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Beyond the Spirit of the New Urban Crisis – Risk-class and Resonance

David Tyfield

1) Introduction

It does not seem hyperbole, overestimating the importance of one's own time, to talk of the present moment globally as one of great disruption. In these circumstances, this chapter addresses a key question: How can we best understand and practically explore the contemporary new urban crisis (NUC) as a singular lens on the Four Challenges of the age in order to mitigate and overcome them? I argue here that the combined contributions of two concepts promise to be particularly illuminating in this regard: risk-class and resonance. Specifically, they offer strategic illumination regarding both means *and plausible but surprising ends* for better futures.

Let us first define some terms in this question. Three longer-term trends spell increasingly insistent political challenges that are unprecedented in both profundity and scale. These are (Tyfield 2018): first, the crisis of the environment and the transgressing of so-called 'planetary boundaries', most obviously regarding climate change and biodiversity loss, in a new planetary age of the 'Anthropocene' (e.g. Bonneuil and Fressoz 2016); secondly, the emergence of digital technologies and artificial intelligence and their increasing penetration into social life (e.g. Harari 2016); and, thirdly, the unprecedented interconnection and mixing of humanity, across cultural, national and ethnic categories (e.g. Beck 2006, 2009). Each of these on its own would pose serious challenges to societies. Together, they amount to an extraordinary qualitative paradigm shift, and one that may be summarized in terms of a fourth, and 'meta', problem of *learning how to govern complex systems well*. Meeting these Four Challenges thus demands commensurately significant conceptual innovation and upgrading.

So pervasive, ubiquitous and profound are these Four Challenges that they are manifest in, and could be studied through, innumerable concrete issues of concern regarding habitable futures: e.g. of food and agriculture; energy and heating/cooling; or health and wellbeing. Yet one issue arguably incorporates and sits above all of these issues and is thus an acme of this emergent social condition: the city.

The urban is a key manifestation of the Four Challenges in two respects. First, because it brings out so clearly and immediately the important issues of contemporary social injustices and inequalities, being a site of an existing and acute system crisis. This 'new urban crisis' (henceforth, NUC) is "much more than a crisis of cities"; rather, it is "the central crisis of our time" (Florida 2017: xxvi).

Secondly, as humanity becomes an ever-more urbanized species, it will be in the resilience of cities that our successes (or failures) in responding to the Four Challenges are likely to be most vividly evidenced. In particular, urban infrastructure is a key practical, and so political, arena of the profound rethinking that is needed. For infrastructure is not only a matter of significant

(if recently neglected) public concern with disproportionate effect on the quality of social life, rendering it highly important in its own right. But it is also an exemplary site of current conceptual confusion, being widely conceptualized as the supposed archetype of enduring stability and technical mastery but now in a new age of ‘normal disruption’ (Graham 2010) that directly upends such expectations. Building urban infrastructures fit for the future thus quickly confronts numerous intense challenges: of system complexity, uncertainty, non-linear unpredictability etc... or just that there are no simple, universal answers.

Settled common-senses regarding the very *meanings* of these key terms (i.e. ‘city’, ‘urban’, ‘infrastructure’) are thus now in play over the medium-term. The questions being raised about the future of city centres and the urban form due to the Covid-19 pandemic (e.g. KPMG 2021) are simply early foretastes in this regard. And precisely as sites of so many lives and livelihoods, and significant contemporary inequalities, what these keywords come to mean will continue to be fiercely contested for the foreseeable future.

With significant and qualitative social change underway, however, it follows that new concepts adequate to, and illuminating of, these still-emerging realities are needed. Here we explore the separate and combined contribution of two major conceptual innovations to these crucial issues.

First, there is ‘risk-class’. This denotes a new and emergent form of social stratification amidst global risk-society that is shaped by differential positioning regarding both system goods *and system bads*, old and new. Moreover, the term incorporates both: (a) an emerging dynamic and productive *system* of social stratification; and (b) the *particular* risk-class most actively driving that system emergence, namely the rising/emerging ‘global middle risk-class’ (Tyfield 2018 Cf Kharas 2010, 2017, Ravallion 2010).

Contemporary studies of inequality have largely taken the place of what was previously explored in terms of class. The latter is now widely understood not to capture new and egregious inequalities. Instead, then, focus has shifted to quantitative measurement of inequalities, understandably seeking to bring them to public attention. Yet this largely empirical approach generally lacks any theoretical framework that replaces and upgrades prior understandings of ‘class’.

Understanding, however, abhors a vacuum. In the absence of explicit attention to new conceptualization, then, the vacancy is filled by default with explanation in terms of mechanisms that are taken to be already well understood. Such explanations range across a political (economic) spectrum, from a focus on specific circuits of economic activity for more (small ‘c’) conservative analyses, to (now often ‘racialized’) ‘capitalism’ per se in more radical ones. In all cases, though, the still-emerging novelty and system complexity of key dynamics regarding (new) inequalities tend not to be either acknowledge or explored. The result is a range of explanations that tend to reaffirm, and so entrench and polarize, existing political positions.

Conversely, by specifically tackling the need for new theoretical understanding, a risk-class lens offers a much more informative analysis, and in at least two key respects. First, regarding how we have got to the NUC in the first place; and, secondly, regarding where this could yet lead, in particular regarding *how much worse it could get*. This thus motivates even greater political response and urgency.

Yet a risk-class perspective also thereby enables a critique of dominant, including critical, perspectives on (urban) inequality. In particular, it situates such arguments and consequent policy/political responses *themselves within* the system dynamics that continue to drive and exacerbate the grinding inequality and urban system dysfunctions characteristic of the NUC. It may at first seem unfair to include implacable critics of contemporary capitalism in the dynamics producing current system crisis. Yet this seemingly simple move is of the greatest significance, as we shall see, transforming the normative tenor of the whole analytic enterprise.

In particular, against the polarization of positioning one generally finds at present, a risk-class analysis is quintessentially ambivalent – or, rather, constitutively open-minded – in its normative stance, not least regarding its own key issue of appraisal of risk-class as emergent system (and global middle risk-class as particular ascendant social agency). For risk-class is, on the one hand, singularly dynamic and productive, not least regarding mass cultivation of the crucial 21st century competence of complexity adeptness; while, on the other, it is driving and driven by increasing polarization of societal ‘winners’ and ‘losers’. The former is societally necessary; the latter ethically unacceptable and societally ruinous. And yet, it seems, for the time being they come together as a single package.

The picture thus painted of humanity’s global predicament is one of essential and constitutive political turbulence and ethical questioning, with no clear options that simultaneously tackle all the multiple complex and wicked challenges besetting cities, regions and their populations. Confronting us with this situation, a risk-class perspective thus immediately dispenses with ideological proposals that seek influence via populist and reassuring promises manifesting binary worldviews of ‘good’ vs ‘evil’. Yet such extreme and polarized political stances are now dominating and fracturing democratic political settlements, even in the most stable polities. Accordingly, by challenging this cultural trend head-on the concept ‘risk-class’ has already, at this stage, earned our concerted attention and even gratitude.

But we may go much further. So far, ‘risk-class’ has emerged as a necessary but not sufficient step to show how our current seemingly bleak predicament grounds plausible visions of much more positive, if unfamiliar, futures. For this second step, though, we need the contribution of a second conceptual innovation: the sociology of resonance (Rosa 2019). Specifically, ‘risk-class’ and ‘resonance’ together open up entirely uncharted conceptual territory for exploration of key challenges and paradoxes, conceptual and strategic, of the present. This exploration is simultaneously constructive, sobering and inspiring; and here, focuses on city life, urbanization and infrastructure.

In particular, immanent dynamics may be identified that are otherwise missed and/or neglected through which the rising global middle risk-class will likely, in the medium-term, birth a new relatively stabilized yet highly productive regime of ‘green’, digital capitalism; and/via the associated cities and infrastructures. That system will most likely *remain* egregiously unequal, even as it advances sustainability. In the longer-term, though, further extrapolation of the same dynamics would likely push, for the first time in history, beyond a system built on socially stratified material distribution, possibly challenging the class-capitalism dyad itself and at global scale.

In short, armed with the new concepts – the missing jigsaw pieces – of ‘risk-class’ and ‘resonance’, a whole new, updated and enabling strategic vision for 21st century society, and sociology, can begin to emerge. This will be able to work with the unquestionably profound socio-technical and planetary/environmental transformations (Clark & Szerszynski 2020) still ongoing without being defeated, bewildered or silenced by them. Indeed, we could even say that only with risk-class and resonance can we move towards a new sociological understanding that keeps and renews what was most valuable in classical 19/20th century sociology, not least of Marxian inspiration – in terms of its perspicacity and efficacy of strategic vision regarding the live and productive social dynamics of its time (the proverbial ‘baby’) – while abandoning, updating and so transcending its substantive conceptual understanding (the ‘bathwater’), formulated for a world that no longer obtains.

In short, together ‘risk-class’ and ‘resonance’ enable an updating of the foundational sociological concepts of ‘class’ and ‘emancipation’ respectively. And, likewise, they enable both critical engaged understanding of a new and still-emerging digital, green capitalism, just as the cognate concepts did for Marx in his strategic aetiology of the then-emerging industrial capitalism; *and* a longer-term vision of trans-capitalist planetary resonance, rather than industrial communism/socialism.

In what follows, tracing this conceptual journey, we first consider the concept of risk-class in more detail (section 2), before applying it to the New Urban Crisis (section 3), showing how risk-class illuminates the NUC better than does its original formulation by Florida (2017). Extending this critique further, in section 4 we then use a risk-class analysis to explore how much worse the NUC could yet get. As this argument depends on several elements that are generally overlooked, including in critical inequality studies, this also effects a preliminary critique of those approaches. Further exploring these neglected dimensions – which we may collectively label as issues of ‘spirit’ – in section 5, then opens up an entry point with which to engage with the paradigm-shifting sociology of resonance, proposed by Rosa.

In section 6, therefore, we introduce this perspective and use it to elaborate a scheme of sociological understanding for, *inter alia*, contemporary urban inequalities. Finally, then, with the paradigm shift taken, we can return to complete our investigation: first, by finalizing the critique of inequality studies from this resituated perspective; and secondly by illustrating how risk-class and resonance together illuminate productive, if anti-utopian, dynamics of urban inequalities to better futures that are otherwise missed but must be first imagined and

recognized if probabilities of their realization are to be optimized. We conclude with final considerations, summarizing the crucial contribution of risk-class to understanding and tackling the singular challenges of the age, and as part of a broader project of rebasing sociological thought for the 21st century.

2) What is risk-class?

Our journey starts with the work of Ulrich Beck (2009, 2013) regarding critical exposition of the emergence of global risk-society and increasingly profound evidence of new and egregious inequalities, inter- and intra- nationally. These include new *forms* of inequality, and thence injustice, such as regarding issues of networks and mobilities (Sheller 2018). In the emerging Anthropocene, it also includes exposures to new systemic bads, e.g. environmental and financial risk (Curran 2016), almost in perfect inverse relation to one's responsibility for causing them and one's opportunity to benefit from their creation.

In such circumstances, class, as understood from 150 years of (critical) sociology, is not only increasingly redundant as a social category (Beck 2013), but harmfully misinforming. In the first instance, this is because the settled gradations and definitions of class society, institutionalized in the socio-political bargains of the post-war welfare state, themselves broke down. As the UK's Deputy Prime Minister and former union shop steward, John Prescott, allegedly put it at the turn of the millennium, "We're all middle class now".

More seriously, though, was how such class analysis was also increasingly unable to see, much less explain, what was becoming most striking, new and egregious about the novel forms and yawning gaps of inequality. For Beck, then, global risk-society demands the abandoning of critical sociological analysis using the now outdated categories of the settled class stratifications of industrial capitalism and their well-documented dynamics of reproduction.

It is into this debate that Curran (2013) suggested the conceptual innovation of 'risk-class'. This aims precisely to identify and name this new process and system of social stratification, with the new social conditions of global risk-society front and centre, not awkwardly dealt with on the side. Up to this point, class is explored as a system of the (necessarily unequal and asymmetric) distribution of the goods or benefits produced by contemporary social processes, quintessentially of capitalism, in whatever is its current regime manifestation. Think, for instance, of the various forms of capital identified in Bourdieu's (2001) classic class analysis of mid/late C20th France (viz. economic, cultural and social). The key insight of 'risk-class' is to explore class in the early 21st century not only in terms of distribution of these system goods but also of the system *bads*.

There is no shortage of these system bads to consider today. However described and explained – whether in terms of global risk-society (Beck 2009), acceleration (Rosa 2013) and overflowing complexity (Urry 2003), or neoliberal financialized globalization (Harvey 2005) – what is unarguably striking of the past four decades is the dynamism and fecundity with which innovations (technological, cultural, legal and political economic) have constantly

created ever more numerous and more existentially challenging risks, hazards and dangers.¹ (Clearly, this has profoundly shaped parallel processes of urbanization too.)

These ‘bads’, created by the system as a whole in its particular dominant trajectory of social change, clearly benefit and/or enrich some; usually those most active in creating them, for obvious reasons. Yet they also land as new burdens and costs too; and, almost inevitably, asymmetrically and unequally so. Indeed, bearing the costs of these new system bads is strongly indicative of the extent to which one is *not* (also) benefitting from them.

Any comprehensive analysis of contemporary society, inequality and injustice, therefore, must pay significant (if not greater) attention to the distribution of these constantly proliferating system bads as it does to that of the familiar system goods. For one’s actual situation and comparative enablement to thrive is at least as conditioned by one’s specific societally-positioned exposure to the system bads as it is by access to the system goods, and with these inseparable and mutually compounding. Hence ‘risk-class’: a new and emergent form of social stratification amidst global risk-society that is shaped by differential positioning regarding both system goods *and system bads*, old and new.

It is, in fact, quite remarkable how profound a transformation in conceptualization is contained in this seemingly simple addition to our definition of class. As this Handbook demonstrates, in fact, there is therein an entire research programme of theoretical development and empirical insight to unfold. For our purposes, though, we focus on a few key corollaries of particular pertinence to the argument of this chapter.

