

The crisis in sociological leisure studies and what to do about it

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The Crisis in Sociological Leisure Studies and What to Do about It

In recent years, social philosophers such as Zygmunt Bauman, Agnes Heller, Jacques Rancière, Richard Rorty and Peter Sloterdijk have generated tremendous excitement by offering some revolutionary and radical ways of thinking about human life in the twenty-first century that present some fundamental challenges to sociology as it is normally conducted. Responding to this trend, this article argues that we need to not only fundamentally re-think what we mean by theory in the sociology of leisure but also how we carry out research in leisure studies. The first part of the article argues that orthodox sociological 'Theory' is dead and it offers some good reasons why this is so. It is subsequently argued that there is a crisis in leisure theory which has its roots in the central tenets of sociology. Taking its cue from Jacques Rancière's classic study *The Philosopher and His Poor* the article develops the argument that if social inequality was once upon a time the fundamental issue in the discursive formation known as the sociology of leisure, today it urgently needs an alternative cognitive framework for thinking outside this paradigm. In order to substantiate this critique the discussion considers two leading theoretical perspectives in leisure studies: the sociology of Pierre Bourdieu and feminist sociology, and in particular the emphasis currently placed on the idea of intersectionality. It is argued thereafter that sociologists of leisure, and others who carry out research in leisure studies, generally have a particular activity in view: methodological uniformity of both the employment of research methods and the philosophical study of how, in practice, researchers go about their business. But there are some different 'rules of method' when we engage in thinking sociologically after 'Theory'. As will be demonstrated in the final part of the article, analysis of this second kind of activity does not rely on the tools, epistemological frameworks and ontological assumptions generally used to make sense of leisure. Instead it develops its own new 'rules of method' which turn out to be radical, because they are not 'rules of method' at all.

Keywords: sociology; leisure theory; social inequality; methodology; sociological hermeneutics; cultural intermediaries

Introduction

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5 It seems to me unlikely that any important sociological theories of leisure will ever be written
6
7 again. Leisure 'Theory' is dead. Theory, that is to say, within the sense of theory as the
8
9 'founding fathers' of sociology understood it. In the future, I can imagine *Annals of Leisure*
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11 *Research* articles and even some special issues still devoted to sociological leisure 'Theory'.
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13 But these will invariably represent flights into the past, package tours to much-loved Arcadias
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15 where sociology used to have some especially firm footholds: functionalism, Marxism,
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17 symbolic interactionism, feminism and so on. As is usually the case at properly consoling
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19 funerals, those writing these articles or responsible for putting the special issues together
20
21 won't dream of dwelling on the deceased's bad points, because they'll no doubt be so carried
22
23 away by the eulogies that got them thinking about the resurrection in the first place— a bit of
24
25 nostalgia; those were the days. But nobody should be fooled by what people will be saying at
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27 these wakes. Make no mistake about it, leisure 'Theory' is dead.
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34 Personally, I see no reason to lament the passing of leisure 'Theory'—the talent wasted on
35
36 theorizing contemporary sociological understandings of leisure should be used for the more
37
38 urgent task of theorizing contemporary leisure. It is, however, worthwhile enquiring why
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40 leisure 'Theory' has become redundant; it may help us to both understand more closely the
41
42 sociology of leisure's historical situation and begin to map out for it an alternative future. It is
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44 to these two tasks that this article is in the main devoted.
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49 **The end of leisure 'Theory'**

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54 If I were asked to mark the moment when the decline of 'Theory' became inevitable in
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56 leisure studies, by identifying the work of one sociologist, I would choose Chris Rojek. Of
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3 the key sociologists in leisure studies, Rojek is an important standard bearer. In books such as
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5 *Decentring Leisure* (1995) and *The Labour of Leisure* (2009), we are presented with a
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7 sociology that registers no allegiances to 'isms' or any other signature gestures. His work
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9 offers us not a 'Theorist's' world of leisure but one in whose sociological evidence we can
10
11 believe. As both of these books demonstrate, increasingly from the last three decades of the
12
13 twentieth century, in pursuing their leisure interests, fewer and fewer individuals have been
14
15 able to believe in the value of the social roles assigned to them at birth. If, in Rojek's mid-
16
17 nineties mind, the postmodern imagination emerged as a new way to think and understand
18
19 how we engage with leisure in modernity, by the end of the noughties he was just as
20
21 persuasively arguing that what we call 'leisure' today is actually a form of social and cultural
22
23 life in which 'work' and 'leisure' often intersect and mutually inform one another. What
24
25 Rojek's work demonstrates more than anybody else's is that theory continues to prosper
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27 when it challenges the intellectual attitude that once defined 'Theory'. This is one good
28
29 answer to our original question about the decline of 'Theory' in leisure studies.
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36 This answer implies, however, that sociological leisure studies are in rude health. But they
37
38 are not. To understand why, we must consider a second answer. Sociological leisure studies
39
40 are actually in a quiet but deep state of crisis. **But what do I mean by crisis? To squeeze**
41
42 **together two definitions, the crisis of sociological leisure studies can be understood as a result**
43
44 **of a 'legitimation crisis' (Habermas 1975), reflected in the erosion of the explanatory basis of**
45
46 **previously important theoretical perspectives in sociology, which has led to an 'organic**
47
48 **crisis' of authority that 'consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot**
49
50 **be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear' (Gramsci 1971 p.**
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52 **276).** This crisis presents challenges that deliver some heavy blows to the discursive
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54 formation, which despite being relatively new feels more like an ageing boxer staggering
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3 with exhaustion in the final round of a championship fight, who still thinks he has the right
4 punches and combinations to win, but can't see that this is more illusion than hit. These
5 challenges bring into question the tacit, invariant assumption of sociology that in order to
6 understand people's leisure choices we need to put their social inequality at the forefront of
7 our analyses. In other words, sociology, in leisure studies, as elsewhere, is the very thought of
8 social inequality (Rancière 2004). This is the paradox that pervades the discursive formation,
9 for it is in the idea of social inequality that sociology assumes the 'truth' about our leisure is
10 located. It is also a paradox of this crisis that its roots are to be found in the circumstances
11 that originally gave rise to sociological leisure studies.
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25 As is well known, in the 1970s the study of leisure was led away from its uncritical comfort
26 zone by bright young academics from disciplines as diverse as urban studies, geography,
27 history, social work, and especially sociology, attracted to a new field of study whose subject
28 burned brightly in their own free time, and who in due course not only produced a new
29 **dynamic subject field which reflected the diversity of their own interests straddling theory,**
30 **policy and practice,** but also a paradigm shift by bringing attention to social inequality as the
31 fundamental issue in the study of leisure. **It is this second observation that alerts us to the**
32 **compelling influence that sociology was to have on this new interdisciplinary subject field.**
33 **Indeed, not only did sociology make a recognizable aspect of human life appear strange by**
34 **de-familiarizing the familiar, but it also provided the means to think differently about leisure**
35 **and its intimate relation to the often unfair (and ideological) functioning, organization and**
36 **development of society. In broad outline, then, a new, critical perspective of leisure was**
37 **established through a sociological analysis: patterns and configurations of leisure vary across**
38 **time and from society to society and culture to culture (Dumazadier 1974; Elias and Dunning**
39 **1969; de Grazia 1964; Roberts 1978; 1981), and leisure is transformed fundamentally by**
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3 modernity in general (Rojek 1985; 1995) and the depredations of industrial capitalism in
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5 particular (Clarke and Critcher 1985).
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10 Yet, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, the crisis in the sociology of leisure has its
11 roots in the aftermath this paradigm shift. Although the necessity of bringing to attention
12 social inequality in constraining the freedom and reducing the ability of some people to take
13 up 'leisure' on their own terms was important 30 or 40 years ago, it has by now run its course
14 and is in need of an alternative vision. Why? By continuing to pose social inequality—
15 particularly though not exclusively of class, of gender, and of ethnicity—as the primary 'fact'
16 that needs to be explained with regard to people's leisure, sociology has ended up explaining
17 its *necessity* (Rancière 2004).
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30 This might appear a somewhat scandalous proposition; it is meant to be. As such, it demands
31 a critical discussion of some of the dominant standpoints in the sociology of leisure. Let us
32 consider two. On one hand there is the massive legacy of Bourdieu, the social theorist of
33 *Distinction* (Bourdieu 1984), whose theories and concepts are some of the most regularly and
34 uncritically applied in leisure studies; on the other is feminist sociology, and in particular its
35 foregrounding of intersectionality in the current theoretical landscape in leisure studies
36 (Henderson 2013; Watson and Ratna 2011; Watson and Scraton 2013). Here my aim is to
37 simply give two illustrations of what happens to understandings of leisure when inequality is
38 presupposed. This is important to note, particularly with regard to feminist sociology of
39 leisure with its qualitative evidentiary bases and miscellany of theoretical argumentation. Of
40 course, it is important to remember that intersectionalities perspective must be understood as
41 just one of many developments in feminist sociology of leisure. But there is no getting away
42 from the fact that it is central to *current* feminist thinking in leisure studies and as such it
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3 provides an ideal theoretical and methodological framework in terms of which one could
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5 apply Rancière's polemic and respond to it.
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8 9 **The sociologists of the leisure and 'the poor'**ⁱ

