uprooting and modernity**

Modernity has become a suitable case for treatment. Calls for reform that deliver economic growth become strident when technological progress appears failing. Noting how America picked off the ‘low-hanging fruit’, Nigel Thrift argues for a new impetus to capitalism:

To escape this technological plateau, and to produce a new round of accelerated productivity and profitability born out of gains from knowledge and innovation, therefore requires a fundamental reorganization of how the world is (Thrift, 2012: 143).

This 'fundamental reorganisation' is no longer a case of rivers being damned up or the industrialisation of agriculture that concerned Heidegger (1993). Instead, much world-making is aimed at institutions and cultural mores, since it is people who are deemed to be holding up progress. As Arendt (1998) anticipates, it is the human condition that is to be uprooted and reformed.

This tendency towards reform and reorganisation is so prevalent as to have led Beck et al (2003) to characterise modernity as 'reflexive'. Their diagnosis is that late modernity is directed at itself. Rather than celebrate a multiplication of boundaries (such as stretching class categories from 5 to 7), they advocate grasping the conditions in which modernity is seeking to reform its own foundations. Consider, for instance, how far enlightenment values underpinning Western ideals have been eroded. Against all men (sic) being equal, the 'trickle down' ideology of neo-liberalism extols how the many are beholden to the few.

Our point is that reforms aimed at bringing about new rounds of 'accelerated productivity and profitability' are predicated on righting reforms of the past. For example, the rationale of looking to the future (cf Giddens, 1998: 940) ends up with modernity, in the spirit of reform, turning to destroy its past. Hence instead of 'going forward', as one expects, much reform turns out, perversely, to be about looking backwards. For some this is to deconstruct meta-narratives (Lyotard, 1984); for others the agenda is to demystify the professions (Freidson, 1970). As frequently, however, it becomes a case of setting about to destroy the 'culture' of institutions across commerce, education, healthcare and government (Latimer, 2000; Munro, 1998).

Where nothing is sacred, such as earlier reforms to education and public health, it is not techno-scientific innovation driving this spate of reform. Rather devices of grading and ranking are the *cri de coeur* of this latest phase of modernity. As illustrated by a rise of audit (Strathern, 2000), an ever-deepening engagement with the calculative puts in place managerial technologies linked to 'responsibilisation' and 'accountability' (Munro and Mouritsen, 1996). Indeed, when reform looks beyond its ideological bent of 'liberalising' markets and becomes a cataclysmic mode for 'rectifying' prior reforms, there is an impending chaos in which private and public sector institutions find themselves constantly reconfigured on the basis that they 'cannot stand still'.

Alongside once-vaunted corporations like Tesco proclaiming they 'reinvent themselves', individuals are incited to 'unlock' their assets and become 'enterprising' in the business of continuous makeovers. This is not only to note how people directly work for capital by becoming 'entrepreneurial selves' (Sennett, 1998) or 'entre-employees', with the will to succeed colonizing every aspect of life (Bührmann, 2005). It is to note how everything – from leisure time to green belt land to genes – is up for grabs. Yet far from reform upon reform resulting in a relativism of 'anything goes' – a super-tolerance of lifestyle wherein oppositional class relations become inert – we think it more correct to

identify a social contract in the throes of 'everything goes', even and especially what was once highly valued (cf. Bauman, 2005).

### **Reform and the BBC class survey**

Into this picture of endless reform, a new set of 'classes' was marketed by the BBC from the Great British Class Survey (GBSC) and presented as 'adding' two new classes to the British National Statistics Socio-Economic classification (NS-SEC). This 'survey experiment' (Savage et al, 2013) has led to debate on the methods validity of its findings. For us, however, the GBSC is more problematic, first because of its reliance on an abbreviated version of culture and second because the GBSC prolongs the search for a modern version of class that depends on models of stratification.