First and foremost, by incorporating system bads into our analysis of social stratification, we are always and inevitably confronted by the systemic production of factors and system outputs that no one will want to bear. While familiar class analysis in terms of goods may admit that there is intrinsic contestation over those scarce goods, it is also possible to reach a conceptualization – and, indeed, a relatively enduring institutionalized reality, as history attests – in which all classes are more-or-less satisfied with their share. Class-as-goods is thus conceivable as a system that can settle into relative stability, even as this is built on dynamics of constant haggling, ‘struggle’ and manoeuvre.

As soon as system bads are added to the equation, though, this settlement is fundamentally upended. For the individualized acceptance of a system bad, the benefits of which also likely go elsewhere, is simply unthinkable. Risk-class, thus, is inevitably a system of even greater dynamism and turbulence than the fiercely contested class politics of industrial capitalism.

Secondly, though, it is also a system of extraordinarily (system-) *productive* dynamism, including of its own emergence as a system of social stratification. Consider how these novel

¹ For these reasons, with ‘innovation’ as the positively valued, ‘system good’ counterpart of the risk, dangers and system bads underlying the emergence of ‘risk-class’, it may even be more accurate (if less pithy) to talk of ‘risk-innovation-class’ (Tyfield 2018).

risks, dangers and system bads emerge at such pace and intensity. On the hand, they have an upside for some that is intoxicatingly motivating and will continue to be so insofar as the costs can (continue to be) ‘outsourced’ or ‘offshored’ (Urry 2014) to others. Meanwhile, on the other, such displaced risks will tend to strengthen those enabled and weaken those emburdened, enabling further rounds of enabling and emburdening. Finally, this very dynamic incubates a broader culture of both celebration of and avid, existential flight from systemic risks in the form of ever more rounds of self-serving ‘organized irresponsibility’ (Curran 2015, citing Beck 2009).

Moreover, in this prevailing and deepening politico-cultural context, this complex system dynamic takes on a particularly intense and objectionable form. For here not only are system bads relentlessly innovated and unleashed. But there is also increasing and mutual reinforcement between, on the one hand, benefitting from the associated goods while escaping from exposure to the system bads (almost, i.e. short of planetary catastrophe), and, on the other, enjoying no such benefits but carrying disproportionate costs and exposures to the harms. Moreover, this dynamic pertains no matter how trivial or gratuitous the supposed benefit and how serious the harms thereby externalized.

It follows that risk-class has emerged as (and as primary expression of) a massive multiplier of inequality and polarization of life chances, *permanently* diverging life courses even over generations. Class as *risk*-class is thus now the manifestation not just of (perhaps dramatically) unequal distribution of system goods (wealth, health, meaningful work, education) but also compounded and intensified by unequal exposure to new and increasingly profound (if possibly invisible, unfamiliar and/or undocumented) dangers. Of course, the latter also accumulate into global and/or planetary threats that likewise have uneven and localized effects.

We have here, therefore, a classic positive feedback loop characteristic of complex systems, and hence a ratchet of proliferating complexity and runaway acceleration.² From the perspective of sociological analysis, then, risk-class is also strikingly different to class(-as-goods) in that it must be investigated *not* as a system of enduring reproduction of existing structures, but one of ever-deeper systemic transformation and (destructive) (re)construction of new social worlds. In this respect, risk-class in the early 21st century, as an emergent and powerful force of social change, much more resembles the emergent *construction* of industrial class-based society of the 19th century than the subsequent settlement and reproduction of *that form of class* in the 20th, even as the latter is now reflected in sociological orthodoxy not the former.

² We note the potential confusion over the use of the words ‘positive’ (and, to lesser extent, ‘negative’) throughout this discussion, in that ‘positive feedback loops’ may well be strikingly *negative* in impact and concern specific complex system dynamics of proliferating reinforcement. Whether we are referring to genuinely ‘positive’ developments or ‘positive’ feedback loops (the desirability of which will depend on the specific case), should be evident from the sense, and sentences ripe for misunderstanding have been carefully reworded accordingly.

The concept of ‘risk-class’ thus presents a new resource with which to illuminate and hold to account novel dynamics of quantitatively and qualitatively new inequalities, precisely as Beck demanded. Yet it has not abandoned ‘class’ (and, by association, ‘capitalism’) as key category, but updated it. And here too, therefore, we have the concepts with which we can begin to explain and hold up for critical political scrutiny the empirical dynamics through which the current global ‘epidemic’ of inequality actually manifests. These novel *system* dynamics, however, are not reducible to more populist, but also simplistic and misdirected, explanations (of Right or Left) in terms of personalized and/or structural moralistic blame. As such, detailed research becomes possible, discerning the diverse socio-technical and spatio-temporal processes and mechanisms through which risk-class emergence and yawning inequality are currently *feeding each other* in specific times/places.

3) The New Urban Crisis and risk-class

Perhaps the most graphic illustration of this risk-class dynamic today is that key manifestation of the Four Great Challenges, as mentioned above: the 21st century city and associated challenges of urban inequality, infrastructure and resilience. Underpinning and exacerbating these diverse urban issues in recent years is the ‘new urban crisis’ (NUC). This manifests a model of ‘winner-takes-all urbanism’ that exemplifies the more general dysfunctions of late neoliberal capitalism with its strikingly ‘winner takes all’ (WTA) economy and model of (digitalized) innovation (Tyfield 2013).

The NUC consists of 5 primary dimensions (Florida 2017: 6-9):

- The deep and growing gap between a few global ‘superstar’ cities and the rest (i.e. both inter- and intra-nationally);
- The crisis of these superstar cities themselves, as the fragmentation into polarized ‘haves’ and ‘have nots’ reaches levels of inequality and unaffordability that threaten their very dynamism;
- The growing inequality, segregation and ‘disappearing middle’ across cities and societies more generally;
- A crisis of the suburbs too, as growth assumes spatially concentrating, not spreading and dispersing, forms, and the ‘cheap land’ for such sprawling growth is exhausted; and
- Emergence of an unprecedented phenomenon across the global South of ‘urbanization without growth’ (Jedwab and Vollrath 2015).

Altogether, then, these factors illustrate a new *geographical* inequality – i.e. with inequality taking on new, fundamentally place-based forms, no longer explicable in the abstracted non-space of a quasi-universalistic, purely ‘social’ theory – and *a new geography of* inequality – i.e. with novel, complex, fragmented and fractal spatial distribution of inequality (Cf Graham & Marvin 2001).

As Florida comprehensively documents, the central driver of this crisis concerns the *dynamics of socio-economic clustering* of innovative, ‘high-skilled’ knowledge-based or ‘creative’ activity. The twin result is both global competitiveness and localized economic growth, *and*

demographic sorting, segregation and inequality. Placed atop pre-existing asymmetric distribution of socio-economic profiles (itself a time-honoured, foundational characteristic of capitalist development (e.g. Harvey 2005, Smith 2010)), then, this process has acted as a ratchet for the constant “amplification of economic and geographic divides” (Florida 2017: 11). Indeed, these dynamics thereby overlay and compound pre-existing inequalities of diverse social forms, including along racial, ethnic and/or religious lines; worsening demographic disparities across multiple metrics even, perhaps, amidst significant improvements in tackling explicit and intentional discrimination and prejudice on such grounds, both legally and in everyday lived social norms.

Florida’s book-length analysis stands out for the clarity and comprehensiveness of its exposition regarding this key system-level dynamic and the multiple social pathologies to which it leads. The account, though, is told as something of a *mea culpa* for his prior work as arch-evangelist of the ‘creative class’ who are now identifiable as leading protagonists, and system winners, of this crisis. The focus of the explanation is thus on how seemingly positive dynamics of innovation generate the unintended consequences characterizing the NUC. Moreover, his analysis focuses on the global North (and the US in particular) regarding both the *mechanisms* that have got us to where we are now and, relatedly, his key *case studies*, in both major global cities and failing ones.³

The result is certainly an illuminating and extremely valuable analysis, yet key issues are also missed or downplayed regarding possible futures of urbanism, or the ongoing process of mass urbanization and its future-perfect characterizability as comedy or tragedy. So too are the regions of the world that are already utterly dominating the 21st century’s story of the city, namely China and the global South. These issues, however, come readily into view when the NUC is explored and explained not in terms of the (unintended consequences of) economic geography of innovation and knowledge-based globalizing economies – how this ‘good’ ends up doing ‘bad’ – , but in terms of risk-class. And Florida’s insights can indeed be fully and comfortably incorporated and situated in such an approach, while also illuminating aspects that are otherwise missed.

For instance, in both the general descriptions of his argument and the more detailed illustrations thereof, Florida is explicitly describing the emergence of a *new* polarized stratification of society, not captured in conventional categories of inequality. This is precisely ‘risk-class’, even as he never uses the term. Hence, “the process of economic sorting is even more vexing than inequality per se, as it compounds the advantages to those at the top while also compounding the adverse circumstances of the less advantaged” (p.104). The result is that the “nub of the NUC is increased economic isolation and insecurity of far less advantaged urbanites” (p.40). Elaborating on these dynamics, he notes (citing Wilson 1987) how the deleterious effects of the spatial concentration of poverty generates vicious cycles, in which fewer and lower-quality jobs, worse social networks (e.g. for work and/or marriage and/or role models),

³ Hence, for example, the proportion of 4:1 (depending on how you count it) of the ‘dimensions’ enumerated above regarding the focus on the global North and global South respectively.

poorer schools, higher crime rates and prevalence of criminal cultures in peer networks (e.g. gangs) and worse health care and wellbeing constantly reinforce each other.

Arguably such dynamics have long been in evidence. But what is remarkable and new is how, in parallel, the clustering and segregation of the *wealthy* has become so much stronger, and in ways that “*reinforce* one another [such that today] they are [both] consistently a feature of large, dense knowledge-based metros” (p.113, emphasis added). In other words, “in advanced nations and great global cities today, economic inequality is also spatial inequality: rich and poor increasingly occupy entirely different spaces and worlds” (p.110) albeit still in the same ‘cities’ and possibly cheek-by-jowl in complex, fractal ‘splintered’ (Graham & Marvin 2001) patterns not large, demarcated blocks of streets.

Indeed, so inadequate is conventional understanding of inequality, in the key form of urban inequalities, that “our traditional measures of income and wage inequality understate the true extent of the economic divide because they fail to take account of this devastating combination” of “economic inequality and economic segregation” (p.125); a combination that is “deadly”. Moreover, chiming precisely with the argument of risk-class that this is the construction of new forms of inequality that endure and compound over time, Florida notes how “class and location combine to reinforce one another, not just in the present moment but over generations”, thereby generating “a more permanent and dysfunctional inequality of opportunity” (p.125).

In short, there can be no doubt that the phenomenon Florida wants to bring to public attention is new and especially troubling, and that it involves the synthesis of the unequal distribution of social goods and wealth *and* of social bads, in their asymmetric geographical concentration. This is risk-class. Yet, ‘risk-class’ does more than just give a theoretical name to the empirical phenomena identified by Florida. Rather, the recasting of Florida’s account is itself stronger when the concept risk-class is used explicitly, and indeed is placed at the heart of the analysis, rather than just as its peripheral output.

First, on its own terms, risk-class illuminates and rectifies several key gaps or weaknesses in Florida’s argument. For instance, he insightfully argues, drawing on the work Lance Freeman (2009), that the heated issue of urban gentrification of neighbourhoods is both sometimes overstated as an issue and not the real challenge. It can be overstated in that gentrification actually tends actively to displace far fewer than thought, with most erstwhile middle and working class areas ‘riding’ the increase in moneyed interest in their neighbourhoods (Florida 2017: Ch.4). The real challenge, meanwhile, is almost a matter of the *limits* of the gentrification model of urban improvement (if we could call it such) in that poor areas are permanently excluded from the dynamic and tend, rather, to get ever worse. The destructive dynamic at work, thus, is how those displaced out of gentrifying areas and those never in them in the first place are moved to ever-worse and ever-worsening neighbourhoods. Such “chronic, concentrated poverty is a far bigger problem than gentrification”, Florida concludes (p.85), “and remains the most troubling issue facing our cities.”

This argument is compelling as far it goes, but there are key missing pieces to its explanation. The relatively sanguine interpretation of gentrification *per se* emerges from the structure of Florida's argument throughout; i.e. conducted in terms of the economic geography of knowledge-based globalizing capitalism, while retaining a generally positive (or at least resigned or unquestioned) view on this political economic model *per se*. As such, he argues that "gentrification is the product of the very attributes that define knowledge hubs and superstar cities... Acute gentrification is more a symptom of urban success than it is a general characteristic of cities and metro areas across the board" (p.75). In other words, insofar as we cannot be against urban success, we cannot be against gentrification.

Yet what is missing in this argument is the enthymeme – or tacit, presupposed premise – that by 'urban success' we understand this condition *per se*, rather than a particular historical form of it. By foregrounding considerations of risk-class, however, – i.e. the new and newly egregious form of inequality that Florida himself ends up highlighting, rather than the economic geography of clustering – we can readily see that just such a specific and contingent form of political economy is indeed being presumed here. In other words, gentrification may be considerably less concerning and more benign than its bitterest opponents argue. And yet it is also the case that it is a *particular* manifestation of urban success – and an undeniably exclusive one, as part of 'winner takes all' urbanism – in the context of a broader '*winner takes all*' political economy.

Moreover, once this first step is taken, we can also then situate, within the same explanation, both gentrification's corollary of concentrated urban poverty (not least in 'superstar cities') and the persistent political currency of arguments regarding gentrification's essential malignity, notwithstanding careful evidence to the contrary.