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11 *Bourdieu: the arbitrary as necessity*

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17 Let us begin with Bourdieu. There is a paradox at the heart of his sociology: although it is
18 extremely critical of social inequality, its subjects have no social role in it other than to
19 perform this social inequality as they endure it as their life. As Rancière explains this leads to
20
21 'a theory of the *necessary* misrecognition of social relations as the very mechanism of their
22 reproduction' (Swenson 2006: 642). This tautology is important for our purposes since it
23 clearly identifies the limits of Bourdieu's sociology for understanding leisure. Not only is
24 social inequality built into the deep structure of Bourdieu's sociology, but it also performs the
25 brilliant feat of making 'the poor' feel ennobled while confirming their extirpation from the
26 world of leisure choices (see for example Bourdieu's magnum opus *The weight of the world*
27 (Bourdieu *et al.* 1999)). It isn't that Bourdieu's respect for 'the poor' isn't genuine, it is
28 simply the case that his insights are not convincingly constituted of the different situations in
29 which social inequality occurs. In a nutshell, the great sociologist of reflexivity thinks that the
30 majority of 'the poor' do not have any time for leisure and he presumes that those who do of
31 being incapable of having any—well, any that doesn't incite the kind of disapproving,
32 puritanical look made corporate by the Frankfurt School, whose ghost lives on in Bourdieu's
33 sociology, grimly looking down and shaking its mocking head at those amongst 'the poor'
34 'aspiring to reranking [*reclassement*] through [their] feats in the great simile industry of the
35 new petty bourgeoisie: the manufacture of junk jewelry or sale of symbolic services; the
36 commerce of youth leaders, marriage counsellors, sex therapists, advertising executives, or
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3 dieticians determined to create within people the symbolic need necessary for the
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5 enlargement of their market, hence for the reconquest of their inheritance' (Rancièrè 2004,
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7 p.p. 192-193).
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10 11 *The limits of the leisure intersectionalities perspective and methodology* 12 13

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16 Another version of this theme is replayed in the theoretical perspective and methodology
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18 known as 'intersectionality' some feminists have adopted in leisure studies, which works on
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20 the basis that social inequality in leisure is relational and has multiple dimensions. The clear,
21
22 rational logic of this perspective suggests that by taking into account the concept of 'class'
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24 multiplied by 'gender' multiplied by 'race' and so on what is revealed is something even
25
26 more unequal. However, it never stops to consider, that in practice, an odd kind of polarizing
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28 effect might just take place. Rather than amplifying each other, social inequalities multiplied
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30 might just cancel each other out. A good example of this approach is Watson and Ratna's
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32 (2011) research in the UK. Their article claims that intersectionality offers us a way to move
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34 beyond static interpretations of compound social inequality by taking into representations of
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36 shifting, multi-layered social inequalities which are constructed across racialized, classed and
37
38 gendered social relations in particular leisure spaces. Yet Watson and Ratna's account offers
39
40 very little that is concrete or geared to representing the social conditions under scrutiny. What
41
42 it does instead is lock the ostensibly multi-disadvantaged into a singular, self-contained
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44 leisure *world*. In so doing, what it fails to recognize is that 'the poor', in common with most
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46 other men and women in liquid modern societies (Bauman 2000), actually inhabit pluralized
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48 *worlds* where there are different possibilities. In liquid modernity, *everyone* wears many hats
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50 and inhabits many worlds. It is sociologists who wish to lock them into a single,
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52 disadvantaged world.
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5 Whereas those who theorize leisure by ‘thinking intersectionally’ see a singular *world* made
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7 up of complex intersections of social inequality, there is another approach to thinking
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9 sociology that sees *worlds* in the plural. This is a view that is not only critical of the
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11 assumption that the theoretical world is the only horizon from which really existing realities
12
13 take their meaning, but one which argues that when we understand the world (*sic*) in the
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15 plural, as the social philosopher Peter Sloterdijk does, ‘then there are different existential
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17 possibilities, that is to say, difference itself becomes the unity into which life draws its
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19 breath’ (Davis 2013, p.p. viii-ix). This view is confirmed by some research in leisure studies
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21 which suggests that an individual may inhabit several different worlds at once and often
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23 within an ordinary day (AUTHOR 2003; AUTHOR and AUTHOR 2004; AUTHOR 2013). It
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25 is scarcely any longer possible (if it ever was) to explain really existing realities (or identities)
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27 rationally as unfolding in time and space with any kind of fixity.
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34 Let us explore this argument in a little more detail. Robert Musil, the great Austrian writer,
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36 suggested 80 years ago (in his highly influential unfinished novel *The Man Without*
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38 *Qualities*) that what gives modern life its uniqueness in the absence of any sign of singularity
39
40 is the universal ability of men and women to exceed whatever identity they have been
41
42 allotted. In other words, we learn from Musil that ‘universal man can only be a man without
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44 qualities, for a man without qualities is the only one who can possess *any* quality’ (Jonsson
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46 2010: 117). That is, whilst there are many ways of becoming-in-the-world, all humans share
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48 the meaning of what it means to be human—in other words all human beings have the sense
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50 of an inevitable, universal, relation but with contingency attached to the individual form their
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52 life will take. As Jonsson goes on to explain:
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3 There is a slogan for this mode of universality as negativity: the right to difference. But
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5 human beings possess no such 'right'; rather, they practice such difference inseparably
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7 from their life process. There are situations in which this negativity becomes
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9 politicized, such as when an external power seeks to fix a person or a group in a certain
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11 identity—as Jews, women, Muslims or youth—thus disavowing their capacity for
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13 negativity (*ibid*: 117-118).
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17 Indeed, the satisfaction we find in our leisure is often the satisfaction of finding another
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19 aspect of ourselves, which permits us to be somebody else and this has nothing to do with the
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21 desire of external powers (such as sociologists) to recognize us 'for who we really are'.
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25 This observation leads to a further troubling aspect of intersectionality. This is the argument
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27 that despite its adherents' claims to the contrary, 'thinking intersectionally' does a double
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29 disservice to 'the poor', by not only being resolutely determined to 'give voice' to the
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31 conditions of the multiplicity of their subjugation, but also by judging 'them' as oppressed
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33 creatures. As Rancière (2004) would say, in the kind of sociology promulgated by the
34
35 intersectionality perspective, there are no 'thieves', only 'the possessors and the disposed'.
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39 One of the consequences of this is that in trying to understand leisure through relational and
40
41 multiple dimensions of inequality, the world of the research subjects under scrutiny is always
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43 bound to remain partial to say the least, and if the intersectionality perspective is one that is
44
45 successful in giving voice, the only voices really heard are those of the sociologists. One of
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47 the other consequences is that 'thinking intersectionally' has to nurture with its thought the
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49 lives of its 'subjects'; but in so doing it fails to grasp the fact that its monsters cannot be
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51 tamed by bolting together objectified versions of their existence from intersections that never
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53 quite cohere with one another. The overall effect is so full of its own virtuousness that it gives
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55 the impression of showing little regard for its respondents, and the arch structuring the
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3 sociology—with its inability to grasp the existential contingency of the individual lives at
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5 stake in the commentary—renders the perspective critically inert. As that most discerning
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7 critic of this social scientific fixation with turning subjectivity into objectivity and converting
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9 people from subjects into objects of investigation, Jacques Derrida once put it, ‘One cannot
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11 say: ‘Here are our monsters’’, without immediately turning the monsters into pets’ (1990, p.
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13 80).
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18 What is perhaps most problematic with ‘thinking intersectionally’, then, is that it ends up
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20 overstating the significance of the relationship between difference and subjugation. This
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22 constitutes the limit of a particular sort of sociology, for which true freedom is only that of
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24 the sociologist, and which is conceivable and functions as the exact opposite of the ostensible
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26 powerlessness of those who are subjugated. As Rancière would say, here sociology ends up
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28 as the very thought of inequality because by posing social inequality as the primary fact that
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30 needs to be explained it ends up explaining its necessity.
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36 What ‘thinking intersectionally’ also does in this regard is deny the true interpretive role of
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38 thinking sociologically since its conception of reflexivity (in common with Bourdieu’s),
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40 foregrounds social inequality at the expense of understanding leisure worlds through the self-
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42 understandings of social agents. Indeed, the awareness of what is lost, overlooked, and
43
44 distorted in the process of transforming people’s everyday worlds into sociology cannot help
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46 but be missing from ‘thinking intersectionally’; and what it shares in common with
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48 Bourdieu’s sociology, is the inability to escape the tendency to impose its own narrative order
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50 on all kinds of untidiness—worst of all, the necessities of sociological ‘Theory’ above the
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52 identification with and compassion for those whose worlds it claims to be explaining—while
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54 failing miserably to reflect on the process by which that order has been achieved.
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Rethinking social inequality and its relationship with leisure