Stratification models like the NS-SEC – as we discuss later – conflate class with status. This is not least because the effacement of economic struggles between workers and bourgeoisie, not to mention its elision of remnants of feudal rankings, prolongs unresolved debates about 'conflictual' positionings (Holmwood and Stewart, 1983; Wright, 1985). Moreover, in combining the twin dimensions of employment and wealth, the NS-SEC takes the post-war stability of social structures more or less for granted. Its socio-economic grading of people is problematic because, in combining position and possession, it incorporates presumptions of a stable and unchanging culture that puts professions at the top and unskilled labour at the bottom.

Savage et al's (2013) main ploy is to augment models that depend on social and economic assets with Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital. Here culture becomes another form of possession or resource (Savage et al, 2005). It is worth recalling however that, for Bourdieu, much of what he identified in the 1970s as cultural capital (as distinct from social and economic capital) was associated with education (see also Serres and Wagner, this volume). As far as France was concerned, the agency education gave in terms of 'world-making' had to be reckoned with (cf Bourdieu, 1989). While culture for Bourdieu, as an anthropologist, has a much wider range of meanings than what is learnt in schools, he took education, at the time of writing *Distinction*, to be one of the pillars of class. Specifically, he saw education as granting a different kind of 'social power' to that exercised by the rich. His appraisal of class in France is thus of two countervailing hierarchies, one built on wealth and economic power and the other pivoting on cultural influence and educational attainment.

Contrastingly and germane to understanding differences with Bourdieu's (1984) study, there was a different narrative dominating UK politics. This was sometimes referred to as 'benign capitalism' and figured supposedly around a redistribution of wealth in which wages were rising and the rich were being taxed out of existence. True, sizable profits still went to capital, but to the extent capital was said to lie in the hands of the pension funds, it was arguable that the 19<sup>th</sup> century picture of wealth being appropriated by exploitative capitalists was out-dated. In place of an oppositional division of class between workers and

owners of capital, it had become possible for proselytisers of benign capitalism to paint an impression of a circular flow of wealth in which everyone supposedly benefits. Such a picture also helped pave the way for a version of stratification that centred on the employment ladder.

Given the abandonment of benign capitalism (aided by deregulation of the banking system), stratification models might be thought to have had their day. The shift in culture towards favouring a 'trickle down' economics, in which the few benefit over the many, has put paid to dreams of a safer, more equal world. As investment vehicles, the pension companies, who were supposed to recycle profits back to the workers, now compete alongside hedge funds and private equity firms, to say nothing of the hoards held by oligarchs and super-rich.<sup>3</sup> At the time of writing, the UK chancellor George Osborne is introducing 'reforms' that do away with the monopoly of pension funds by annulling the need for pensioners to take out annuities. In further allowing early access to pension pots, he seems intent on blowing a final hole in the picture of benign capitalism.

In the rest of this paper we focus on four matters of concern in Savage et al's (2013) interpretation of the GBSC: 1) their reliance on an abbreviated version of *culture*, 2) their condensing two dimensions of *stratification* into single values, 3) their failure to address *power* by ignoring the third dimension of stratification, and 4) their limiting the issue of *precariousness* to their 'bottom' rank. Given our different take on culture, which we come to first, we argue that the notions of culture underpinning their contribution to the BBC class survey are much too restrictive and fail to pick up on orientations that reflect what is happening in modernity more generally. Critically, their elaboration on class overlooks how relations between agency and world-making are skewed by the endless reform of institutions and cultural mores in favour of economic growth.

### **Culture: shifting from 'habits' and 'place' to 'position' and 'face'**

Our argument earlier tied culture to world-making, a view that has grown out of the work of Douglas (1986), who references the work of Nelson Goodman among others. In contrast, Savage et al (2013) rely on an abbreviated version of culture, one that uses consumption patterns to signify cultural capital and so place people on a scale of value and values. While consumption is certainly critical to modern society (cf Featherstone, 1982; Simmel, 1971), Savage et al's position disregards the way world-making notions of culture have undergone an apotheosis through the work of Adorno, Raymond Williams and Bourdieu, among others, from being a mere backdrop to social and economic matters to its current position of prominence.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Figures from the Brookings institute for the period since 1998 imply the top 1% has got richer, with the top 0.1% getting even more rich and the top 0.01% doing best.