Regarding the former, it is the persistence and parallel reproduction of this underlying winner-takes-all risk-class *economy* that underpins both 'urban success' taking the *particular form* of gentrification *together with* the deepening and permanent exclusion from any such 'win' for 'loser' districts. While, regarding the latter, as precisely a manifestation of this more fundamental challenge, gentrification will understandably continue to generate resentment and ire so long as this root cause is not itself named and tackled directly. And that, in turn, would be evident in changed dynamics in which urban success no longer has to manifest as gentrification specifically. Demanding that political effort should be focused on alleviating concentrated urban poverty *but not* gentrification thus makes no sense from this broader perspective, since they are two sides of the same risk-class coin; losers and winners, respectively.

Similarly, while he offers useful, constructive and sometimes even radical policy suggestions about how to go from the current crisis to an 'urbanism for all' (Ch.10), there is a certain implausibility in these prescriptions, and particularly insofar as they are to be applied in the burgeoning cities of the Global South. Indeed, there is a marked and jarring disconnect between some of his conclusions regarding the deep state of dysfunction of urbanization in the majority

world and his upbeat conclusions that, with appropriate policies, all could yet be well (see Pieterse 2013).

For instance, he writes that “in the midst of the greatest urban migration in human history [i.e. in the global South, over recent decades and still continuing], urbanization has ceased to be a reliable engine of progress” (p.188). Indeed, for billions of these urbanites, “urbanization has been *a near total failure*” (p.186, emphasis added), as a model of ‘urbanization without growth’ has increasingly taken hold. One would need strong evidence indeed to counteract such unequivocal statements with hopes that readily available policy interventions could generate better outcomes.

Yet the suggested interventions almost entirely presume functioning liberal polities and governmental apparatuses, with significant budgets available to spend on the public good (see Bigger & Webber 2020); or even a political context that *agrees* what that ‘public good’ is and can deliver on that goal (e.g. Jaglin 2008). This, however, is to underestimate radically the challenges of such policy across many areas of the global South, in ways that underline the general preference of the analysis for the global North. In doing so, Florida’s argument also neglects the intricate systemic interweaving of issues of economic geography, his explicit focus, with those of political contexts and associated capacities of governmental administration. In short, what is manifestly lacking in Florida’s account is explicit examination of the implicit presupposition of *the specific regime of capitalism* (and hence, inseparably, class) and the differential position within it of different cities around the world, which together massively over-determine the potential for a city to be a ‘winner’ or not.

Similarly, any attempt to address this manifest and ‘near total failure’ of urbanization in the majority world (and hence the majority of contemporary urbanization) must grapple with the cycles between specific dominant form of political economy and the power relations and social persons constructed in different places over time (e.g. Pieterse 2013). The latter, of course, is precisely the agenda of risk-class. Indeed, from a risk-class perspective, questions may even be raised regarding how credible, politically or strategically, some of Florida’s policy recommendations are in the global North too, notwithstanding their reasonableness; and perhaps especially in the superstar cities.

For instance, while both London and New York have centre-left mayors at present, and both tend to lean that way politically, it would seem particularly hard to imagine such cities adopting land value taxes in ways that could dramatically harm their global economic competitiveness – and this precisely because of the issue of the concentration of *power* in these cities, and the supreme significance there of property asset prices in recent decades. These factors are then manifest in the risk-class profile of their respective demographics that would veto any such move.

Overlooking the crucial underpinning of the negative form of urbanism by a specific ‘winner-takes-all’ capitalism, however, Florida also opens his argument up to further critique and unpicking. In particular, Florida argues that “inequality is not just an occasional bug of urban

economies; it is a fundamental feature of them” but “clustering is necessary for economic growth, inequality is not” (p.103). But it becomes hard to sustain this distinction, at least as an insight capable of supporting a rationale for equality-boosting policy action, as soon as this wider perspective is taken.

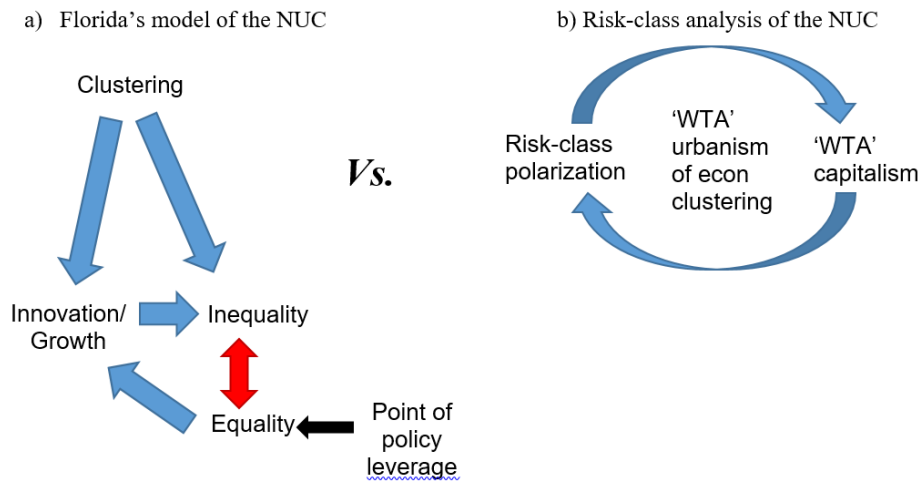
Once we admit the underlying driver of this inequality is the specific political economy, then it becomes clear that any initiative to mitigate specific inequalities is necessarily but a sticking plaster that allows the continued growth and intensification of the system as a whole. In other words, without addressing the engine of inequality, efforts to boost equality will end up only exacerbating the problem in the slightly longer term; and the distinction between ‘clustering, good’ and ‘inequality, bad’ becomes transparently untenable.

Placing risk-class at the heart of the analysis, however, situates the insights of Florida’s account while going beyond this failing. First, in this way, we can bear witness to the emergence of a new urban condition that becomes itself a key factor in the ongoing evolution of global urban inequality, rather than as mere output; and in terms that provide a unified, yet geographically differentiated, explanation across the world, including the global South.

Secondly, for Florida equality/inequality is an external variable open to policy intervention. From a risk-class perspective, though, we see instead a complex system feedback loop. This is certainly mediated through ‘winner-takes-all urbanism’ and economic clustering, but is primarily the relation between the propagation of the particular regime of WTA capitalism and the emergence and polarization of risk-classes (see Figure 1).

Lastly, but by no means least, with risk-class as our lens we can incorporate – and as increasingly central – the dynamics of global risks in all their diversity (e.g. environmental, financial, health...) and their differential impacts on urbanites; and with the efflorescence of such global-risks themselves endogenous to the explanation in a complex system that may be characterized as a totality specifically as that WTA political economy. By contrast, such global-risks feature in Florida’s account only as background and external problems – no doubt shaping a ‘perfect storm’ of problems for 21st C urbanization, but without them featuring in explanation about how one could respond.

Figure 1 – Comparing explanations of the New Urban Crisis



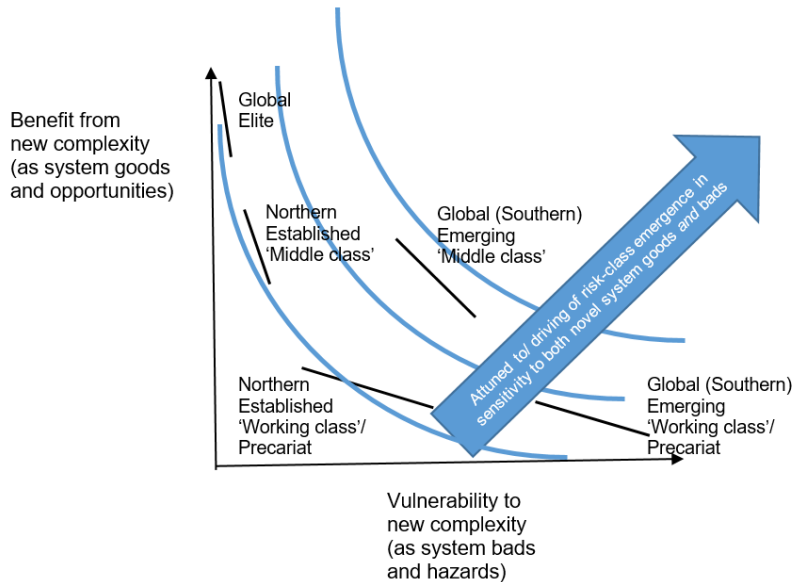
What makes this difference in explanation so important, though, is that this form of political economy – overlooked in an account of the NUC without risk-class – is *still emerging*. As such, the specific dominant regime of capitalism emerging from and through the ‘winner-takes-all’ urbanism that Florida illustrates remains *uncertain and inchoate*. The tendencies highlighted by a risk-class account thus leave open and put in question the future of these trajectories of social change: whether to even greater exacerbation of existing inequalities and/or potentially positive dynamics (see below).

Both possibilities, though, point to a third key issue regarding risk-class for our particular purposes. This concerns how risk-class matters not just as a system of social stratification and its dynamics. For it also relates to the ongoing formation of the *specific* class within that risk-class system that is the primary agent and beneficiary of that system’s construction: the global middle risk-class. There is much excited commentary at present regarding a new global middle class (e.g. Khora 2017, Ncube & Lufumpa 2015). Yet it must be immediately admitted, as our starting point, that this incipient but mushrooming socio-political constituency is not ‘middle class’ on any meaningful and recognizable definition that can withstand comparison with the settled sociological sense of this term regarding the post-WW2 global North (e.g. Milanovic 2013, Goodman 2015).

Conversely, it is credibly characterized as a ‘middle *risk-class*’. This group is both sufficiently privileged to have meaningful access to the opportunities and (novel system) benefits of ‘global risk society’ *and yet* unable to secure themselves totally and lastingly from the risks of being disproportionately burdened with the associated system bads. Both the carrots and sticks of global risk-society thus present themselves most compellingly to this ascendant ‘global middle class’, vis-à-vis all other strata (Figure 2). The global middle risk-class is aspiring, personally ambitious, inchoate, fluid and ill-defined, and potentially massively influential at global scale, given the combined effect of their huge numbers and significant economic wealth and dynamism. The result is thus that this demographic is the most significant agent in the ongoing

emergence and shaping of the system of risk-class – and its associated transformation of capitalism.

Figure 2: Comparative orientation to risk-class amongst emerging risk-classes



In short, if we want to understand ‘whither the NUC?’ we cannot limit ourselves to the retrospective story of innovation clustering (in the US and UK) told by Florida and must instead invert the lens. Instead we must look at the issue prospectively and from the perspective of risk-class and the epochal momentum of its ongoing emergence (and hence the *global* middle risk-class in particular). Doing this reveals, first, an even darker prospect as default future in the short-term. But also, by identifying immanent, embryonic *social systemic mechanisms*, new visions and medium/long-term futures in which sustainable, resilient ‘urbanism for all’ is indeed a realizable possibility.

4) How bad things could yet get (even as we go ‘green’) – a risk-class perspective

It may appear that, in foregrounding the importance of the political economic context, the argument so far resembles a relatively standard approach of critical inequality studies. But this is, in fact, not the case, and the differences are of utmost significance.

The former generally proceeds on the basis of spelling out the entrenched social mechanisms, springing ultimately from the structures of capitalism, that condition a relentless and one-way process of the reproduction of class distinction and growing inequality. As such, the conclusions of such analysis tend to be calls – to greater or lesser extent, depending on the ‘radicalism’ of the argument (e.g. compare Piketty 2018 vs. Klein 2015) – for the wholesale transformation of that foundational structure, as the root problem. Absent such structural revolution, the alternative will be the continued status quo, with continued growth in inequality: the rich getting richer and accruing increasing *shares* of aggregated wealth, the poor facing ever-worse grinding poverty and carrying ever-worse global risks.

Conversely, a risk-class perspective disagrees with this argument on every one of these crucial points. First, placing the emergent social relations of risk-class at the centre (but not the foundation, given complex systems reasoning) of the argument shows that contemporary inequalities are a new and unfamiliar condition. Risk-class is a productive and dynamic social phenomenon, not reproductive and stabilizing. It is also, therefore, both unpredictable in its longer-term trajectories, and capable of historically rapid change – given its localized and positive feedback dynamics – not just steady incremental accretion. While agreeing with and accepting arguments regarding the inescapable tendencies of capitalism per se to asymmetric distribution of social goods, and indeed to class-based society, it also does not place the ‘structure’ of capitalism as foundation and well-spring of all that follows. Rather, a risk-class perspective sets up a systemic-relational conceptualization of contemporary social realities that admits no such foundations at all.

The *empirical* focus is thus on the parallel and mutual construction of the specific social power relations and subjectivities of risk-class and the *specific regime* of capitalism, there being no capitalism in the abstract. Altogether, then, the conclusion and purpose of this form of analysis is also entirely different: not to show the urgent (yet timeless) need to overthrow capitalism per se, but to explore and illuminate existing powerful dynamics and to identify strategic openings and points of leverage here and now.

This more strategic and pragmatic approach will surely be rejected as being insufficiently radical, too accommodating of the outrageous inequalities of the present. But the exact opposite is actually the case. For, in the first instance, a risk-class perspective enables new ways of thinking about contemporary inequalities that show how much *worse* inequalities could yet become; and even as there is meaningful global action on environmental challenges, which is widely (mis-)interpreted as being necessarily ‘win-win’ for environment and social injustice. In other words, admitting only a reproductive (if incrementally worsening) logic, and perhaps also premised on a totalizing critique of capitalism, the broadly realist endeavour of mainstream critical inequality studies actually underestimates the dangers of contemporary inequalities.

Key to this difference in analysis are the emergent system dynamics of positive feedback amongst a network of three key issues; a network that places real, living, vulnerable social beings as central to the empirical trajectories of change. This triad is particularly apparent from a perspective of risk-class, and at this moment of neoliberal global system crisis, namely:

complexity/acceleration ⇔ alienation/polarization ⇔ fear

This system dynamic is intimately associated with risk-class. On the one hand, it is feeding the emergence of risk-class system, in its proliferating production of uncontrollable system bads. On the other, it is then fed by the emergence of risk-class, through dynamics of system ‘winners’ having particular determination to separate, distinguish and secure themselves from (becoming) ‘losers’.