The argument developed so far suggests that in sociological 'Theory' 'the poor' have to stay in their place: on the hand, they have no time to go anywhere else because work won't wait for them, which is an empirical fact; and on the other, their immovability rests on the belief that 'God mixed iron in their makeup while he mixed gold in the makeup of those who destined to deal with the common good' (Rancière 2009, p. 276). This second reason is not an empirical fact, but it provides the alchemical myth ('the story of the deity who mixes gold, silver, or iron in the souls') that underpins the 'natural' order of things and which sustains the idea that 'the poor' have to remain in their assigned places. In other words, in order for sociology to function it has to rest on the idea that the social divisions and the inequalities emanating from these are performed by those who endure them 'as their life, as what they feel, and what they are aware of' (*ibid*). To use one of Rancière's analogies, the identity of someone from 'the 'must fit like a handmade pair of shoes, but the type of shoe is never in question.

Obviously, Rancière doesn't think that 'the poor' actually believe that God mixed iron in their souls and gold in the souls of those higher in the system of social stratification, but it is enough that they *sense* it and as a result feel obliged, responsible and actively committed to this idea *as if* it were true. In other words, for Rancière, social divisions are not only a reflection of actually existing conditions of existence, but also the extent to which sociologists believe that they are natural and inevitable. In Rancière's scheme of things 'myth' and 'reality' and 'activity' and 'passivity' are not opposed; just as a 'reality' always goes along with 'myth', so 'activity' always goes along with 'passivity'. In other words, for

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3 Rancière, sociologists give their *own* meaning to the world through the patterns of hierarchy
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5 and order which appear in their ‘Theories’ and which they help to create and sustain.
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10 Rancière (2009) argues that what sociologists need to grasp is that actually existing reality
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12 and the ability to transform it lies not in their theories or their research but in the collective
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14 passion of individuals. What he also argues is that when the status quo of actually existing
15
16 reality is challenged, ‘a break of epistemology as the qualifying perceptual criterion for
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18 political participation’ (Panagia 2010, p. 98) takes place, which leads to a demand for a share,
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20 a place, a *part des sans-part*, in the social order by those who do not have one. To this extent,
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22 Rancière understands politics as a form of disruption of the established order of things by
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24 those who challenge their own invisibility, silence and unimportance within that order. Here
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26 Rancière is not talking about the empowerment of a group that already has a subordinated
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28 part or a place. Rather, that ‘politics is the emergence of a claim to enfranchisement by a
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30 group that has been so radically excluded that its inclusion demands the transformation of the
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32 rules of inclusion’ (Martin 2005, p. 39). What this suggests is that men and women acting
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34 politically not only demand to be included in the world in ways that have previously not been
35
36 open to them, but that they are also intent on a total transformation of the ways in which they
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38 are *seen* in this new ‘part’ or role—that is, they are after a radical transformation of
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40 experience. In other words, in order for them to be included, the world has to be transformed
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42 to accommodate them in different ways than it has done previously, and in order for the
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44 world to be transformed, men and women acting politically need to conjure a different world.
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49 This is where often leisure comes in.
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54 The essential point I want to make here can be made by briefly discussing some of the
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56 findings from my study of the ‘Inbetweeners’, the intermediary generation that provide the
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3 focus of a life history interpretation of working-class life in northern England in the period
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5 after the Second World War (AUTHOR 2013). Amongst other things, this study explores the
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7 extent to which a generation of working-people found through their leisure interests and
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9 activities the means to transform a world in which they had hitherto been predisposed to
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11 remain invisible. As this study shows, through the life course this generation would re-
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13 discover life as unintended and contingent and they would as a result set about re-making
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15 new worlds in their own image, and discovering also, by extension, that leisure is often
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17 pivotal to these reconstructions.
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23 What the evidence emerging from this study suggests is that when the balance of work and
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25 leisure tilts over from the former to the latter, as it did for many working-people in England
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27 in the post-war period, the distribution of iron and gold is disturbed. Indeed, by stealing ‘a
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29 certain sort of gold, a sort of gold which is at once more and less precious than the gold
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31 which is supposed to be mixed in the soul of the rulers’ (Rancière 2009), the Inbetweeners
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33 were at the vanguard of the dawn of a new order of things in which leisure moved steadily
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35 into its position as the principal driving force underpinning the human goal of satisfying its
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37 hunger for meaning and its thirst for giving life a purpose (AUTHOR 2010). In other words,
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39 what the findings of this study demonstrate is that leisure was key to understanding the
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41 interruption of a tacitly accepted order of things by working-people who had hitherto been
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43 invisible in it. The result was, as the evidence of the study demonstrates, in the post-war
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45 period, that leisure as a certain kind of gold, instead of being out of the reach of most
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47 working-people, began to take up a more central and radical place in their lives.
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51 52 53 54 **Interim summary** 55 56 57 58 59 60