<sup>4</sup> Notably Becker (2009) favours Bourdieu's use of world over his concept of field.

What we want to suggest is how an abbreviated understanding of culture goes hand in hand with the insistence on endless reform. Ideas of culture are often reduced to custom and tradition, treating practices as if they were invariably inert and backward looking; presumptions captured in Strathern's (1993) ironic quip that 'culture is a drag'. And, yes, in the absence of pronounced social or topographical mobility, culture may well become static and recessive. As Mary Douglas explicates, taken-for-granted attitudes are at the heart of the dilemma for Trollope's character when he asks his daughter: 'How can I give you to a man I know nothing about?' (Douglas and Isherwood, 1980: 89). The collapse of such – possibly spurious – local knowledge has given added importance to consumption. For example, a display of possessions, or activities, make up what Douglas and Isherwood call a 'live information system' (1980: xiv), to be read by others and through which a person can be 'placed'.

Whenever causal powers of culture are cast as negative, humans are expected to cast off belongings that anchor them to their 'pasts' and become susceptible to ways they can advance and achieve successful futures (Adams et al, 2009). In a 'forgetting' of what belonging might mean, much so-called reform assumes the human condition has to move on from being a 'standing reserve' (Heidegger, 1993) towards making oneself ready 'in advance' – 'just waiting' for the next challenge (Munro, 2004a). For example, a perceived failure in free education and health in the UK to generate economic growth, has brought about a sea change away from enlightenment ideals to their current status as industries ripe for reform. Significantly, reform not only gives up on working classes being 'cultivated' along the lines Marshall (1951) took to be the 'civilised' middle class; it is the middle classes that are derided as deficient in terms of enterprise.

Here we are stressing a doubling in contemporary conditions: a looking back on the one hand to tear up whatever limits economic growth, and on the other a looking forward by individuals towards their future success. While 'uprooting' through migration, colonisation and industrialisation (Hoskins 1988; Sennett 1986; Bourdieu and Sayad 1964, 2015; Papadopoulos et al 2008) has a long history of making places of dwelling vulnerable, we are pointing therefore to a more deliberative uprooting than that marked by the picture of 'building' replacing 'dwelling' (Heidegger 1993). What is seen to hold back progress are the habits in which people too easily make themselves 'at home' in positions of employment and 'place' themselves in a drip-down schema as advantaged relative to others.

In addition to ignoring this wider picture of reform (and the possibility of cultural capital as conceived by the GBCS being *disadvantageous*), Savage et al's (2013) reliance on the consumption of artistic activities and interests – as if these *embody* class sufficiently to signify division in the possession of cultural capital – makes an artefactual error. For example, it is surely wrong to equate culture solely with 'highbrow' matters such as classical music, theatre going and the like, and overlook the great variety of other forms of class distinction? Similarly, it is misleading to adopt a 'deficit' model (Francis and Hey, 2009; Skeggs, 2004) that reduces popular culture to football and soaps and associates these with working class interests. It is as if their social theory embraces a

conflation culture with individual possession, forgetting culture is something accomplished together, with all its diversity and borrowings that characterize contemporary cultural performance (Oswald 1999; Strathern 1999).

While culture is rightly seen as rooted in practices and customs, our view is that world-making (Bourdieu 1989) is tied more to 'position', in the sense of having agency at a node in a network, than to 'place', in the sense of either geography or social status. This said, anticipating our discussion on the importance of parties for the exercise of power, understandings of 'face' (Goffman, 1955; Munro, 2010) also appear ever more relevant, sociologically, to the notion of position. What matters today is how identity-work (Goffman, 1959), belonging (Garfinkel, 1967) and cultural performance (Munro, 1999) is activated through *relations* (Strathern 1995; Latimer and Munro, 2009). Here we stress how culture is open to a forging of new connections and bonds, as much as it may also preserve that which is inherited by way of cultural values, social networks and economic assets.