In the first case, it is in the context of this dynamic of *complexity-alienation-fear* specifically that system bads are produced and then responded to in ways that attempt to contain and mitigate them through deliberately skewed distribution and externalization to the extent this is possible. And there is a huge amount that can indeed be externalized in this way, or at least sufficiently to keep that promise alive, thereby driving risk-class system construction. Such a process of successful externalization in risk-class formation, however, then underpins a further round of ‘organized irresponsibility’, driving yet more production of system bads.

In other words, while risk-class emerges as a system compelled, pushed and prodded by proliferating system bads, it is *propelled*, pulled and shaped by the specific dynamic of *complexity-alienation-fear*. This may be more easily understood by zooming in on the mechanisms of risk-class construction regarding the primary agents of this process, the global middle risk-class.

Taking each of the triad in turn, first, the global middle risk-class, as winners, are major beneficiaries and key creators of further complexity and acceleration like global elites (e.g. Birchnell and Caletrío 2011). Yet, unlike those elites, they embrace complexity with full understanding of its costs and the *personal* dangers of falling instead into positive feedback loops of alienation/runaway acceleration that would catapult them into reinforcing cycles as system losers. Such enduring pressure and precarity thereby keeps fear on steady simmer. That fear in turn then keeps elbows sharp, conditioning the tendential reaction to the proliferating, uncontrollable, ill-understood and confounding – i.e. *frightening* – complexity of the world to be its most pitiless and self-serving.

This, in turn, ensures primary responses will be attempts at externalization and only *personal* mitigation,⁴ hence driving further complexity and destructive acceleration and high-stakes alienation... and so on. In this way, then, risk-class is constructed at its most polarizing, system bads continue to accumulate and each feeds the other; hence complexity, alienation and fear intensify in reinforcing cycles.

Once we have identified these dynamics, though, it would seem they will be more or less prevalent for so long as such challenging global risks and system bads endure; i.e. *for the long haul*, not least since this process itself feeds production and exacerbation of system bads. Indeed, they will be at work even in brighter scenarios where there is significant climate action, and specifically amongst that most populous and powerful rising global social force. Specifically, given the (entirely understandable) determination to build on their current but precarious status as system winners so as to *remain* such, a sustainable transition dominated by the global middle risk-class will inevitably drive incremental system bad mitigation only where externalization is seen as a failed or insufficient strategy; and then most likely in ways that disproportionately accrue benefits to the winners and costs to system losers.

⁴ A preference for climate adaptation vs. mitigation measures, given the private benefits and the public costs of the former vs. public, dispersed benefits and high, private costs of the latter (Harper and Peake 2021), also follows.

Here, in other words, we have a powerful social dynamic that is constitutively normatively ambivalent. There are positive feedback loops (e.g. of green innovation and complexity adeptness) that are both highly dynamic and system productive, and at the crucial global scale needed for meaningful global transition, but that also remain *no less* polarizing of social (technical, environmental, economic, political) inequalities.

Moreover, this constituency is likely to take increasing hold of the machinery of state power in their respective countries and cities, arguably including even the massively powerful and globally significant apparatus of the Chinese state, and to turn its activities to prioritize their interests. This will, in turn, tend to *legitimize* their interests *as* the universalized ‘public good’, not least as this group do indeed observably lead the individualized adoption of (potentially expensive) ‘green technologies’. It thus becomes even more likely that this group will be increasingly enabled in its self-advancing agenda, enjoying both ever greater levers of power *and* ever greater public acclamation and moral approbation.

But the underlying dynamics of complexity-alienation-fear will persist. And in these circumstances especially, the combination of growing power *and* moral standing is ripe for the emergence of its dark side too. This would involve ever-greater conviction that those who are not so successful or enabled *deserve* their situation through personal fault and must be policed ‘for their own’ and/or ‘society’s’ benefit. This, in turn, tends to generate a growing blindness to their suffering and to the ways in which these are greatly compounded by precisely such action.

In short, even if/as this middle risk-class demand significant action to mitigate such global risks as climate crisis, given the underlying sociological dynamics of this process as *primarily those of self-preservation in a context of generalized fear*, it is likely that this will exacerbate, not diminish, levels of inequality. The continued emergence of the system of risk-class and restratification of societies into risk-classes is then itself a key outcome and driver of this process of green transition.

So this is what may well come to pass in the ‘best case’ scenario for climate change. But things would be no better, and likely a great deal worse still, if no such concerted climate action emerges. For all that would then be changed is the generally perceived hostility vs. hospitality of the environment, while the same underlying sociological dynamic of risk-class will remain in place. Given a world that is increasingly unpredictable and dangerous and societies already primed to sensitivity in this regard, though, this latter dynamic would most likely drive even more pitiless demands for self-preservation, and with the most powerful constituencies obviously most influential regarding who is thereby prioritized.

In such circumstances, the most credible outcome, and especially across the more fragile and exposed polities of the global South (including China), would surely be a growing determination amongst those states that can do so to securitize responses to climate emergency in ways that privilege their powerful middle risk-classes (*Cf* Wainwright and Mann, 2013). In

turn, by default if not design, this would increasingly penalize poorer, if more populous, sections of society (including, for instance, ‘climate refugees’, internal and external (Bettini 2017)).

Here, in other words, we have exactly the same dynamic of complexity, alienation and fear, and of accumulation of power for self-preservation of the middle risk-class *at the expense* of those below them. Yet there is also the added bleakness of nobody (nor the world as a whole) benefitting from significant mitigation of global climate risk, even sharper antagonism between the classes and a pervading zeitgeist of apocalyptic emergency, exhausting tension and cut-throat ‘life-boat’ politics.

Bringing this back to the NUC, it is obvious how this could play out specifically through issues of urbanization and infrastructure, and especially given the redefinition of the latter term immanent in the ongoing emergence of the digital condition. Regarding the worst futures of continued utterly inadequate climate action, harbingers of such cities are, in fact, already there for us to see in the highly securitized, paranoid urban forms of major Latin American and/or African cities, of razor-wire-enclosed compounds and ubiquitous surveillance.

In such futures, this would spread to other countries that have so far escaped it (e.g. across north/west Europe), and with security measures, forms of mobility and associated infrastructures ‘upgraded’ through digital technologies in ways that enable the ‘more perfect’ (Cf ‘punish better’ *per* Foucault 1979: 82) sorting of haves and have-nots. Moreover, movements towards that urban form in the global North may be triggered simply by growing unrest over inequality more generally (e.g. the proliferating urban racial unrest in the US in 2020), without any need for such protests to be specifically identified by those involved with issues of global risks.

Even in ‘green’ futures, though, infrastructures and urban configurations may well exacerbate inequalities, and even as they appear to be much more inclusive. Again, examples of this process are already clearly in evidence regarding, for instance, seemingly progressive programmes of bike-lane construction and/or bike-sharing schemes. For such initiatives, when simply placed atop the severe but fractal existing geographies of inequality, tend overwhelmingly to benefit demographics who are already comparatively privileged, while compounding pressures upon those who are not in ways that, for instance, actually intensify dynamics of gentrification and neighbourhood sorting (Fishman et al. 2014). The result is the surprising vehemence of negative reaction, or ‘bikelash’ (Wild et al. 2018), to such policies, not least from those who are supposedly thereby included and enabled by the downgrading of the car.

Similarly, the building of clean, efficient and dependable public transport infrastructures (and especially underground rail systems), serving city centres in particular have been shown to benefit those living and working in these central and desirable districts disproportionately (Smith et al. 2020). Hence, even making such means of travel *affordable* is very likely to subsidize primarily the mobility of those who are already comparatively well-off. Here, in

other words, we have perfect examples of how existing urban inequalities – and the political economic system dynamics that have produced them – are currently so great that even attempts to mitigate them may very likely actually just change their form, or even make them worse in the first instance.

So a risk-class perspective illuminates system dynamics that augur futures that could well be considerably worse than the present and that, even in best case scenarios, are strikingly sub-optimal. In both respects, this offers a marked contrast to the arguments of mainstream inequality studies, which tend to miss the dangers of the former and, regarding the latter, proffer, or at least tacitly presuppose, optimal alternatives. What is crucial, though, is how a risk-class perspective highlights not just the key driving role of global risks in the ongoing restratification of society but also sets up insights into the *qualitative and intersubjective dynamics* (i.e. complexity-alienation-fear) that are, in parallel, profoundly shaping of actual outcomes. The significance of this subtle shift in perspective can hardly be overstated. For we have thereby been led, by risk-class, not just to different and novel substantive concerns but also to different methodological and ontological stances.

Specifically, faced with such flagrant injustices and dysfunctional social mechanisms it is tempting – obvious! – to conclude that we must tackle them at root. But what is this root? The answer from a risk-class perspective is likely to be unwelcome: there is no ‘root cause’ and hence no fundamental and ‘really-existing’ ‘structure’ to resist or oppose.

The ‘structural’ causes certainly matter, but are not real *qua* foundational. Instead, we find that system dynamics can adopt a particular ‘hue’ or ‘mood’ that then pervades, conditions and colours the specific way in which the system evolves, and across scales of micro-, meso- and macro- levels. Regarding the NUC, WTA capitalism and risk-class, then, it is the ‘mood’ of fear that both characterizes, or expresses, *and* shapes, or rather poisons, the trajectory of system evolution. While in no way a foundation, such a mood is also then a key point of leverage and a key locus of responsibility for any analysis of the problems seriously committed to tackling them. Certainly, it cannot be ignored.

The strategic imperative is thus for forms of analysis that directly counter this mood of fear and anxiety, whether by providing insights that deflate fears with a bracing realism or by illuminating openings and courses of action that offer convincing, substantiated grounds for hope and inspired response. In short, what is needed in this case is analysis that both explicates contemporary inequality in ways that embrace the dynamics of the system as a whole, and shed light on the *positive* opportunities therein while concealing nothing of its negative tendencies. In this way, it also thereby takes responsibility for its *own* tendential effect on the system’s evolution as a potentially influential perspective on these issues, and tackles this issue at the key level of the general ‘mood’ that it is itself committed to support and/or weaken. Here, in other words, we have an approach that is both critical and yet (re-)constructive. In the case of global inequality amidst existential global risks, risk-class is a key building block of just such an approach.

By contrast, structural and/or realist ‘inequality studies’ not only completely miss the key issue of contemporary inequality, namely the ‘productive’ dynamism of the system and hence the unfamiliar *novelty* of the new inequality. They also completely misdiagnose how best to combat it, namely by forlorn attempts to tackle, and indeed overthrow, the ‘structure’ at its strongest; i.e. having already conceded its enduring reality and, moreover, mischaracterised it.

Every element of this approach thus further weakens its strategic efficacy: determining to depose, not just develop and direct,... a supposedly solid structure, not just a productive and dispersed dynamic,... that is misunderstood, not strategically apprehended. What it *does* achieve, thus, is largely the feeding of the alienation/polarization and fear that is the ‘key’ to the entire dysfunctional system dynamic as set out here. In other words, we can also now see how inequality studies does not just confuse understanding of its indubitably crucial subject matter. But it is itself part of the *system dynamic* that creates and compounds the very outcomes it deplores; a point to which we will return below once we have done some groundwork on our second theory, to which we now turn.

5) Digging deeper – the dangers of fear and the importance of spirit

The problem before us has now been clarified: a dynamic system logic between the ongoing emergence and construction of a global risk-class system of social stratification and the continued proliferation of unchecked global system bads through spiralling feedback loops of complexity/acceleration-alienation-fear. From this point, though, we are led (it turns out) in two complementary direction for deeper understanding.

First, if such *complexity* is the problem, it follows immediately that what is needed is some rebalancing *simplicity* – even if this is itself emergent rather than retrogressive. Let us call this a ‘vertical’ expansion (see Fig 3). What and whence this emergent simplicity, though, is almost by definition impossible to answer in advance and in the abstract. And it is even harder to envisage given the deeply entrenched social and material dynamics that condition accelerating complexity, or what Rosa (2019) calls ‘dynamic stabilization’, as matters of system functioning. While it is a useful starting point to have enunciated emergent simplicity as the goal, therefore, it is hard to do more with this realization alone, and so we will have to return to it below.

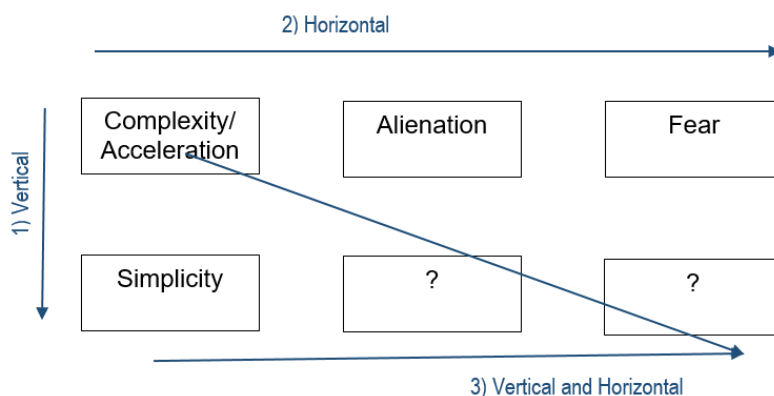
In this first step, though, we have already admitted the need for a different and new approach to the NUC. Inequality is not to be addressed primarily and directly by any levelling up of distribution of system goods, teleologically to ‘equal’ distribution. Instead, focus shifts to a system (and subjects therein) oriented primarily towards conceptions of the good life and ways of relating to the world that are not premised *only and always* on ‘more is better’, and particularly more material social goods. For this prevailing common-sense necessarily drives the relentless – and now manifestly dysfunctional, as planetary limit-transgressing – ratchet of complexity and acceleration... and hence inequality, that is birthing risk-class society.