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3 Amongst all the issues that emanate from the cognitive dissonance found in sociological
4
5 leisure studies discussed in the preceding section of this article, the following stand out. First
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7 and foremost, the prevailing discourse underpinning some orthodox sociological accounts is
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9 premised upon situating ‘the poor’ in a singular, self-contained leisure *world*. One of the
10
11 upshots of this is (as we saw with intersectionality), while it provides its adherents with a
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13 vocabulary for analyzing how social inequality in leisure is relational and has multiple
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15 dimensions, it does this at the expense of understanding that all men and women today—
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17 notwithstanding whether they are ‘the poor’ or not—inhabit pluralized *worlds* where there are
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19 different possibilities for leisure. We also saw that such an outlook can lead to some
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21 sociologists equipping ‘the poor’ with an excess of the most unattractive, but also most
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23 necessary features of ‘people like them’—features that while purporting to ‘give them voice’
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25 actually turn them into monsters, or even worse still, pets, whose leisure interests incite the
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27 kind of disapproving, puritanical look made universal by the Frankfurt School.
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32 What is also clear from this discussion is that the discursive formation known as the
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34 sociology of leisure has been too insular, too parochial, and too complacent in framing the
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36 idea of its subject, and while many of the once bright young academics from the 1970s are
37
38 still around, the waves that they make nowadays seem much more modest. Beyond the odd
39
40 blue-moon gem from Rojek, the sociology of leisure seems to have reduced its ambitions to
41
42 the shrinking comfort-zone of coterie approval that is its key associations, conferences and
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44 journals. Moreover, what is hardly debated in leisure studies is that the subject field has lost
45
46 its lustre. The study of leisure has by and large dropped off the curriculum at most
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48 universities and most bright young postgraduates nowadays seem more attracted to subjects
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50 like sport, criminology and cultural studies. The fundamental issue at stake here can be found
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52 in the failure to incorporate into the sociology of leisure what has happened in social,
53
54 cultural, political and economic life over the last thirty or so years.
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5 It is important to qualify something at this point. I am not suggesting for a moment that social
6 inequality is by now unimportant to leisure studies. That is not my argument. My argument is
7 that there is now an unacceptable gap between sociological accounts and quotidian leisure.
8
9 This gap has arisen as a result of the discursive formation's anxious reluctance to let go of
10 the 'zombie categories'—zombies frighten us by being both dead and alive—associated with
11 orthodox sociology, which no longer have a compelling grip on reality. What I am talking
12 about in this regard are the zombie concepts associated with social inequality which have a
13 strange ghost like presence in the sociology of leisure, which still uses them as if they
14 represent something, including power; and to some extent they do still represent power. But
15 the social networks and patronage, the paddings of privilege and the stereotypes leftover
16 from modernity in its 'solid' phase do not carry the same power that they once did—even if
17 sociologists carry on 'business as usual'. Breaking this spell is a game that sociologists of
18 leisure need to play if the discursive formation is to emerge from the current crisis.
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36 So how to refresh the sociology of leisure in a way that thinks outside social inequality? The
37 first answer to this question must be that the explanations I have given for the decline of
38 sociological 'Theory' have implications which reach much further than just theory. Indeed,
39 the whole function of sociology is in question if we can no longer accept that it has the
40 authority to either lock individuals (no matter how ostensibly multi-disadvantaged) into a
41 single identity or to convince us that the theoretical world is the only horizon from which
42 human existence takes its meaning. What this suggests is that the sociology of leisure needs
43 some new 'rules of method'. To understand why, we must consider yet another answer.
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56 **Towards an alternative sociology of leisure**

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3 Today we find ourselves living in a society at once strange and yet strangely familiar. It is
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5 still far from being an equal one, which means that a democratic deficit continues to bedevil
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7 the leisure opportunities of many. However, with the emergence of what Bauman (2000) calls
8
9 'liquid modernity' there has been a shift from a structured and structuring society in which
10
11 our identities were largely predetermined by our social class, gender, 'race' and the like, to an
12
13 unstructured and de-structuring one in which *individualization* dominates more than anything
14
15 else, and where our identities always remain a work in progress. Social class, gender and
16
17 ethnicity may still exert *some* degree of influence on our leisure lives, but they certainly do
18
19 not dictate them. There are many reasons why this is so, but it is still difficult to define this
20
21 change briefly. But what individualization involves, fundamentally, is the change, as
22
23 Raymond Williams once observed, from *unaware* alignment to *active* commitment, or in
24
25 other words, the moving of social relationships to human consciousness. Unaware alignment
26
27 refers to the kind of life you are born into and stuck with, while active commitment refers to
28
29 the kind of life we make for ourselves because we *feel* it our duty to do so. And this is
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31 because all of us—modern men and modern women both rich and poor—are existential
32
33 agents who are very much aware of our social contingency.