While processes of inclusion and exclusion remain integral to understanding oppositional class relations, and connect to how culture and belonging get done on the ground, we are interested as much in how dwelling in modernity is turned towards identities that advertise persons as 'visible and available' (Latimer, 2001; Munro, 2004b) to the contesting agendas of modernity; and so in doing animate the impetus for its reform. In this respect we are particularly concerned with how culture generates conditions for membership of classes that are in-the-making, rather than are only about patrolling existing borders – as if these are fixed or preordained from what has gone before.

### **Stratification: class and status groups**

Stratification models, as distinct from class division, are attributed to Max Weber. However, as his sub-title 'Class, status, party' makes clear, Weber (1978) distinguishes three dimensions of stratification. Far from conflating these into single values, he highlights the cultural mores ('specific style of life', p.932) associated with a status group. In emphasising the conduct demanded of those who would belong to a status group, Weber stresses understanding specific forms of culture *alongside* class. This attempt to give a fuller picture of societal division and distinction, distances him from Marx's positioning of culture as a superstructure that merely reflects the economic base.

The significance of Weber's intervention can be seen, as already remarked, in the way Bourdieu (1984) counter-poses how those with cultural and educational standing in France mark themselves out from the merely wealthy. Weber's comments not only bring status groups alongside divisions between economic classes, critically they address how status groups are *reproduced*. The basis of stratification is however different: whereas *classes* are stratified 'according to their relations to the production and acquisition of goods', *status groups* are stratified 'according to the principles of their consumption of goods' (Weber 1978: 937). This thesis that consumption of goods displays special styles of life foreshadows the seminal work of Mary Douglas discussed earlier. Contrastingly,



Bourdieu's (1984) claim in *Distinction* is that it is cultural mores ('specific styles of life') that people use to distinguish 'class'.

Why the inclusion and exclusion exercised by status groups matters is because this puts culture and belonging at the heart of 'world-making'. As Bourdieu (1989) points out, reflecting back on *Distinction*, it is *positional power* that enables agents to engage in world-making. Critically, this clarification suggests it is not consumption per se that forms worlds. Rather it is the capacity to act as 'spokespersons', or activate others over how to see and make the world, that matters. The drift towards socio-economic grading, by contrast, more or less abandons any stress on struggle, or world-making, and leads to the creation of so-called 'zombie categories' (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). This is because 'class' loses its theoretical potency as a critical trope if it is conflated merely with the consumption patterns of status groups. This is especially the case when their distinct stratifying vectors are flattened out, as Savage et al (2013) do, into a single grading structure that measures neither class nor status.

### **Power: parties and stratification**

As well as conflating class with status a further problem in the GBCS is that it obscures Weber's third dimension of stratification, namely parties. The key to understanding agency in world-making, we suggest, lies in Weber's (1978: 938) shift from a discussion on class and status groups to include *parties*:

Whereas the genuine place of 'classes' is within the economic order, the place of 'status groups' is within the social order, that is, within the sphere of the distribution of 'honor'. From within these spheres, classes and status groups influence one another and they influence the legal order and are in turn influenced by it. But 'parties' live in a house of 'power'.

The shift in register to the last sentence is dramatic. Weber is moving away from reporting a mutual influence between classes and status groups. Instead, it is to the formation of parties that he turns to highlight the live use of power.