In opening up this agenda, of the conception of the good life/good society and concern with the presupposed and ‘normal’ relation to the world, and a social science thereof, however, we also thereby open up a second line of enquiry and expansion of our framework. This concerns

the ‘horizontal’ expansion of the framework; in the first instance, through deeper exposition of the system dynamics of complexity \Leftrightarrow alienation \Leftrightarrow fear. Put together with the vertical expansion above, however, we also find ourselves able to expand horizontally regarding their *respective* opposites, i.e. expanding both vertically and horizontally (see Fig 3).

The resulting framework not only now offers other promising ways into the otherwise suggestive but opaque (almost noumenal) goal of ‘simplicity’. It also sets out a much fuller and richer system logic that situates, opposes and so opens up the clear, present and daunting prospect of the complexity \Leftrightarrow alienation \Leftrightarrow fear dynamics taken on their own. In both these respects, the work of Hartmut Rosa is of unrivalled assistance.

Figure 3: Expanding the understanding of contemporary social system dynamics



First, regarding elaboration of our understanding of the negative system dynamics, a focus on complexity and acceleration not only signals the otherwise neglected importance of their opposites (respectively, simplicity and stabilization, if not necessarily *deceleration*) in any effort to redress current dynamics of growing inequality. But it also signals the ways in which, absent the countervailing balance of the respective opposites, the *particular* dynamics today of complexity/acceleration are *singularly troubling*, and in ways not fully captured or spelt out by these terms alone. For they are conditioning positive feedback loops of deepening burdening and lack of control, mediated through the generalized adoption across populations of a specific and (self-)harmful relation to the world; i.e. of deepening and even catastrophic alienation.

In other words, the terrible irony of contemporary, radicalized forms of modernity and ‘progress’ is that such ‘advancement’ actually spells *worsening* of human wellbeing; both for the majority especially, and for all to some extent (e.g. climate change or planetary boundaries) in a classic negative-sum game that is the very definition of madness. And it is precisely this dynamic that is driving risk-class emergence. Ever-greater *system* bads are cultivating and feeding a generalized alienation from the world and each other, and a determination to survive by being among the few lucky (but not *so* lucky) comparative ‘winners’, which thereby shapes sociotechnical change in turn.... In short, so emerges the logic of the ‘race to lose last’ (Wackernagel 2016).

Moreover, we may go one step further still. These global risks have, slowly but surely, percolated ineluctably into public consciousness, and so too the continued failure to mitigate them; indeed, with growing awareness that system dynamics actually have continued, all but unabated, to *worsen* the global risks. This has thus given rise not just to a generalized alienation, but also to the specific zeitgeist and habit(us) of fear. And *fear multiplies*, not least because – whether personal or collective – it massively further complicates and undermines practical action to address challenges. The systemic context of risk-class emergence is thus the systemic dynamics of positive feedback of *this constellation as a whole*. The ratchet of complexity/acceleration in mutual reinforcement with the relation to the world of alienation, which in turn is in mutual reinforcement (now to climactic peak) with the zeitgeist of fear. And it is on *this* basis that inequality could yet get much worse, beyond the gloomiest imaginations of largely reproductivist sociology of inequality.

For amidst not just normalized alienation, ennui and bleakness or ‘muteness’ in relation to the world, but actually unleashed *fear* that things will, relentlessly but perhaps suddenly, get dramatically *worse*, system dynamics of risk-class take on even more aggressively self-preserving characteristics. Yet this very stance and expectation thereby sets up even more dynamically dysfunctional and actively stratifying trajectories of sociotechnical change. In short, a zeitgeist of fear not only feeds itself but also feeds *specific* responses, at both collective/state and individual/private levels, of intense self-preservation that then feed and legitimize that existential insecurity and fear *yet further*.

Finally, today this whole process is compounded and mediated by the exceptional megaphones and deliberately targeted messaging of social media, post-truth and conspiracy theory. In a further hyperloop, therefore, fear hypertrophies and metastasizes through the associated disintegration, disorientation and polarization of public discourse; that key locus of accountability, democratic oversight and public unification.

At its worst, then, and in places where the division between 21st century global risk-society winners and losers is particularly acute and transparent, this will be actively shaping the built environment and urban forms and practices (and associated sociotechnical innovations) in ways that are entrenching and cementing this ‘normal’ way of relating to the world. The massive building and reshaping ongoing in cities of the global South are striking ‘concrete’ manifestations of such zeitgeists, locking in dynamics of sociological stratification and inequality of the very worst kind. Yet even in cities of the global North, where the exposure to global risks is arguably less intense, we see here too an attenuated version of this dynamic – in the form of the NUC as documented by Florida, and as canary in the coal mine regarding the more broadly dysfunctional and society-destroying dynamics of contemporary digital knowledge capitalism.

In other words, we can now understand the ‘new urban crisis’ as not just the outcome of the success of a particular form of innovation-clustering economic geography, but, set in this wider context, indicative of a whole *new and emergent* challenge for global society as a whole; precisely the challenge of emergent risk-class stratification. Moreover, it is clearly a *crisis*, not

just a new ‘normal’, because of the vertiginous and, indeed, genuinely terrifying self-propelling logic of the *zeitgeist of fear* that is both its product and its super-charger. In short, attending to the NUC in these terms we come to a rather surprising – and certainly social scientifically unfashionable – conclusion that the key socio-political challenge and point of primary leverage is a prevailing *zeitgeist*, not any specific socio-material mechanisms. Echoing FDR’s famous dictum, it is imperative, in fact, that we learn to fear nothing but fear itself.

Such reasoning suggests the essential importance of cultivating an attitude and *zeitgeist* that directly counters such fear and its perilous self-propagation. Moreover, it suggests the importance of forms of analysis that are capable of supporting such a stance. This could be in terms of a deflationary puncturing of the worst fears and/or illuminating openings for more positive future developments; even spotting positive trends already in play but otherwise occluded. Acknowledging the importance of the ‘mood’ or ‘spirit’ of such research itself to its actual or potential contribution regarding the social issue at hand, though, is actually to call for a transformation in the foundational self-understanding of the social sciences per se. For it is manifestly *not* the concern of the vast majority of contemporary social science – and studies of inequality and class included – to take into account what effect its *own* relation to the world will tend to have, or is capable of having, in the world. Indeed, issues of psycho-physical orientation or habitual affective stance, such as fear, feature rarely in such work.

That such issues really do matter, however, is simply a direct corollary of admitting that understanding complex social systems necessarily embeds the analyst as always already included in the dynamics under investigation (e.g. Fazey et al. 2020: 6 on ‘second order science’) – and so *how* one researches and/or relates to the system will itself inescapably both colour the findings and shape the potential impact thereof back on the system dynamics. In other words, we are confronted by the need for a paradigm shift in approach for sciences in and of and *for* (the better governance of) complex systems. This may be summarized as a move to a ‘post-objective’ science and a reorientation from perspectives grounded in the primacy of what Schweitzer (1923/1955) called ‘worldview’ – or one’s sense of the real, objective constitution of the world ‘out there’ – to perspectives grounded in the primacy of ‘lifeview’. This key term denotes the all-important sense of efficacy of one’s stance regarding, and living relation to, the world, as a self-conscious will-to-live.

This is thus to propose a significant shift in the foundations of (a still critically illuminating) social science. It is thus, perhaps, little wonder that it has proven so hard to abandon these prevailing standard ways of thinking – e.g. about inequality – notwithstanding their multiple frustrations and manifest shortcomings. In Rosa’s ingenious development of a sociology of resonance, however, it is arguable that we now have the grounds on which to break with this outdated and sterile approach.

In particular, for our purposes, tooled up with the insights from Rosa’s explorations of resonance, we are also now capable of a full statement of the horizontal expansion of the positive contraries to the fearsome system dynamics of complexity/acceleration ⇔ alienation ⇔ fear. And from there, we can begin to map out the full implications of a new sociology of

risk-class: i.e. not just in terms of new and productive substantive concepts for thinking about the egregious new global inequalities, and the dynamics that are producing them; but also, and crucially, new ways of thinking about these issues and of conducting research on them, with the potential to illuminate, and even to contribute directly to the construction of, *brighter* futures.

6) ‘Resonance, simplicity, liberality’ vs. ‘alienation, acceleration/complexity, fear’

This is not the place to spell out in detail what is, without exaggeration, the paradigm shift in sociological thinking manifest in Rosa’s (2019) magisterial and seminal explorations of resonance and the ‘sociology of our relationship to the world’. With our focus firmly on global inequality and risk-class, though, we can make the following key points.

What is resonance?

First, let us define ‘resonance’ and its importance in a critical, but engaged, assessment of contemporary societies. Working with the physical metaphor of actual resonance between two tuning forks (such that striking one, and then holding it close to a second, will make the latter also ‘resonate’ and ‘resound’), Rosa progressively unfolds a usable meaning of ‘resonance’ for sociological thought. At base, this involves two closely interrelated meanings of the term.

On the one hand, and more abstractly, ‘resonance’ connotes a ‘specific mode of relation – a specific way of being-related-to-the-world’ (p.169). In this respect, Rosa builds on arguments concerning the most productive way of conceptualizing social phenomena as in terms of (perhaps dynamic, systemic) *relations*. In contrast to conceptions of social ontologies in terms of individuals and social structures, this posits instead systems that are constitutively relational (e.g. Bhaskar 1998). It is thus the specific forms of relating that give rise to the both the seemingly ‘macro’ social entities (or ‘wholes’) and the specific subjects (or *relata*) that constitute it. Humans (and indeed, arguably, all non-humans too) are thus constitutively social in the specific sense of being constitutively relational, and hence characterised by their particular modes of relating to other beings, whether human or not.

In this context, resonance becomes a foundational concern of sociology – or a ‘science’ of understanding social systems – in that resonance is a *relational phenomenon* and a specific *quality of relating*. Indeed, it is a particular and singularly important one, being the ‘relation of relatedness’ (p. 178). Rosa’s insight regarding resonance and its sociological importance is thus arguably just a spelling out of the reflexive logic of acknowledging the importance of a relational perspective, insofar as we admit a key element of consciousness and subjectivity to such distinctly human social relations.

More specifically, on the other hand, ‘resonance’ is also used to refer to the fact that this importance of resonance is not merely a theoretical posit, but is a (perhaps, singularly) profound and felt need of the human person. In other words, the actual experience of resonance is one that is singularly significant and motivating to people, and hence can be seen (as Rosa shows exhaustively with myriad and wonderfully imaginative examples) to condition social behaviour and decision-making, whether everyday or of biographical significance. People

actively seek out resonance – or resonant experience – even if/where they have no sense of articulating what they are doing in these terms. As Rosa puts it, resonance is thus:

“a specifically cognitive, affective and bodily relationship to the world in which subjects are touched and occasionally even ‘shaken’ down to the neural level by certain segments of the world, but at the same time are also themselves ‘responsively’, actively and influentially related to the world and experience themselves as effective in it.” (p. 163)

Taken together, then, Rosa’s theory presents clearly and for the first time the need of human persons to experience resonance – both as the ‘resonated’ and ‘resonator’, the second *and the first* tuning fork – and the ways in which such experiences, and (perhaps habitual) failure or absence thereof, offer singular insights into the shaping of current societies and the trajectories of social change. Moreover, and of immediate relevance to our concern here of global inequalities, Rosa is also unequivocal in arguing that resonance also thereby elucidates not just the self-experienced ‘success’ or ‘failure’ of a particular life. But it also and inseparably illuminates the social conditions for further resonant experience, and the extent of one’s efficacy (both actual or ‘objective’ and self-experienced) in shaping these to one’s advantage.

As such, one’s capacity for resonant relation to the world is thereby understood as to some irreducible extent a matter of personal psychophysical disposition or character, but also and crucially (and, in practice, inseparably) a profoundly sociological matter; indeed, arguably the key sociological issue. For different social conditions will necessarily shape *both* the extent to which resonant experience is potentially available (e.g. consider, at limit, the chain-gang prisoner or hostage, as against the successful artist, or the rich man or lady of leisure) *and* one’s capacity and power to shape one’s conditions in order to improve the prevailing potentials thereof.

Moreover, we see in Rosa’s analysis clear potential for dynamics of self-reinforcement and positive feedback via what Rosa calls ‘self-efficacy’, i.e. being able to feel in resonant relation with the world in ways that affirm one’s capacities. Ripe conditions for experience of personal self-efficacy engender stronger openness and active, effective pursuit of resonance, which are then experienced by *others* with whom one successfully resonates, and so thereby compounding and strengthening those conditions etc... And equally, worse circumstances condition failure to resonate, which begets worse condition. One might even say it is no longer just ‘who you know, not what you know’ that matters, but ‘*how*, in what relation and ways, you know them’.

It should thus also be immediately evident that such an analysis resonates (!) strongly with the analysis of risk-class and its dynamics of compounding ‘Matthew Effect’ social stratification described above. Risk-society ‘winners’ will tend to build on their initial advantages in ways that elicit more effective interventions for their reproduction and expansion *as well as* greater enthusiasm and active energy in support of established trajectories of change (if not the status quo itself) that supports them personally in turn. Meanwhile, system ‘losers’ juggle greater obstacles and *in ways* that are less effective and tend to be more disposed to the self-confirming

disappointment of the failure or absence of resonant experience, thus sapping senses of self-efficacy yet further.

Here, in other words, is furnished a crucial and compelling characterization of the *subjective* counterpart to ‘objective’ iterative dynamics of risk-class: ‘compelling’ as phenomenologically persuasive; ‘crucial’ as offering insights for optimized strategic intervention *as* and *among* such resonance-seeking subjects with the objective and subjective processes only analytically separable.

Resonance and alienation

Secondly, resonance theory offers a compelling account of the *nature of alienation* and its *relation to resonance*, in ways that serve to illuminate both of these concepts/phenomena... and hence the broader dynamics of risk-class. Specifically, alienation is the “other” of resonance (and vice versa) (p.178), but not its opposite. Regarding the former point, whereas resonance is the relation of relatedness, and the experience of a mutually responsive and affirming relation between self and world, alienation is the “relation of relationlessness” (p.175), and the experience of a “mute” relation to the world. Alienation is thus precisely the *absence or failure* of resonance, or, as habitual disposition, of a felt capacity or potential for resonant experience.