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39 The implications of these observations for sociology are profound. In the rest of this article I
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41 shall develop a thumbnail sketch of an alternative sociology of leisure with certain
42
43 epistemological, ontological and ethical implications. In so doing, my approach differs
44
45 noticeably from the *doxa* of orthodox sociology of leisure, by which I am referring to the
46
47 knowledge it thinks with, but not about. The views that I shall develop below have their point
48
49 of origin in another kind of sociological thinking which begins with the assumption that truth
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51 is better revealed through essential action rather than 'Theory'. These views are intimately
52
53 shaped by the work of social philosophers such as Bauman, Heller, Rancière, Rorty and
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55 Sloterdijk, who each stress the ambivalence and social contingency of modern life, and which
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3 culminates in a way of thinking that reverses a number of assumptions underpinning
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5 orthodox sociology's rational theorization of the modern world.
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8 The first merit of this way of thinking is that it abandons the binary oppositions orthodox
9
10 sociology inherited from the Enlightenment tradition. Its second strength, and a considerable
11
12 one, is that it inscribes social theory within modernity by taking it out of the academy and
13
14 placing it politically into everyday life (Badiou 2005). Its third virtue is to foreground the
15
16 question of what it means to be human in the modern world. In so doing it frames human life
17
18 as an existential problem. However, contra Heidegger, it stresses 'becoming' over 'being'
19
20 and the recognition that modern life is irreducibly mutable and heterogeneous. In addition to
21
22 this, it argues that rather than finding ourselves merely 'being-thrown-in-the-world', we are
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24 knowledgeable actors who recognize the conditions of own social contingency. The fourth
25
26 virtue of this way of thinking is that it replaces the idea of a singular world as an ontological
27
28 given with the idea that we in fact inhabit pluralized worlds—contingent, shape-shifting,
29
30 fractured, underdesigned and undesignable, fuzzily-hierarchical, imperceptible worlds—in
31
32 which life is lived *noch nicht* surrounded by possibilities that have not yet been realized, and
33
34 where freedom is considered as our duty. Its fifth distinguishing feature, and perhaps its most
35
36 contentious, is that it brings the idea to sociology that what we understand about the
37
38 pluralized worlds in which we find ourselves is only knowable through some kind of story.
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44 Let us look at this fifth feature in some more detail. My way of thinking sociologically
45
46 attempts to fasten the delight we find in the pluralized worlds of liquid modernity (Bauman
47
48 2000) onto new kinds of narrative informed by the kind of passion found in the best works of
49
50 literature and poetry. In other words, in deconstructing binary oppositions—between 'subject'
51
52 and 'object', 'concept' and 'existence', 'knowledge' and 'action', and so on—and in the
53
54 absence of ontological certainty, it is my contention that 'rules of method' have to be
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56 assigned on what are essentially aesthetic grounds—on the basis of whose narrative has the
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3 more attractive language, or the more engaging style. For a second time, I have put forward
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5 what might appear a somewhat scandalous proposition—though once again for good and
6
7 assignable reasons.
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10 ***Telling stories: sociological hermeneutics and the role of the cultural intermediaries***
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13 Let us look at this feature in more detail. Sociology will never be quite equal to the
14
15 complexity and infinite nuance of what takes place in everyday life, but it is impossible to
16
17 think sociologically without arriving at some kind of interpretation, or another. However, and
18
19 to paraphrase what the great Canadian literary critic Northrop Frye (1963, p. 24) in his
20
21 Massey Lecture *Giants in Time*, drawing on Aristotle's idea of the 'universal event', said of
22
23 the work of poets, what we meet in any interpretation is neither 'real' nor 'unreal': it is the
24
25 product of the educated imagination—if by imagination we mean not, as is sometimes
26
27 thought, the ability to invent, but the ability to disclose that which exists (Berger cited in
28
29 Burn, 2009). Thinking sociologically is neither fixed nor definitive. It is, on the contrary, a
30
31 place of perpetual deliberation, speculation calmed by an awareness of the 'facts' that lie
32
33 behind what is often naively called 'reality' and the sociological imagination, and which
34
35 makes them one and indivisible. Quite simply, sociologists make a good deal of assumptions
36
37 about everyday life and that there is a good deal of truth behind these, and these assumptions
38
39 are as good a place to start as any.
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45 To continue with Frye's synopsis, sociologists should never try to make any 'real' statements
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47 at all, certainly no particular or specific ones. It is not our job to tell our readers what
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49 *happened*, but what *happens*: not what *did* take place, but the thing that *always does* take
50
51 place. The biggest charlatans in sociology are the 'Theorists'; the ones who claim that they
52
53 are telling their readers how things 'really' happened'. As Giddens (1974) has convincingly
54
55 argued, the relation between sociology and its subject matter—the two-way process by which
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3 everyday experience is turned into sociology and sociology is turned into everyday
4
5 experience—has to be understood in terms of a ‘double hermeneutic’. In volunteering
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7 themselves as cultural intermediaries in this way, what sociologists do is demonstrate that
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9 virtue is better revealed in action rather than ‘Theory’. In so doing they reveal themselves as
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11 the most honest of sociologists who say ‘This is my interpretation of the world and I’m going
12
13 to try like hell to make you believe that it’s true; all I ask is that you suspend your own
14
15 ontological assumptions for a little while until I have told you my story’.

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19 In other words, sociologists as cultural intermediaries challenge their readers to engage in
20
21 what Rorty (2007) calls ‘cultural politics’: the beginning of a conversation about what words
22
23 to use to create a better vision of the society we want to live in. What this tells us is that
24
25 rather than trust sociological ‘Theory’; we should trust sociologists’ stories instead. This is
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27 because sociology conducted under the auspices of cultural politics can only be good or bad
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29 in its own categorization. Sociologists as cultural intermediaries know what they are
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31 presenting us with is both a superior and an inferior world than the one we usually live with,
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33 but what they demand is that we keep looking steadily at them both. In this way of thinking
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35 sociologically, no idea of reality is final and no interpretation, however good, is going to
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37 pronounce some final absolute truth. Every new interpretation, every new formulation
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39 emerging from this or that interpretation has the potential to change our understanding.

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44 In anticipation of my critics, I am acutely aware that, as the eminent philosopher R.G.
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46 Collingwood (1994) famously pointed out, the work of the scholar is constrained by two
47
48 important issues that need not concern the novelist or the poet. First, its narrative must be
49
50 localized in a time and space that has actually existed; and, second, it must be allied to
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52 evidence which the scholar has gathered from reliable sources. In other words, as
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54 sociologists, we do not have the freedom of the novelist or the poet; we are constrained by the
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56 evidence.
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3 Walter Benjamin, a scholar who occupied the opposite pole on the continuum on which the
4 rather conservative Collingwood's views could be plotted, offered a more radical solution. To
5 scholars who wish capture the lives and times of any era, Benjamin (1974) suggested, they
6 should develop a 'procedure of empathy' by turning to the period in question in order to
7 redeem its sufferings. Benjamin's invocation gives a crucial role to developing solidarity with
8 the worlds of those whose lives we seek to understand. This concern is captured succinctly by
9 Brewer's (2010) practice of 'refuge history' whose 'procedure of empathy' forms the basis of
10 the 'rules of method' underpinning the aforementioned book *TITLE*. As Brewer explains,
11 'refuge history'

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24 is close-up and on the small scale. Its emphasis is on a singular place rather than space,
25 the careful delineation of particularities and details, a degree of enclosure....Within the
26 space of refuge historical figures are actors and have agency, motives, feeling and
27 consciousness. They are the subjects not objects of history. The emphasis is on forms of
28 interdependence, on interiority and intimacy rather than surface and distance. The
29 pleasures of refuge history derive not from a sense of control of history but from a
30 sense of belonging, of connectedness—to both persons and details—in the past.
31 Whether as the expression of a certain common humanity or as an identification with a
32 particular group, this sort of history sees sympathy and understanding—a measure of
33 identification which can range from the quite abstract to the deeply emotive—as
34 essential to historical knowledge and insight. Refuge history is therefore... *Heimlich*
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(2010, p. 89).