Here it is worth re-reading Weber's (albeit brief) remarks on parties in the light of Bourdieu's insights over agency and world-making:

Their action is oriented toward the acquisition of social 'power', that is to say, toward influencing a communal action no matter what its content may be. In principle, parties may exist in a social 'club' as well as in a 'state'. (Weber 1978: 938)

In contrast to either Scott's (1979), or Savage's (this issue) notion of an elite operating alone, it is *parties* that make class and status active by representing interests. As Weber emphasises, parties do their world-making by virtue of drawing on all kinds of stratification:

In any individual case, parties may represent interests determined through 'class situation' or 'status situation' and they may recruit their following respectively from one or the other. But they need be neither purely 'class' nor purely 'status' parties. (Weber 1978: 938)

For all the analytic benefit there may be in separating economic, social and cultural forms of capital, Weber is implying parties, whether 'ephemeral or enduring' are prone to exploit any manner of division and distinction.

Yet in order to present a face of democracy and diversity, parties can no longer be left as Weber imagined them. For parties to gain legitimation today over their agendas, they must be seen to be representing the interests of all classes and all status groups. Critically, in the contemporary culture to which we are pointing, there is a concomitant dismantling through reform of either 'status' or 'class' preordaining agency. Instead, in order to progress their agendas of reform, parties need to re-form themselves into networks by *crossing over* the boundaries of status and class and enrol members who are in positions, however temporarily, to activate their agendas.

### **Precariousness: grading and reform**

In tying precariousness to their 'bottom' rank, the GBCS also obscures many unsettling effects generated by conditions of endless reform. A more general sense of precariousness, we suggest, intensifies ontological insecurities, proliferating conditions of possibility wherein identities have to be made anew and evermore fragile footings found for belonging. While sociology examines how UK institutions, including schools and the NHS, fared under internal markets, deregulation and outsourcing in the public sector (e.g. Clarke et al 2000), our own studies suggest that far from reforms being progressive in any meaningful sense, much reconfiguration disseminates a sense of precariousness that is pernicious and destructive.<sup>5</sup>

Such destructive aspects to reform put into question Savage et al's (2013) extra class they call the 'precariat'. Attributions of security that once separated salaried employees from waged seem no longer tenable. This is to emphasise how many 'reforms' affecting institutions appear aimed at making all forms of work temporary – at the heart of which is a knowing destruction of security through bidding systems for resources and appraisal through the endless technologies of grading and ranking. Tomorrow, if not today, the threat of redundancy hangs over white-collar workers. As with once-protected academics, reconfiguration only needs the announcement of a shift in 'strategic direction' and redundancy is a done deal. Hence, without diminishing the perils of those without economic capital or social networks (and certainly current reforms of the welfare state threaten many living in the UK), precariousness has to be understood today as becoming an almost universal condition.

What we are arguing here is how the constant process of reform both reduces security of employment and creates further openings for profit-making and exploitation. Although not everyone would agree, our impression of a reforming modernity is one in which whatever was once stable is now to be mobilised; and whatever was once valued is now to be reappraised. For instance, where status

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<sup>5</sup> Our ethnographies of the shifting ethos of management and care in the NHS (Author 1, 1999; 2000; 2001; Author 2, 1995, 1998, 1999, 2001, 2004a) show how this sense of precariousness extends to so-called employees (e.g. nurses, doctors, managers) as well as so-called 'consumers' (e.g. customers, patients).

groups, on Weber's formulation, could act as a bulwark against changing cultural mores, status groups, the professions – from Mrs Thatcher onwards (Rose and Miller 1992) – became the target of this reforming modernity. If teachers were early casualties in this 'war on privilege', with their pronounced fall in social status going alongside an erosion in their powers of discretion, other professions like doctors and nurses remain in the firing line and are in process of being proletarianized (Illiffe 2008), with an on-going erosion of discretion and autonomy (Armstrong 2002).