As such, though, alienation is itself illuminated and in intrinsic relation with resonance, and vice versa. Hence they are like dialectical sub-contraries not binary opposites. But this specific relation between the two may be clarified further. In particular, on the one hand, while persons may be more or less self-conscious, and more or less skilled, in their pursuit of resonance, it is never the case that any particular instance of attempted resonant experience can be guaranteed. Even someone’s favourite song may grow tired, or fall flat in the context of a particular mood. Any such attempt thus risks resulting not in resonance but in disappointment and alienation. And, indeed, this risk is itself a prerequisite for the arising, as and when it does, of genuine resonance, without which the crucial specialness of the experience would be lost.

On the other hand, alienation is given renewed and compelling meaning through its inter-relational definition vis-à-vis resonance. The concept of alienation has fallen dramatically out of favour in (critical) sociological analysis in recent decades (Rosa 2019: 174 et seq.), despite having been a foundational concept of critique from Marx onwards. For all this august lineage, though, attempts to spell out more clearly and persuasively exactly what it means – and what it is alienation *from* – have proven forlorn, again and again, while the term itself has slipped into lay, and hence more lazy, usage. In such circumstances, abandoning the concept altogether, as simply a loose arm-waving, appears the only option for rigorous social analysis. Yet, here, defined in terms of resonance and its absence, we finally have such a clear and precise definition: that alienation (of all its various forms) is at root alienation from (the capacity and possibility of) resonance.

The importance and usefulness of this revived concept of alienation, however, is particularly apparent and marked today, as Rosa’s earlier work (2013) on acceleration shows and the

centrality of the acceleration-alienation-fear dynamics above further attests. Specifically, with this concept we can understand the dynamics of the current manifestation of modernity as a particularly intense positive feedback loop between continual acceleration of sociotechnical change and deepening muteness in relations to the world, or deepening incapacity for resonance. In particular, Rosa (p.17 et seq.) enumerates four key structural elements of contemporary modernity, namely:

- 1) understanding of ethical horizons of a human life as fundamentally open;
- 2) privatization or personalization of the ethical problematic (viz. “how do I live a good life?”) with the result that it is effectively insoluble;
- 3) a socio-political and political economic system that must constantly grow and innovate or collapse (“dynamic stabilization”); and
- 4) the resulting normality of constant competition between increasingly individualistic and materialistic persons, to drive that systemic growth and secure one’s place within it.

Again, we may immediately note the ‘resonance’ of such analysis with that of risk-class.

Built on these conditions, though, positive feedback dynamics emerge of deepening mass alienation. Humans continue – given the insupportable but unshiftable burden of ‘ethical privatization’ and relentless competition – to search unstintingly and desperately for resonance. But this is systemically conditioned so as to be manifest usually in displaced and even impossible forms;⁵ especially those of greater accumulation and appropriation of the world, not least in the form of the supposed promise and security of greater personal resources. Regardless of the passing success or disappointment of such attempts, this tends to cultivate the specific mode of relating to the world that treats it (ex ante) as mute, and hence primed for deeper alienation.

Moreover, in pursuing the ‘jam tomorrow’ promise of resonance in material(ist) accumulation (of experience), such action directly contributes to the further socio-technical acceleration and destabilization that further condition the likelihood of relationlessness, and hence deeper alienation. The dysfunctional dynamic of the present, thus, is fundamentally that of the self-defeating pursuit of resonance in ways that serve only to make it increasingly difficult and remote. Hence “[r]esonance is [today] the momentary appearance, the flash of a connection to a source of strong evaluations in a predominantly silent and often repulsive world.” (p.185, emphasis in original)

Crucially, though, this dialectical relationship between resonance and alienation also illuminates a twist in this tale of the present. For the intimate connection between the two means that “sensitivity to resonance directly and necessarily implies [sensitivity to alienation]” (p.186)... and *so too vice versa*. The present is characterized by the mushrooming search and

⁵ As argued further below, this arguably includes various forms of critical social science as an unusual, and rather perverse and intellectualized, form thereof; e.g. in the motivating excitement regarding insight into the negative state of the world, flushed with virtuous pride.

appetite for self-affirming experience by the insatiable and demanding individualists produced by this dynamic, *and* the growing inability of a world *deliberately created* mute to afford such.

It follows that this deepening alienation has within it the seeds of unprecedented sensitivity to and demand for resonance. In this way, the relation between resonance and alienation is seen to be “highly complex and genuinely dialectical” (p. 174), and we see how the current age – of unprecedented complexity, acceleration and, inseparably, deepening alienation – is also one of unique potential in terms of a new, and newly explicit, reorientation to resonance.

Expanding ‘horizontally’

Returning to the system logic outlined above, we see now more clearly how resonance theory illuminates and resurrects the crucial concept of alienation, and so enables the key ‘horizontal’ elaboration of the negative dynamics of the present; i.e. as complexity \Leftrightarrow alienation \Leftrightarrow fear, with alienation the key bridge concept, unlocking the whole. What is most important for our current purposes, though, is how this, in turn, also enables the horizontal elaboration of their respective contraries in the all-important specification of the associated *positive* dynamics (or, at least, possibilities thereof). Resonance theory is thus the all-important missing piece in a constructive yet still critical social theory fit for a world of complex systems. Or, to put it more concretely, if opening up just how bad global inequalities could yet become unpacked the key dynamic of complexity \Leftrightarrow alienation \Leftrightarrow fear, we may, with resonance theory, move to a fuller system logic that opens other, better possibilities.

Here, first, the contrary of complexity, i.e. simplicity, is connected to and illuminated in terms of resonance, enabling the fleshing out of what and how dimensions of this otherwise supremely ‘simple’, and hence contentless, term. For instance, simplicity may be more clearly specified in terms of how it is a condition that optimally enables relations of relatedness, as against the constant and exhausting readjusting needed in contexts of proliferating complexity and runaway acceleration. Note also how this understanding of ‘simplicity’ also remains perfectly compatible with it being a specific and geo-historically contingent *emergent quality* of a socio-technical system, not a timeless and transcendent purity. Such simplicity is also, therefore, potentially uncertain and unforeseeable... until it spontaneously and unpredictably manifests.

But just as alienation provides a crucial bridge between complexity and the zeitgeist and/or affective disposition of fear, so too does resonance connect simplicity to the contrary of fear, enabling its specification. Tessellating and constellating between ‘resonance’ and ‘fear’, as presupposition and opposite respectively, identified the key missing piece as (what may be called) ‘liberality’ (Murray 1938). This is an affective disposition of positivity and generosity towards the world, an active and practical celebration of one’s freedom and efficacy as an agent in the world, and with an explicit rejuvenated *ethical* (not political) orientation that sees ethics and value(s) as of crucial *practical* importance, not just as constraints and/or pieties. Liberality thus connotes embracing and skilfully cultivating the opportunities for successful (i.e. resonant) participation in the constant making of the world, and in arguably the most important respect of being *free of fear* (Moffatt and Tyfield 2021).

More specifically still, whereas fear is the default effective stance of the subject confronted by a world understood to be potentially hostile but certainly given, liberality is that of the subject able to see the world as (potentially) responsive to their attempts to remake it. In other words, fear characterizes the person who takes worldview as primary, while liberality the person who sees lifeview as primary. And a resonance perspective shows not only that the former is, per se, alienation, while the latter is in resonance; but also that adopting a resonance perspective allows one to *see this* and thereby to *choose* to think in terms of that more strategically enabling framing.

In short, just as a zeitgeist of fear is identified as a key obstacle – but also, as subjective, an important site of agential leverage – to the emergence of more positive system dynamics and positive feedback loops, resonance theory thus enables the identification of liberality as the specific needed to take up this agenda. In other words, with resonance theory at our disposal, we can identify that the crucial positive corollary to complexity/ acceleration \Leftrightarrow alienation \Leftrightarrow fear is (emergent) simplicity/stabilisation \Leftrightarrow resonance \Leftrightarrow liberality.

Once alerted to this, however, it also becomes possible to begin to look for and observe how this latter is not merely posited as idealized opposite, but is in fact evident and manifest already in various ways. To start with, this perspective immediately resituates the ratchet of inequality/risk-class emergence. Framed by resonance theory, we can see this is driven not just – or, arguably, even primarily, at least in terms of its specific *form* and *shaping* – by a purely negative social logic of existential flight and self-preservation – of misanthropic malevolence, malice and selfish disregard. Just as, if not more, important is the active and positive search – albeit often misconceived – for human flourishing of those who find themselves, for the first time, precarious but definite system winners and so determined to pursue their advantages and opportunities with all the energy at their disposal. Both negative *and positive* dynamics are thus at play, albeit asymmetrically and, at present, only embryonically.

Resonance and risk-class

Finally, there is significant mutual conceptual enrichment in placing resonance theory and risk-class in conjunction. First, as Rosa notes, the “root of this incapacity” (i.e. for resonance, as in habitual feelings of alienation) lies “in either rigid fixedness or chaotic openness of either subject or world to which it relates” (p. 179); both of which have clear risk-class sociological allusions, along the lines noted above [see x]. But there are also two specific important ways in which this is the case.

First, the increasing sensitivity to resonance that is the corollary of increasing experience of alienation is arguably a *particularly productive dynamic* amongst precisely that social constituency that is also at the vanguard of the construction of the risk-class system; i.e. the *emerging global middle risk-class*. In short, this powerful emerging global constituency is arguably uniquely primed for a rapid emergent self-consciousness of a conception of the good

life (and good society) explicitly conceived in post-materialist terms of the optimal pursuit of resonance.

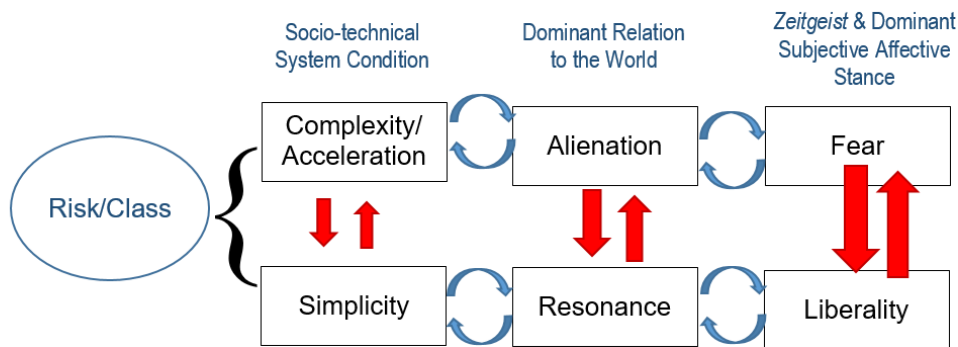
Poised most precariously, but promisingly, between futures characterised by self-confirming cycles of resonance or alienation, the intensity of attraction and repulsion respectively is uniquely strong for this group. The novelty of the enjoyment of opportunities for experiences of resonance afforded by middling prosperity is still great (in ways it is still absent for the global precariat and has grown stale for established classes in the global North); while, conversely, exposure to global risks being a live and threatening possibility (in ways it is not for the established middle classes of the global North, for instance). Moreover, in these circumstances, experiences, and hence positive feedback loops, of self-efficacy are likely particularly vibrant amongst the global middle risk-class (even as they are likely regularly thwarted). This is evident, for instance, in their broader (and palpable) mood of cautious but unquestionable optimism and *liberality*; a mood that is all the more striking for the contrast it presents to the doom and gloom prevailing in the global North.

For example, so dynamic and positive is this constituency that one may speculate that it is capable of an unprecedentedly rapid education and development of its consumer tastes. In this way, the all-but-inevitable surge, in the first instance, of materialist consumerism may quite quickly be overtaken by a move to post-materialist aspiration of the sort identifiable in the global North (e.g. Inglehart and Abramson 1999), but taking just years rather than decades. The rapid evolution of sophistication in consumer tastes in China, for instance, already evidences such a process (Yu 2014).

One must also surely add here that not being Western, Euro-centric cultures could well assist this further. For these groups are not burdened with a deeply entrenched and endogenous fetishism of the autonomous individualist consumer as corollary of the mute world of secular materialism and the enduring scars of the ‘Death of God’. Even to the extent such societies may themselves have become extremely materialist (potentially even more so than the contemporary post-materialist West), longstanding cultural dispositions regarding a greater appreciation of collectivism and interdependence and/or an enduring pragmatism of thought, as opposed to Western literalism, are also potentially significant advantages.

Moreover, it is surely germane that it will simply be too difficult, expensive, ‘wickedly’ challenging and even environmentally impossible for the emerging global middle risk-class to attain the secured high-levels of materialist and consumerist lifestyle they may see in the late 20th/early 21st century global North even if they aspire to this. Consider, for example, developments over recent decades regarding traffic congestion and/or traffic-related air quality across East and South Asia and Africa [ref]. It is already evidently the case that the obvious and default pursuit by such constituencies of such a class-as-goods standard of living very quickly emerges as, not only a zero-, but a negative-sum game.

Secondly, resonance theory enables the identification of the *full system* dynamics of contemporary global inequalities and the emergence of risk-class:

Figure 4: Complex system dynamics of resonance/alienation and risk-class emergence⁶ [

As such, resonance theory not only allows the specification of the second, positive row, but also a sense of how the whole fits together and is in dynamic inter-relation, with upper and lower rows mutually informing and inter-related. Crucially, with the whole system thus specified, we can see that it is the *integrated effect of both rows* that will shape the effects of, and hence the specific forms, of risk-class. Hence, an analysis of risk-class alone points to how much worse global inequalities could get and to the system dynamic of the upper row. In synthesis with resonance theory, however, we also now have the theoretical outlines for exploration of the opportunities for *better* futures emergent with the rise of the system of risk-class (to which we will shortly turn).