Trying to understand different worlds with different rules demands a special kind of
sociological inquiry. This is the kind of inquiry that takes into account the objective features
of the world while contemplating real-life situations—research respondents' inner and outer

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2
3 worlds—by accounting for their personal priorities and relationships with others. There are
4
5 two other important building blocks to this kind of inquiry. First it begins with the
6
7 assumption that the human ‘becoming-in-the-world’ is knit together with its own sense of
8
9 security and comfort—with *feeling* just right—and second that every world has its own sense
10
11 of morality—its inhabitants *living* life in a way that they deem right.
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15 ***Thinking with feeling: how to make the sociology of leisure heimlich***
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18 These insights form of the basis of my own sociological ‘rules of method’, which demand
19
20 that if we should seek to record the leisure lives of our research respondents accurately, we
21
22 must also aim at getting into the evidence of how and in what ways they *experience* leisure
23
24 and its *social meaning* for them, as well as something of its disorderly continuity— often
25
26 invisible, but all the more consequential for being so—which makes life palpable, and in
27
28 some cases, bearable. To paraphrase Foucault (1970, p. xi), the purpose of researching
29
30 leisure *heimlich* is to try to restore what usually eludes the consciousness of the sociological
31
32 imagination, which is looking at a milieu and its people from the inside and trying to feel
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34 what it feels, what they feel.
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39 One of my key concerns in the aforementioned book is to explore and evoke the emotional
40
41 contours of my respondents’ collective history. In other words, to paraphrase Nora, it is
42
43 concerned with what wells up from this generation that memory has welded together (1996,
44
45 p. 3). In developing this study, I inhabited a realm between the past and the present, moving
46
47 back- and-forth, in dialogue, constructing a narrative as an interpretive device made between
48
49 me and my respondents. The study works with the assumption that reality cannot be
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51 reproduced in history, but the concentrated act of reproducing some of reality’s dynamics
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53 can, of turning history into an essential action—even if the best it can hope to achieve is
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55 make the world it renders in its pages feel human and not merely academic machination. In
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3 other words, refuge history—understood here as the empathetic study of what Hegel called
4
5 ‘absolute spirit home-experience’ (Heller 2011) and the narrative that moves it—is the
6
7 domain *par excellence* of sociological hermeneutics.
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10 Sociological hermeneutics is reminiscent of what Foucault termed a ‘general’ history (as
11
12 opposed to a ‘total’ history). Whereas a ‘total’ history draws its resources around a single
13
14 unifying centre—‘a principle, a meaning, a spirit, a worldview, an overall shape’; a ‘general’
15
16 history, deploys ‘the space of a dispersion’ (1972, p. 10). Foucault’s critical method
17
18 recognizes that all historical (and sociological) accounts are embedded in, and concerned
19
20 with, the exercise of power-knowledge. This critical awareness informs the study in question
21
22 in the sense that it deploys its own ‘space of a dispersion’ in the gap between what is
23
24 necessarily present and unnecessarily absent in the individual and collective memories of the
25
26 Inbetweeners. What this tells the reader of the book is that between the past and memory
27
28 there is something else at stake that is much more important than ensuring reliability and
29
30 representativeness. This is that interpretation itself is a moral issue: subject and object, the
31
32 counterfactual and the ‘factual’, the necessary and the contingent, and so on, are
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34 intermingled; in this study, contraries always come together.
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40 *Metaphoricity and pictorial thinking*

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43 And yet, whether we are always conscious of the fact or not, we scholars—historians or
44
45 sociologists or whoever, depending on our education or individual taste or contingent
46
47 encounters (or more often than not, I suspect, all three of these), will have been captivated by
48
49 certain theories, certain ideas. From these ideas we derive the framework of our own
50
51 intuitions, the underpinning convictions that form our own scholarship. Many of the shaping
52
53 beliefs (of which I am conscious) that underpin my own scholarship are located in the
54
55 sociology of Zygmunt Bauman—especially his ideas of ‘solid’ modernity and ‘liquid’
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3 modernity—which attests that as the world alters, we need the right vocabulary with which to
4
5 interpret it.
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8 It is my view that Bauman sets the agenda for sociology today: for what we think
9
10 sociologically about when it comes to the modern world. Bauman came up with his own
11
12 narrative voice that allows him to interpret modernity in a special way. Writing the modern
13
14 world as ‘solid’ versus ‘liquid’ is the creation of two discrete modern experiences in
15
16 themselves on the page. The way the reader knows that Bauman has found the right narrative
17
18 voices for those experiences is because the sociology gives you access to those two
19
20 experiences—the felt life—that is those two opposing versions of modernity in themselves.
21
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23
24 Used in the way that Bauman uses them, the metaphors of ‘solidity’ and ‘liquidity’ are
25
26 intellectual devices, not ‘things’ in the world (Beilharz 2010). In other words, Bauman
27
28 constructs the world as ‘ideal typical’ meaning (*ideal types* are not descriptions of reality, but
29
30 analytical tools sociologists use to try to understand it). This enables him (and us) to see the
31
32 modern world through ‘solid’ and ‘liquid’ representations that he has imaginatively posed on
33
34 it by using these ‘ideal types’.
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37
38 The juxtaposition of ‘solidity and ‘liquidity’ offers sociologists a fresh way of thinking about
39
40 leisure. This is a way of thinking that does not depend on ‘Theory’, but rather on metaphor,
41
42 which is the rhetorical tool that enables us to ‘defamiliarize the familiar’ and show it in a new
43
44 light (Bauman 1990). Metaphor is that part of language that enables us to practice
45
46 hermeneutics. That is, on the one hand, to make meaning i.e. make intelligible that which
47
48 could not otherwise be grasped, and on the other, to deepen our understanding so as to make
49
50 meaning even more meaningful, in the process creating some democratic operating principles
51
52 as we go along. Seen in this way, Bauman presents us with some intellectual devices which
53
54 signal the continuation the sociological imagination by an alternative means, which retrains it
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3 into looking for both similarities and contradictions, in other words, the ambivalence of what
4
5 we casually call 'reality', and to see significance and meaning in unexpected places.
6
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8 This metaphorical reconstruction of modernity, as Bauman conceives it, is by no means a
9
10 simple replacement of 'solid' modern by 'liquid' modern considerations: on the contrary, the
11
12 central tenet of Bauman's sociology is the need to exhort critical analysis to constant
13
14 juxtaposition. Bauman recognizes that thinking is unsurpassed when we juxtapose, when we
15
16 recognize the value of bringing opposites together, when we realize that two 'realities', one
17
18 posed next to the other, are in one way or another connected.
19
20

21
22 As the Wittgenstein scholar, Peter Hacker (2010), points out, questions about 'what it is like
23
24 to be something?' require contrasts in order to make sense. What is it like for a person born
25
26 into the working class to experience leisure? This is not a good question. For Hacker, critical
27
28 inquiry is dialogical in spirit. In other words, we should turn our attention to what two
29
30 things—in the case my study *TITLE* (2003), the certain solid modernity and the unpredictable
31
32 liquid modernity—might say about each other. What is it like for a person born into a solid,
33
34 seemingly permanent, immutable modernity to find themselves in a liquid modern world?
35
36 This is a perfectly good question. In other words, following Wittgenstein's emphasis on
37
38 *seeing* things differently and the associated notions of pictorial thinking through 'family
39
40 resemblances', there is a requirement that there be a juxtaposition, and once there is all sorts
41
42 of stories are likely to follow. From this shuttling between 'solid' and 'liquid'—concepts as
43
44 magic wands in and of themselves which illuminate, with an almost miraculous precision, our
45
46 way of thinking by maximizing contrast—it is my argument that it is possible to weave a
47
48 larger fabric, a sustained deliberation on some key themes, to be precise, a picture of the
49
50 always unrestful modernity.
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55 56 ***Indisciplinarity*** 57 58 59 60