In contrast to the stabilities underpinning stratification models, particularly in the era associated with benign capitalism, it is hard to think precariousness is other than the prevailing condition in this reforming modernity. For example, in our lifetime, university lecturing posts moved from 'tenure' to 'permanent' employment and now to 'open-ended' contracts. How long before zero-hour contracts are the norm with expectations of giving lectures anywhere at a moment's notice? Thus we not only stress how uprooting is unsettling, creating its own conditions of possibility for membership of class and status groups. As we suggest next, precariousness results in identity-work and belonging being appropriated and hijacked by an intensification in the forming and reforming of competing parties.

### **Uprooting, parties & identity**

Wherever reform becomes the dominant agenda, two effects may be understood as operating together. First, there is the kind of uprooting through which contemporary life conditions become '*unsettling*' (Latimer, 2013), creating a precariousness in which identity or membership is no longer 'readable' from lifestyle, consumption or other cultural practices. Second, there is an 'unhinging' of identities and belonging dictated by 'reform' hollowing out what has gone before – especially anything held sacred – and so creating lacunae, opportunities for the kind of division and distinction through which agendas of reform can be played out, and parties enhance their power.

Integral to this unsettling of identity and unhinging of belonging, parties can be said to work *on* modernity as much as they work in modernity, refining their policies and re-spinning their promises. Indeed, inasmuch as the putative need for reform signals a failure to ever arrive at modernity (Latour, 1993), the path taken by parties is seldom towards one utopia or another, but is dictated instead by a politics about the next bridge to cross. *What is held to count as progress by one party is contested by another*; and so becomes integral to the 'piecemeal tinkering' (Popper, 1962: 1) on which the various parties make and remake their agendas of reform to attract allies across different networks and enrol further support (cf Latour, 1987).

In this way, the need to recruit today from *across* classes and status groups, identified earlier, makes the standard notion of self-standing elites problematic. This is especially the case in the perceived need to enrol from across the particular class divisions we have identified earlier. Notably those in positions to

identify themselves as say offering *transformational leadership* – the ‘product champions’ and ‘change agents’ promising to ‘turnaround’ aspirational as well as failing institutions – have to find ways to recruit people. Specifically, the ubiquitous keeping apart of policy and strategy from operations and delivery within institutions, requires those lower in the hierarchy to step up to the mark as ‘response-able’ to calls for change and hold themselves out as ‘available’ to deliver reform. Hence recruitment also affects those in operations and the front line; notably those who make themselves *visible* as ready to ‘buy into’ agendas and *available* to be held responsible for their ‘delivery’.

For this and other reasons, world-making nowadays transmutes from being a question of belonging to a specific status group – as in Weber’s thinking – to one of gaining agency by virtue of enrolment in one party or another. As such, adherence to cultural mores (e.g. solidarity with colleagues) shifts to a perceived need to advertise one’s availability in the face of the latest ‘call’ (e.g. how to ‘let go’ of staff). In consequence, making one’s ‘response-ability’ visible and available to the requisite parties inevitably becomes as much a matter of *face* as it thrives on *position* in a network (Munro, 2015). The reliance on the kind of knowledge exhibited over the impossibility of marriage in Trollope’s novel, discussed earlier, gives way to a dependence on the kind of facework discussed by Goffman (1959) in his analysis of the presentation of self and a reliance on the kind of account-giving that Garfinkel (1967) makes integral to an affirmation of membership through the ‘passing’ of accounts (Latimer 2004, Munro 2001).

Hence, rather than agency reflecting any homology in world-making with the ‘image of social position’ in Bourdieu’s (1989) formulation of symbolic power, identity relies on cultural performance as much as on position. It is facework and account-giving that become reflexive to the often competing and contradictory calls and demands of parties in modernity; and so allow persons to morph ceaselessly between putative positions in their networks (Munro, 1999). What we are suggesting, then, is that when an analysis of class resorts to static and out-of-date notions of cultural capital, as with Savage et al (2013), they miss the effects and affects of a reflexive modernity in which a culture of reform restitutes domination of the many by the few through its uprooting effects.