With the system dynamic as a whole before us, we can see not only the dangerous positive feedback loops of the destructive dynamics. But we can also begin to conceptualize and explore how these could generate their contraries and especially to the extent there is conscious acknowledgement and effort. This would thereby set up productive positive feedback loops that directly counter, dampen and/or mitigate dynamics of frenzied disintegration and extreme inequality. This applies not just to the contrast between the two rows as a whole, but also the complex dialectical ('and/vs.') relations between each element thereof; viz. alienation *and/vs.* resonance in the first instance, but also fear *and/vs.* (perhaps deliberately cultivated cultures of) liberality and, ultimately, complexity *and/vs.* simplicity.

Indeed, the emergent 'lower' re-constructive system dynamic, in fact, only makes sense and earns its dynamism and, ultimately, stability through and in contrast to the lived experience and understanding of the upper. As we have seen, resonance presupposes the experience and understood possibility of alienation. So too, liberality emerges as a deliberate stance precisely as one witnesses unmistakably the clear and present dangers of a zeitgeist of fear and becomes determined to reject it in defence of things one (perhaps thereby, comes self-consciously to) value(s).

⁶ Blue arrows indicate positive feedback loops; red arrows indicate negative causal relations

Finally, even the great imponderable of an emergent simplicity is illuminated, at least in abstract, by this schema: not as a totalized wiping of the slate, a revolutionary clear out, to some supposedly pure, prelapsarian state, but always and necessarily an *emergent state out of* the level of complexity – i.e. *life* – that has evolved to that point. In each case, therefore, we also see slightly, but interestingly, different relations between the dialectical pairs, furnishing a richly qualitative picture.

7) Critique of inequality studies - reprise

We will shortly turn to our final issue, seeking to illustrate the arguments regarding more constructive dynamics and brighter futures potentially immanent in risk-class emergence. Before we do so, though, let us conclude our critique of mainstream critical sociology of inequality, now building on arguments that Rosa himself (2019: Ch.1) also makes explicitly in his exposition of resonance theory. As already stated, resonance offers the crucial missing piece – for a compelling critical social theory in this new age of complex, global system challenges – of a credible positive counterpart and conception of the ‘good life’ that is capacious enough to be non-specific and so pluralist and inclusive of diverse cosmo-political conceptions, and yet also specific enough to be analytically usable and useful.

More specifically, resonance theory offers an account of the positive goals of sociological enquiry that is compatible with a complex systems perspective. Complex systems, however, demand the admission that one is always already situated within the dynamics one is seeking to illuminate and divert. Social investigation aims to assist in, or itself to deliver, the realization of social futures that are *better* than those currently tendentially in play. It follows that it is a matter of the utmost importance not only to have a clear and compelling account of what that ‘better’ looks like, but also to *embody and exemplify* it. This marks a significant break with a critical social science formulated in an age of relatively enduring social structures. For this latter project could justifiably legitimize its enterprise – both epistemically, in terms of requisite modesty, and politically, in terms of openness to democratic process – in purely negative terms, allowing the ‘better alternative’ to emerge in the course of time as society responded to its criticisms.

Today, however, where the *spirit* of the research itself sets the limit to what it can contribute or not in terms of positive change, a positive enunciation of that goal (however abstract) is now inescapable. In resonance theory, we have one that fits the bill perfectly. Indeed, what is needed is precisely a programme of research (e.g. on global inequalities) that itself manifests and supports the key stance of liberality. And the conjunction of risk-class analysis and resonance theory (captured in Figure 4) enables exactly that: for instance, in terms of combined exploration of both the negative system dynamics of risk-class emergence, and the positive possibilities and opportunities associated with the emergence of the global middle risk-class (in particular) as a new and unfamiliar social phenomenon.

In other words, risk-class and resonance together make clear that the former is precisely *not* another manifestation, at grander, global scale, of the emergence of the Western bourgeoisie, thereby spelling only an even more catastrophic and violent rerun at global scale of its rise over

the last two centuries. Rather the global middle risk-class is *both* a class and *yet also something else and as-yet-unknown*, poised between intense fear and liberality. What is needed is thus to explore it in ways that channel and manifest that same spirit of liberality, or direct opposition to the zeitgeist of fear, so that the potential for positive impact of the investigation itself may be optimized.

Framed thus, however, it is not just the substantive conceptualization of inequality studies that is problematic. This work is characterized by a ‘normative abstinence’ specifically regarding a positive conception of the good life and a ‘psychophysical scepticism’ (p.23) regarding the importance of personal affective stances to the trajectories of social change. The former is today mostly premised on a pluralistic and relativistic, rather than positivist, grounds; the latter on a sociological realism that seeks to eliminate personal characteristics from causal relevance on normatively egalitarian grounds. Yet such positions systematically neglect what is amongst the most important of considerations; namely the importance of the spirit of the investigation to its potential impact in the world. Indeed, from a resonance theory perspective, we can see this contemporary common-sense perspective is doubly flawed.

On the one hand, it is an intrinsically imbalanced and one-sided exercise. For absent any explicit, defensible and credibly realistic formulation of the better world to which it is aiming in its criticism of how things actually are, it, at best, tacitly presumes the possibility of effectively total equalization of distribution of material and social goods (e.g. at least as implicit benchmark against which to measure and critique what is in fact the case). At worst, it has no alternative at all, hence making it a thoroughly negative enterprise of unreasonable and insatiable indignation.

The latter is easily dismissed, but the former also needs rational defence. And in the context of climate change, it is, if anything palpably false that inequality could be ‘fixed’ if everyone’s standard of living was raised to that to which all aspire, i.e. of a relatively comfortable, ‘normal’ middle-class family in the global North in 2020. Given current conditions, this would only ensure planetary environmental catastrophe. Indeed, from the crucial perspective of one-planet living, it is currently the case that even environmentally ‘best practice’ forms of crucial elements to a high-quality living standard (e.g. regarding education, democratic politics, vibrant public sphere etc...) would not yet be capable of achieving this goal (O’Neill et al. 2018).

This approach thus lacks grounding in terms of the all-important implicit contrast – viz. “well, what instead then? ‘Bad’ *compared to what?*” – that it cannot but draw on in its criticisms of the present actuality. Yet, with no justified or mobilized sense of what *good* outcomes look like, its gaze is unilaterally focused on the endless spotting of the unequal distribution of resources and goods – of which, of course, there is limitless, and genuinely troubling, evidence. In other words, thus framed, such studies can and will only ever find, and so spread, *more reasons to be discouraged* – and, indeed, cannot fail but to find such evidence of terrible inequalities, which, after all, abounds – and never with any findings that might signal glimmers of hope in the opposite direction.

On the other hand, though, we have seen that the spirit in which knowledgeable engagement with complex systems takes place matters profoundly – maybe even pre-eminently – in colouring its actual and potential impact on the issue in question. In this case, the one-sidedness of its epistemic project means that such approaches are “capable of constantly mobilizing social outrage” (p.24) regarding what are, unarguably, grievous harms, but *only* this. Indeed, since such perspective offer *no grounds* for identification of cycles of improvement – do not even have a credible conception of what ‘better’ means so as to be able to *look* for it – and conversely, cannot fail but to find inequality wherever they look, they tendentially develop but one affective response to the world: righteous anger, grievance and alienation from a world increasingly confirmed to be constitutively hostile.

The result is that the research programme as a whole is premised on categorically unreasonable and insupportable demands: that unless and until the (not just improbable, but) impossible outcome of a (non-specified) ‘fully equal’ society is realized, they will adopt the unbending posture of decrying the injustice of society and deliberately inciting social antagonism about such issues, regardless of whether such an approach itself is helpful or harmful (in any particular instance) to efforts to tackle those very problems.

The terrible irony, thus, is that, once we acknowledge that the contribution of a research programme to the *zeitgeist* is itself a key element of its potential impact in society and that a mood of fear and outrage is the worst possible context for the tackling of new and challenging complex system problems, then it emerges that such studies actually serve to feed and compound the very dynamics that are generating the outcomes they rightly deplore and are determined to expose. Certainly, the more self-consciously ‘radical’ they are, the more they are incapable of insights that could make a meaningful and positive change in the opposite direction, could offer findings that cultivate the opposite *zeitgeist*, and hence could drive positive feedback loops of societal flourishing.

And, with Rosa, we may note that the root of this weakness is precisely their continued adherence to the objectivist and materialist perspective, which manifests in the focus on inequality as an issue of unequal distribution of (material) resources; thereby excluding from view any concern with issues of resonance. Such work is thus an exercise in reification of the world it rejects, and hence also of the broader condition of social alienation that underpins the whole dynamic array of negative social outcomes.⁷

In sum, orientation to resonance illuminates how the goal is to stimulate new experiments and subjectivities capable of resonance – and *thence* unpredictable emergent simplicity – in and through expanding liberality; and that mainstream, critical social science simply does not engage with this process. But what could such a process look like regarding our concern here

⁷ Hence, regarding footnote [6] above, we find that such work is itself a key example of the dysfunctional and directly self-defeating positive feedback loops of misplaced attempts to find resonance in ways that only feed deeper alienation; in this case, for self and others.

of global risk-society inequalities? In other words, is there any evidence and/or traceable dynamic that could mean the ongoing emergence of risk-class could – has the potential to – lead to *better* futures than we currently tend to imagine, not just worse? To this final and crucial issue we turn next.

8) More positive urban/infrastructural futures?

We have seen how a resonance theory perspective illuminates a whole and still-emerging system dynamic, in which the ongoing construction of a new system of social stratification, i.e. risk-class, could yet be productive, not just a ratchet of deepening alienation and inequality. The key question that emerges, though, is arguably a surprising one, namely: ‘How does, or could, emergence of risk-class system affect and/or effect a mass self-conscious reorientation of social aspiration to *resonance*?’ Or ‘How does the rise of (the global middle) risk-class (and through the challenges of urban infrastructure) condition the shift from the primacy of worldview to lifeview... and then with what potential impacts (via cycles/feedback) on urban infrastructure and risk-class *itself*?’

To explore this question, then, let us return to our issue of urban inequalities and infrastructures and the potential interaction with risk-class system emergence, with the global middle risk-class as the vanguard. From this new and broader theoretical perspective, we find that such issues are in fact ripe for such analysis, and potentially perfect examples of these more positive dynamics. On the one hand, the global middle risk-class likely has acute sensitivity to issues of inadequate infrastructure (i.e. ‘for me and my middle risk-class life and aspirations’); i.e. what is not addressed even when one can afford individualist technologies and avail oneself of contemporary socio-technical opportunities and complexity. Specifically, infrastructure is such a political bellwether today precisely because, of the current inadequacies of the systems bequeathed by a generation of neoliberalism for construction of such infrastructures. Indeed, over four decades of global free market fundamentalism and associated digital technological change have problematized the very common-sense definitions of ‘infrastructure’ itself.

These prevailing definitions of infrastructure, legacies of the understanding of the C19th and 20th, see it is a matter of top-down public bequest of single-best, all-but-permanent and massive materialist structures. ‘Infrastructure’ is thus widely understood as: standardized, often grandiose in scale, concrete and built once-and-for-all; managed, governed and provided by ‘others’, namely publicly credentialed bodies of technocratic experts, and with little or no need for citizen involvement, beyond the passive role of user; and enabling primarily materialist forms of ‘good life’ (for a presumed ‘majority’) and associated cultures and ways of life (not least regarding a settled stratification of class-as-goods) (*Cf* Graham & Marvin 2001).

By contrast, it is increasingly clear that the agenda for the building of the resilient, inclusive cities needed today militates against almost every element of this understanding, in terms of the importance of public participation, experimentation, pluralism and personalization, adaptability and update-ability of infrastructures. The global middle-risk class, as the constituency of powerful denizens of these 21st century cities, are thus particularly attuned to these challenges.

Yet, on the other hand, it is precisely this group that is most likely to be motivated *and able* to build, design and govern these new infrastructures and to work out precisely and in detail how, pragmatically and phlegmatically, to juggle these myriad new and intense challenges in the specific ways relevant to specific places. They will not only act as a significant power bloc, thereby demanding the state resources and powers needed for many of these projects. But as both ‘middling’ in prosperity, relatively highly-educated and aspiring in outlook – i.e. embodying precisely such an aspirational liberality, determined to grab the opportunities for a better life notwithstanding the evident challenges and system risks to which they are also exposed –, they will also be well-placed actually to do something about it. And to do it en masse, as a large, diverse and global group concentrated in the burgeoning cities and megacities of the global South (including the crucial case of a rising China).

Moreover, turning specifically to the system dynamics above, it is not just this liberality that could promise positive developments in this regard. The potential for such outcomes seem even more compelling when viewed through the lens of resonance theory. It is precisely the visceral concern about and experience of alienation – in exposure to global risks – that acts as motivating ‘stick’ in this case. While conversely, with little-to-no guarantee regarding the eventual realization of the secured material prosperity of the late C20th global North, there is a strong external forcing towards the *self-conscious* acknowledgement of resonance (likely only in occasional, but precious, moments) as the real goal (or ‘carrot’) of the good life to which they are aspiring.

In this context, while inadequate infrastructures and urban environments are a particularly arresting experience of deleterious acceleration and alienation for the global middle-risk class, the emerging self-consciousness of resonance as life goal could offer ever-clearer – i.e. as realizable and increasingly realized – re-orientation, *including* not least in their grappling with the challenges of urban infrastructure. As such, this search for, and precious experience of, resonance in leisure *and working life* could well incubate a slow but relentless reorientation of the presumed lives and life-goals that infrastructures and urban forms are *meant to serve and enable*. Moreover, it could incubate this in and through jobs and careers – and for this group especially – that themselves manifest singular experiences of satisfaction in the resonance of the burst of collective creativity such a framing to urban problems may unleash; and especially in vivid contrast to the pervasive background and life experience of enduring conditions of alienation.