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3 What the foregoing discussion tells us if nothing else is that every study is, in part, a
4
5 reflection of its author and his putative assumptions. This is not to say that I cannot look at
6
7 the world other than through the spectacles fitted for me by Zygmunt Bauman. Bauman's
8
9 sense of sociology, as he once told me, is that it is like a sponge, a creature porous in texture
10
11 and of uncertain outline, whose hollows embody countless visiting ideas which swim and
12
13 often stay to breed. Sociology will never be an academic discipline sure of itself, capable of
14
15 making authoritative statements or offering definitive answers. It will always be, for better or
16
17 worse, tentative in its deliberations. What this also tells us is that thinking sociologically
18
19 should never be content with any one way of making sense of the world, nor should it rest
20
21 content that there is any one discipline best placed to make sense of it.
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26 Steering a course between different perspectives, my own approach develops its own
27
28 hermeneutics of 'undecidability' that offers a principle of convergence that we extend beyond
29
30 sociology, history, philosophy and all the rest into the world of culture and our knowledge of
31
32 it, the world of *Kulturwissenschaft*. What this tells the reader is that my approach attempts to
33
34 account for individuals and their worlds by operating on an *indisciplinary* basis (Rancière
35
36 2008), which is not only a matter of going above and beyond the call of duty of sociology as
37
38 we normally understand it, but also breaking with it. Whereas *interdisciplinarity* merely
39
40 signals a combination of approaches drawn from various disciplines, *indisciplinarity* moves
41
42 outside boundaries, setting itself free by subordinating the false divisions between sociology,
43
44 psychology, geography, philosophy and so on, to the sociological imagination, which affects
45
46 the whole person rather than just training the mind, bringing with it moral development that
47
48 leads to the discovery that the imaginative world and the world around us are different
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50 worlds, and that the imaginative world *is more important* (Frye 1963).
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55 **Conclusions**

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3 What these last observations attest is not only that all those awakened to rethinking
4 sociologically anew must be aware that ethical questions are today more difficult (Sloterdijk
5 2013, p. 90), but also that sociological theory means something different. As it rose from its
6 death it developed some ‘new rules of method’ which, following Wittgenstein’s emphasis on
7 *seeing* things differently and the associated notions of pictorial thinking through ‘family
8 resemblances’, abandons theorizing altogether. In other words, after ‘Theory’, narrative—
9 another expression for story-telling, as says Sloterdijk (2013, p. 11), bent on the ‘musical-
10 rhapsodic transmission of knowledge rather than the ‘prosaic-communicative procurement of
11 knowledge’—was now resurrected as a viable alternative to ‘Theory’, and not just as
12 intelligent but better made to the measure of the contemporary world. This ‘new’ method not
13 only entailed taking ‘Theory’ out of the academy and placing it politically into everyday life.
14 It was also to become a way of explaining social life that is on the one hand ‘indisciplinary’
15 and on the other content to rely on interpretations drawn from metaphors (and by default
16 other tropes drawn from literature and poetry), rather than depending on facts or being fixated
17 with establishing grand ‘Theory’.

18
19 Those who use pictorial thinking through ‘language games’ argue two things: firstly, that it is
20 a different way of thinking that recognizes that as worlds alter, we need new vocabularies
21 with which to interpret them, and secondly, that sociologically there are many different
22 stories that we can tell and re-tell. What these stories do not do is try to *conceptualize* the
23 worlds under scrutiny through the rules of logic. What they do, instead, is *literalize*
24 metaphor. This is what makes pictorial thinking valuable. It alerts us to what abstract
25 conceptual thinking cannot: those stubbornly universal human dilemmas—questions to
26 which sociologists have found few compelling answers—which have never vanished from
27 life. The hallmark of this ‘rule of method’, then, is that it recurs perennially as our
28 understandings are revised and revived as society and culture shift and change.

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3 As we have also seen, the practice of pointing out the questionable epistemological grounds
4 which form the basis of orthodox sociological 'Theory', while simultaneously asking ones
5 readers to temporarily suspend their own ontological assumptions, is one of the most
6 distinctive features of this reflexive approach. Some readers will no doubt find the
7 combination of outspoken epistemological criticism and deferred ontological judgement
8 troubling. Others will be equally unhappy about accepting such a frankly novelizing
9 methodological approach, especially when it is applied to certain aspects of abnormal leisure
10 (Rojek 2005; 2013), for example. However, the disorderly continuity of modern life is
11 infinitely less predictable and more strangely ambiguous than any sociological theory would
12 suggest. Sociologists must face up to the fact that each and every one of them is standing in a
13 moral quagmire as they try to illuminate the lived (leisure) life through their different stories.
14 As such, to paraphrase Sloterdijk, we must recognize that as sociologists we must be prepared
15 to be challenged where our own tacit assumptions are interrogated. When there is no solid
16 ground under the sociological enterprise, no basis for moral certainty, the truth is that the
17 only other way the authority of any work can be enhanced is through the acknowledgment of
18 its predispositions.
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41 The effects of social inequality, we can agree, continue, and always will be important for
42 understanding leisure. In this regard we have learned from Giddens, the two-way process by
43 which everyday experience is turned into sociology and sociology is turned into everyday
44 experience should always be promoted by sociologists as a democratic activity. Any
45 sociologist intent on revealing the effects of social inequality on leisure must try to ensure
46 that they are showing us *both* of these things. There is no one theory or 'rule of method' in
47 this regard; the genuinely reflexive sociologist will write these the way that they must write
48 them. In the most compelling stories the writing will be clear and the ideas will be based on
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3 things *seen* by the sociologist and *spoken about* by their research respondents rather than on
4
5 what they think as a professional sociologist and is excited to think they now understand it
6
7 all.
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11 This finally brings me to the sixth, and final, feature of my 'new rules of method'. This is the
12
13 admonition to all sociologists that they must complicate their stories by questioning what it is
14
15 possible for them as researchers, or anyone else for that matter, to finally 'know' about other
16
17 people. It is all too easy to feel and to theorize people less fortunate than yourself (also
18
19 known as 'the poor') as part of a mass—or any other kind of social grouping vulnerable to
20
21 political manipulation. It is also all too easy to disapprove of what that mass do in *their*
22
23 leisure. But that kind of feeling and theorizing is as foolish as the disapproving is
24
25 reprehensible. To put some additional gloss on James' (2009, p. 9) perceptive observations,
26
27 the mass are *us*: a multitude of individuals. They just happen to be leading less fortunate
28
29 lives. Any sociologist who speaks about social justice from their privileged position will not
30
31 be able to do so in any compelling ways unless they can dispel the disapproving, puritanical
32
33 attitude that often pervades sociology. In order to do this, they will not only have to replace
34
35 this attitude with compassion—as Paul Taylor (2009) observed, identifying with those less
36
37 privileged than yourself is not enough, you need to really feel their plight: 'to identify is
38
39 merely to love one's neighbour as oneself; to empathise is to love one's neighbour for himself
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41 or herself'—but just as importantly recognize that their own fortune begins with their own
42
43 freedom.
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51 What I have argued in a nutshell in this article is that, to paraphrase Bauman (1989), if
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53 sociology is going to claim the right to speak with authority about leisure in the twenty-first
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55 century, it is going to have to update its conceptual, empirical and normative understandings
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3 of leisure. Currently it presents us with only a two-dimensional understanding of leisure
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5 inherited from the dichotomous thinking that underpins the Enlightenment tradition. We need
6
7 a third dimension. What I have offered in the second part of the foregoing discussion is an
8
9 alternative way of thinking sociologically that gives us this dimension. This is the path
10
11 forward for the sociology of leisure. Bauman, Heller, Rancière, Rorty and Sloterdijk have led
12
13 the way. Given the resources of their scholarship, there is no reason not to follow.
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ⁱMy use of the term 'the poor' here is Rancière's which works with the assumption that the
history of Western thought is one in which freedom and the right to think are premised on
situating and excluding those whose social role is perceived other than to think. In applying
the term in this way I am also using it as a shorthand to include all those social groups who
are in one way or another subjugated and/or excluded.