The culture of reform, characterized as it is by an uprooting of ‘place’ in favour of parties drawing together ‘positions’ in a network, neither relies on the kind of habitus drilled in by forms of schooling, or the kind of ‘system of predispositions’ (Bourdieu, 1973: 80; Goldthorpe, 2006: 8) that may stem from ‘bringing people up’ in a distinct institutional ethos. Rather it is to the advantage of those charged with reform to promote into positions those who perform themselves as ‘response-able’ – ready and able to deliver the calls that different ‘parties’ emit. People whose habitus exactly enables them to shift belongings and – unlike Bourdieu’s men of the Bearn (see Wacquant, 2004) – ‘unstick’ their world in order to help forge another. People whose system of predispositions leave them ready and able – at a moments notice – to move on; detaching from one set of agendas and relations, while attaching to another set of agendas and relations.

## Discussion: Class-making and Power

The main point in raising these issues about identity and belonging is far from our suggesting that the 'right' system of predispositions will guarantee advancement. To the contrary it is more that identities get performed in ways that increase the stock of persons making themselves consumable to those who hold sway in reforming parties. Thus in making this critique of Savage et al (2013), we think it is vital to recognise how culture in this reforming mode of modernity is now almost all-consuming. Critically, the sheer numbers of persons making themselves 'available' and 'response-able' today leads not to them benefitting from what they deliver, but rather to further losses in solidarity for the many and the greater advancement of the few.

In our view it is parties, rather than status groups, that use cultural mores today to exercise intimidation and exclusion. In asking the question 'Is he one of us?' the parties of reform bear an uncanny resemblance to the introverted and self-serving parties examined by Michels (1915) in his analysis of their tendency towards oligarchy. The major change we can see is that it is now necessary for parties today to recruit from *across* different status groups. Parties today have to wear the mask of democracy and diversity – in order that the party can legitimate itself *as* modern. This is because changes that senior managers make in the name of reform – across government, public institutions, commerce and industry – not only seem designed to protect the few from being accountable and keep their grip on power (Michels, 1959[1915]), but end up ensnaring them in their own inability to get things done.

All this requires a kind of knowing, an ability to read when, and at what moments, to answer the calls to reform and so attempt these shifts in world-making. Thus, rather than treat habitus as solely concerned with what makes people stick with where they belong, we want to suggest the name of the contemporary game is a capacity for detachment; especially the kind of detachment that makes possible immediate and practical extensions that garner new attachments (see also Strathern, 1991). Possibly this relates to the 'analytic' ability identified by Savage (this issue), but as likely a schooling in analysis may also instil the kind of detachment that facilitates what elsewhere we call 'motility' (Latimer and Munro, 2006).

Consequently, those seeking some explanation for a chasm opening up between senior executive pay and middle management, or the over-taking of the professions by senior managers, (Savage, this issue) might also note that, for all the emphasis on reform, hierarchy remains the main mechanism at work along which credit and rewards travel upward while blame and responsibility are divested down.

Indeed, it is hard not to suspect that much reform aids and abets the creation of a new class division between a magic circle of so-called 'transformational leaders' and those potential recruits 'standing in advance', left waiting to buy into (in the managerial phrase) to the next reform. Reforms that replace institutional ethos with the cult of leadership, bring in profit budgets to sensitise managers to

markets, or impose governance and audit cultures, not only make people vulnerable and precarious, such reforms also drive out discretion from the front line, and therefore need to be researched in the future as central to the formation of (possibly) new kinds of class relations.

In summary of these thoughts we should clarify that we suspect that responding to the calls of the various parties of reform, as often as not, is to be asked to look away, to not notice what's really happening. For us the pertinent question to ask in all this remains: Who benefits from endless reform? And if the answer – at least for the moment – is no more than to recognise how benefits are skewed to an 'elite' working on behalf of the owners of capital, then it is time to go beyond stratification models in favour of returning to an analysis of class relations; one that pointedly investigates changes in the wider understandings of culture in an attempt to understand who has the say in world-making; and investigates how they get it. For the moment it is not only a reduction of capitalism to the economic, but also the abbreviation of culture and consumption to the purchase of a few goods, that holds back understanding the complexities of class relations.