Together, then, a global middle risk-class that is encouraged to embrace its tendential optimism may – through the resulting liberality and progressive, even self-conscious, orientation to resonance – embrace the otherwise seemingly intractable challenges of global risk-society as opportunities for their self-advancement. But this would still likely be a world that is being made increasingly hospitable for a lucky minority – albeit a bigger and more geographically spread group than the elites of contemporary late neoliberalism – who are able to live fearlessly and occasionally meaningfully amidst hostile conditions of global risk-society. What is needed to *change these conditions themselves*, and in ways that are to the benefit of all, with the

concomitant mitigation of yawning inequalities, however, is precisely a significant rebalancing of the dynamics of social life from the one-sided production of the overflowing complexity to a new and higher-order simplicity.

This is likely to be a longer-term development. But in basing the specific efforts of the global middle risk-class, e.g. regarding the challenges of 21st century infrastructure, in orientations to liberality and resonance, the likelihood of such emergence is at least optimized, if still unpredictable. Thus oriented to conceptions of the good life that celebrate both human ingenuity (i.e. liberality) and interdependence and relational connection (i.e. resonance), it does not stretch credulity to imagine how this could even result – from *here*, with the present as inescapable starting point – in a new and valued simplicity in the designs and practices of everyday urban life and the infrastructures on which they depend, and even in the iterative processes of their development, maintenance and upgrade.

Over time, and perhaps with startling rapidity given the exponential feedback loops and pent-up energy thereby released, this could then realize a more generalized emergence of system simplicity that is otherwise hard to conceive. Indeed, such dynamics are arguably already in embryonic evidence; for instance, in the arguments for cities and infrastructures that are ‘smart’ not in the sense being overlain with digital technologies so as simply to increase the efficiency of existing dynamics of complexity and social acceleration (Kitchen 2015), but as newly human-centred, place-based and even ‘dumb’ (Fleming 2020). Or, for a striking example, consider the work of Kongjian Yu and his *TuRenScape* consultancy (<https://www.turenscape.com/en/home/index.html>) regarding low-cost, ‘nature-based’ urban flood defences.⁸

We may even specify this dynamic yet further, by returning to the key dynamics outlined by Florida in his analysis of the New Urban Crisis, but now from the perspective of our synthesis of risk-class and resonance theories. Florida’s account insightfully identifies the key dynamic and tension at the heart of the NUC and its crisis of inequality. This concerns the contradictory relations amongst, on the one hand, a ‘knowledge-based’ growth model premised on accelerating innovation and its geography of clustering which generates inequalities, and, on the other, the presupposition of some level of equality for continued economic growth and sufficient social cohesion. The result is thus an asymmetric but dynamically tense relation between constantly worsening inequalities and (greater or lesser, but always superficial) attempts to mitigate them to preserve system integrity and keep the growth model ticking.

To this aetiology of the current predicament, our analysis of risk-class in terms of the importance of alienation/resonance and the current zeitgeist of fear adds further crucial variables. These identify how such dynamics of economic geography also: 1) mediate through a deepening zeitgeist of righteous and spiky individualism and alienated materialist acquisitiveness that colours the dynamics of the whole in ways that tend to the worst possible exacerbations of urban inequalities and self-preserving short-sightedness; and 2) crystallize in

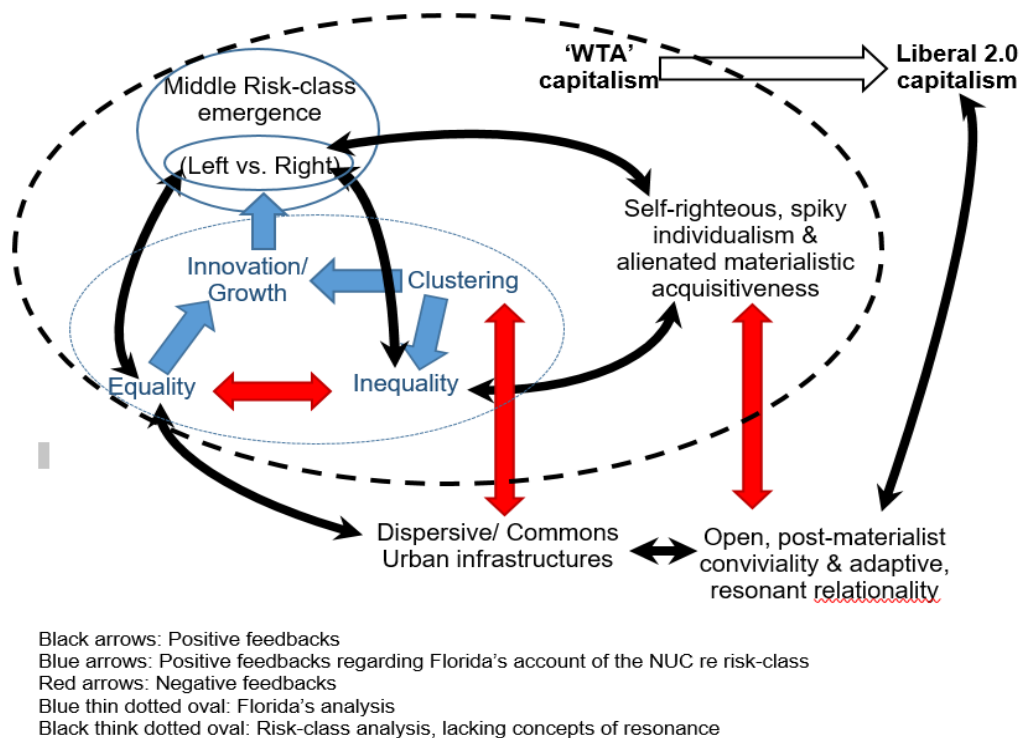
⁸ *TuRen* means ‘earth’ and ‘humanity’, a classic conjunction of traditional Chinese thought.

the parallel and ongoing emergence of the most dynamic social force of the moment, the middle risk-class and the risk-class system of social stratification per se (see Fig [5]).

Once we expand the perspective further, to incorporate the full system dynamic outlined above, though, three further elements of the system become apparent, thereby capturing and conveying at least the *potential* for trajectories of change that are entirely different, as being both hopeful and *qualitatively* productive. These are:

- 1) the recognition of the constitutively ambivalent politics of the emerging middle risk-class as potentially self-serving in the meanest of senses; but also, precisely as exposed to global risks, capable both of compassionate empathy – and regarding the most pressing of new social issues specifically – with those not lucky enough to be in their position, and hence of profound concern regarding issues of equality;⁹
- 2) the countervailing spirit of liberality, not fearful self-preservation, and the growing orientation to adaptive and resonant relationality and inter-dependence; and
- 3) arising from that, the progressive design and construction of new urban infrastructures that serve to enable such resonance-prioritizing lives and for as many as possible, hence with dispersive political economic effect and effectively common access (see Fig 5).

Figure 5: Resituating the NUC within risk-class and resonance



⁹ In the terms of my recent book on the “liberalism 2.0” or “complexity liberalism” (Tyfield 2018) associated with this rising power bloc, this would align, respectively, with a concern primarily for economic liberalism (which would lean Right) and political liberalism (which would lean Left).

Altogether, then, we see how the key question of 21st century urbanism is ‘*which global middle risk-class prevails and comes to dominate?*’, amidst the systemic tensions between the benefits of clustering for innovative digital capitalist economies and the drive to significant rebalancing of urban areas towards more egalitarian outcomes through the construction of infrastructures supportive of such goals. Such an analysis, however, not only sheds some light on the possibility of things actually getting better; and while accepting, illuminating and explicitly building on the distressing and entrenched dynamics underpinning contemporary inequalities, not seeking to deny them. It also offers insight into *how* this could happen, and with the possibility that the eventual outcomes could yet be qualitatively better than we could otherwise even conceive.

Indeed, surely the most radical implication of this dynamic is the traceable potential of the emergent risk-class system as an immanent driver to futures of resilient cities in which constitutive socio-economic processes are relentlessly pushing *beyond capitalism per se*, and in two key senses.

First, the global middle risk-class ‘winners’ of risk-class emergence will certainly drive, benefit from and enjoy disproportionate shielding from continued production of system bads in the short-term, and even likely enjoy public moral approbation for their individualized efforts at their mitigation. Yet the sheer impossibility of externalizing these system bads will secure from them increasing determination and action to tackle these at system level.

Precisely as *risk-class*, in other words, the emergence of this group is distinct from the historical parallel of the emergence of the middle class(-as-goods) of industrial capitalism. This time they will not be able to avoid *internalizing*, and so taking responsibility for, (at least a qualitatively greater proportion of) the negative counterparts of their self-advancement (i.e. system bads or ‘risks’) in ways the latter managed systematically to externalize. For the risks are now global, fractal and inescapable, while, conversely, the subjectivity of this middle risk-class will itself be forged in explicit response to them, not just the sense of personalized materialist opportunity. In this regard, moreover, urban infrastructures will be a key site of this development.

Secondly, though, in their increasing orientation to issues of resonance and explicit ‘anti-fear’ liberality, this tendential pressure is also to incubate a new and unprecedented relation to the world; i.e. one that is foundationally antithetical to the materialist, objectivist, individualist yet idealistically secular-utopian alienation that both characterizes and is generated by contemporary capitalism. A life and/or society oriented to resonance, rather than utilitarian satisfaction and maximal appropriation of the world, is one that is also tendentially aware of the *impossibility* of guaranteeing resonance and hence the enduring *imperfectability* of reality. This is not a stance that can sustain, nor bootstrap, the great destructive delusion of limitless acceleration and material growth.

Instead, this new pragmatic and anti-utopian spirit will be both mindfully fearful of the omnipresent dangers of system disintegration in an age of perpetual global risks and complex

systems; and self-consciously aware of the dispersed responsibility for avoiding the break out of such destructive panics. And for that reason it will also be explicitly and deliberately oriented to liberality as the collective spirit dispelling such positive feedback loops of fear, insofar as there is minimal social and/or personal positivity sufficient to sustain it.

In other words, here we find an emergent and revitalized global *liberal* disposition that may yet condition the sociotechnical evolution of a new social form and political economy that does indeed deliver a major systemic shift beyond contemporary inequality. Far from auguring only a new and worse form of capitalist polarization, therefore, the emergence of risk-class may yet be the immanent development that bridges from the present – when it is, notoriously, easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism– to futures in which we have in fact transcended this form of political economy. Rather, as Figure 5 sets out, therein are also dynamics towards a qualitative shift in psycho-social arrangements, away from the ratchet of competitive, materialist individualism to open, post-materialist conviviality and adaptive, resonant relationality – simply as a matter of ‘enlightened self-interest’, that most powerful of social forces.

We will have done so, though, not through direct, anti-capitalist revolution in the name of ‘equality’ and ‘justice’. And the future that thereby arises will not resemble utopian visions being constitutively sub-optimal, given the impossibility of engineering and guaranteeing resonance, and the intimate (perhaps acknowledged) interdependence of simplicity and complexity, resonance and alienation, and even liberality and fear.

9) Conclusion

There is, and can be, no guarantee that the middle risk-class, spread across the ‘developing world’, and the dynamics of their emergence will forge a world of simplicity, resonance and liberality rather than continuation of the overflowing complexity, alienation and fear. Rather, compatible with the paradigm-shift-like break with prevailing social scientific norms, the analysis of such complex system problems admits no room for such conclusive and ‘scientific’ predictions; nor, therefore, any identification of the preordained ‘agents of history’, as for 19/20th century Marxian analysis of class struggle.

That has not been the goal of this paper. Instead we have sought to set out some of the more important insights available from the synthesis of new sociological conceptual innovations that have grappled seriously with the challenges of *thinking and doing global complex systems better* (Tyfield 2018), so as to present something of a vision of this different – and quietly, but powerfully, hopeful – prospect.

From this perspective, we can see how dangerous dynamics of division and snobbery currently observable with the emergence of the risk-class system could be compounded with misrecognition to create futures characterized by even more nefarious inequalities, and with the self-preserving efforts of system ‘winners’ to ‘save the world’ simply legitimating and driving that inequality yet further, not challenging it (Curran & Tyfield 2020).

As such, there is no alternative to the concerted involvement and responsibility of all persons, including not least the system ‘losers’ of the global precariat and longstanding ‘uber-winners’ of the powerful global elites alike, to steer developments and the emerging historic bloc of the global middle risk-class towards the kinds of collective learning processes and reshaping of built environments that could avoid such outcomes. In doing so, though, it is obviously of the utmost consequence that we can begin to envision and understand how powerful and live system dynamics could yet generate more positive futures (if certainly *not* utopias (Cf Levitas 2013, Wright 2010)); and to accept that the *spirit* of attempts to elucidate empirical evidence of such movements is itself of singular significance.

In short, if the goal emerges as a new liberality, with a new ethical rejuvenation in reorientation to lifeview as primary, out of which may yet emerge a new collectively imagined simplicity and stability, then:

- *resonance* grounds the reorientation in social ontology and the proximal, practical goal that is needed, as conceptual rebasing;
- *risk-class* is the already-emergent social force and agency driving its expedited mass adoption; and
- *resilient urban infrastructure* is one of the most pressing and pivotal problems and opportunities that could compel this collective learning process over the medium-term, and at sufficient pace and scale.

As such, risk-class is a key building block of a reimagined and retooled sociology and in three key respects:

- as a concept, it illuminates contemporary system dynamics, how much worse they could get and the self-defeating danger of reproductivist studies of inequality;
- as a force in the world, it is driving an expedited mass global learning process that is building a transformed, complexity-adept capitalism in positive feedback loops, even as this also likely deepens social stratification as part of that turbulent process; but potentially as a stepping stone beyond capitalism in the longer term and the building of that global trans-capitalist society in new resilient cities and places; and
- as both concept *and* as force in the world, it respectively illuminates and drives the mass reorientation from the unquestioned primacy of (realist and increasingly fearful) worldview to (complex, strategic, affirming and *resonating*) lifeview as the *key and goal* of this moment of system transformation; the stance presupposed for any adequate response to the meta-challenge of learning to govern complex systems well.

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