## **Concluding Remarks**

Uprooting is the world made precarious. Our premise is that tacking on (possibly spurious) consumption data to stratification models is of little use in helping to see what is happening to class in a phase of modernity bent on tearing up its foundations. This is not only to reaffirm that conflating class with patterns of consumption for status groups creates conflictual classification. On top of noting that Savage et al (2013) remain caught in modernity's preoccupation with reform and technologies of grading, we are emphasising how the exhaustive use of ranking devices to drive reform brings about a general precariousness. It is this endless stress on making success and failure visible that destabilises and unsettles any certainties over class positions and intensifies the Western proclivity to dwell in the 'mode of comparison' (Strathern 1997).

In this paper we have drawn attention to how the welter of reforms in the UK over the last half-century have worked to shift modernity away from a culture that values service to the community, strives for equality, treasures its institutions and is amenable to redistributing wealth. Contrastingly, the current discourse of 'working smart' on top of 'working hard' appears promoted by cultures vested in competition and self-interest. These cultures promulgate an illusion of transparency and occlude the social benefit of institutions for the shibboleth that successful individuals must be rewarded disproportionately. However much the former kind of culture may be critiqued for perpetuating false consciousness, the barefaced proselytising by proponents of the latter can still take one's breath away!

It is not part of our analysis to settle whether changes wrought by reform end up with owners of capital engrossing themselves in their greed or whether they represent the swansong of capitalism, a final intake of wealth ahead of the rage against appropriation. Instead a first aim has been to emphasise the importance

of linking culture more generally to the changing nature of modernity. Here, against those fearing a postmodernism that relativizes choice to 'anything goes', we have explored how culture in the UK appears to have degenerated to extolling a 'creative destruction' that sets out to devalue value to profit and de-regulate the state to the extent that 'everything goes'.

A second aim of this paper has been to argue that nothing less than a full re-appraisal of the cultural conditions underpinning modernity is required for any rethinking of class theory. In this respect Savage et al (2013) appear to have fallen into the trap frequented by modernisers, that of pressing for 'reform' – which in their case amounts to appending some extra, and potentially spurious, data about consumption onto socio-economic categories that are already defunct. Just segmenting off the consumption of certain goods as 'cultural', and failing to examine the consumption of other commodities, including what is tantamount to the trafficking of human endeavour, makes an artefactual error. But more than this, it overlooks the contemporary conditions in which production is dominated by a volatility on which 'reforming' parties thrive.

A third aim has been to highlight how demands for reform get exhibited in the various agendas through which parties claim to represent others and act as their spokespersons. While drawing on Weber's ideas of stratification to point out his separation of status and class, what we have emphasised (to update Weber's definition) is how parties form and reform themselves alongside status and class. Perhaps managerialism, with its discourse of efficiency and budgets, has the upper-hand over the UK's institutional framework, but such a tag blurs *struggles* between different parties across all walks of life as they promote their agendas for ascendancy and power.

Time and energy, as Skeggs (2011: 509) reminds us, is how Marx saw labour power. Skeggs' insight is to stress how 'time and energy can be *given* to others' rather than only 'extracted *from*' them. This is why culture matters to class: culture is key to understanding how labour power is appropriated in all manner of ways from those 'standing in advance' by leaders of parties. For example, Watson's (1994) study is illuminating of how much time and energy middle managers spend just trying to work out the agendas of their senior managers (see also Munro, 1995). In this respect, future research could focus more carefully on how time and energy is reallocated by virtue of class divisions within institutions. These might include the division which, on the one hand, reserves recognition of decision-making to so-called leaders making policy and strategy and, on the other, passes the buck of implementation over to the class 'standing in advance' – the many left to work out what to do in order to succeed or fail.

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