The Crisis in Sociological Leisure Studies and What to Do about It

In recent years, social philosophers such as Zygmunt Bauman, Agnes Heller, Jacques Rancière, Richard Rorty and Peter Sloterdijk have generated tremendous excitement by offering some revolutionary and radical ways of thinking about human life in the twenty-first century that present some fundamental challenges to sociology as it is normally conducted. Responding to this trend, this article argues that we need to not only fundamentally re-think what we mean by theory in the sociology of leisure but also how we carry out research in leisure studies. The first part of the article argues that orthodox sociological 'Theory' is dead and it offers some good reasons why this is so. It is subsequently argued that there is a crisis in leisure theory which has its roots in the central tenets of sociology. Taking its cue from Jacques Rancière's classic study *The Philosopher and His Poor* the article develops the argument that if social inequality was once upon a time the fundamental issue in the discursive formation known as the sociology of leisure, today it urgently needs an alternative cognitive framework for thinking outside this paradigm. In order to substantiate this critique the discussion considers two leading theoretical perspectives in leisure studies: the sociology of Pierre Bourdieu and feminist sociology, and in particular the emphasis currently placed on the idea of intersectionality. It is argued thereafter that sociologists of leisure, and others who carry out research in leisure studies, generally have a particular activity in view: methodological uniformity of both the employment of research methods and the philosophical study of how, in practice, researchers go about their business. But there are some different 'rules of method' when we engage in thinking sociologically after 'Theory'. As will be demonstrated in the final part of the article, analysis of this second kind of activity does not rely on the tools, epistemological frameworks and ontological assumptions generally used to make sense of leisure. Instead it develops its own new 'rules of method' which turn out to be radical, because they are not 'rules of method' at all.

Keywords: sociology; leisure theory; social inequality; methodology; sociological hermeneutics; cultural intermediaries

Introduction

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5 It seems to me unlikely that any important sociological theories of leisure will ever be written
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7 again. Leisure ‘Theory’ is dead. Theory, that is to say, within the sense of theory as the
8
9 ‘founding fathers’ of sociology understood it. In the future, I can imagine *Annals of Leisure*
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11 *Research* articles and even some special issues still devoted to sociological leisure ‘Theory’.
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13 But these will invariably represent flights into the past, package tours to much-loved Arcadias
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15 where sociology used to have some especially firm footholds: functionalism, Marxism,
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17 symbolic interactionism, feminism and so on. As is usually the case at properly consoling
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19 funerals, those writing these articles or responsible for putting the special issues together
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21 won’t dream of dwelling on the deceased’s bad points, because they’ll no doubt be so carried
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23 away by the eulogies that got them thinking about the resurrection in the first place— a bit of
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25 nostalgia; those were the days. But nobody should be fooled by what people will be saying at
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27 these wakes. Make no mistake about it, leisure ‘Theory’ is dead.
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34 Personally, I see no reason to lament the passing of leisure ‘Theory’—the talent wasted on
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36 theorizing contemporary sociological understandings of leisure should be used for the more
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38 urgent task of theorizing contemporary leisure. It is, however, worthwhile enquiring why
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40 leisure ‘Theory’ has become redundant; it may help us to both understand more closely the
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42 sociology of leisure’s historical situation and begin to map out for it an alternative future. It is
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44 to these two tasks that this article is in the main devoted.
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49 **The end of leisure ‘Theory’**

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54 If I were asked to mark the moment when the decline of ‘Theory’ became inevitable in
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56 leisure studies, by identifying the work of one sociologist, I would choose Chris Rojek. Of
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3 the key sociologists in leisure studies, Rojek is an important standard bearer. In books such as
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5 *Capitalism and Leisure Theory (1985)*, *Decentring Leisure (1995)*, *Leisure and Culture*
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7 *(2000)*, *Leisure Theory (2005)* and *The Labour of Leisure (2009)*, we are presented with a
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9 sociology that registers no allegiances to ‘isms’ or any other signature gestures. His work
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11 offers us not a ‘Theorist’s’ world of leisure but one in whose sociological evidence we can
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13 believe. As both of these books demonstrate, increasingly from the last three decades of the
14
15 twentieth century, in pursuing their leisure interests, fewer and fewer individuals have been
16
17 able to believe in the value of the social roles assigned to them at birth. If, in Rojek’s mid-
18
19 nineties mind, the postmodern imagination emerged as a new way to think and understand
20
21 how we engage with leisure in modernity, by the end of the noughties he was just as
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23 persuasively arguing that what we call ‘leisure’ today is actually a form of social and cultural
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25 life in which ‘work’ and ‘leisure’ often intersect and mutually inform one another. What
26
27 Rojek’s work demonstrates more than anybody else’s is that theory continues to prosper
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29 when it challenges the intellectual attitude that once defined ‘Theory’. This is one good
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31 answer to our original question about the decline of ‘Theory’ in leisure studies.
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38 This answer implies, however, that **sociological leisure studies is in rude health. But it is not.**
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40 To understand why, we must consider a second answer. Sociological leisure studies **is**
41
42 actually in a quiet but deep state of crisis. **But what do I mean by crisis? To squeeze together**
43
44 **two definitions, the crisis of sociological leisure studies can be understood as a result of a**
45
46 **‘legitimation crisis’ (Habermas 1975), reflected in the erosion of the explanatory basis of**
47
48 **previously important theoretical perspectives in sociology, which has led to an ‘organic**
49
50 **crisis’ of authority that ‘consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot**
51
52 **be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear’ (Gramsci 1971 p.**
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54 **276). What sort of crisis is this? My argument is that the situation in sociological leisure**
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3 studies is part of an intellectual crisis that is mirrored in all areas of leisure studies, which has
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5 in no uncertain terms precipitated the decline in the study of leisure in universities across the
6
7 globe. But what makes this crisis even more serious is that it has presaged 'business as usual'
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9 and the deepening of present trends. This crisis presents challenges that deliver some heavy
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11 blows to the discursive formation, which despite being relatively new feels more like an
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13 ageing boxer staggering with exhaustion in the final round of a championship fight, who still
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15 thinks he has the right punches and combinations to win, but can't see that this is more
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17 illusion than hit. These challenges bring into question the tacit, invariant assumption of
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19 sociology that in order to understand people's leisure choices we need to put their social
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21 inequality at the forefront of our analyses. In other words, sociology, in leisure studies, as
22
23 elsewhere, is the very thought of social inequality (Rancière 2004). This is the paradox that
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25 pervades the discursive formation, for it is in the idea of social inequality that sociology
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27 assumes the 'truth' about our leisure is located. It is also a paradox of this crisis that its roots
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29 are to be found in the circumstances that originally gave rise to sociological leisure studies.
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36 As is well known, in the 1970s the study of leisure was led away from its uncritical comfort
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38 zone by bright academics from disciplines as diverse as urban studies, geography, history,
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40 social work, and especially sociology, attracted to a new field of study whose subject burned
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42 brightly in their own free time, and who in due course not only produced a new **dynamic**
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44 **subject field which reflected the diversity of their own interests straddling theory, policy and**
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46 **practice**, but also a paradigm shift by bringing attention to social inequality as the
47
48 fundamental issue in the study of leisure. **It is this second observation that alerts us to the**
49
50 **compelling influence that sociology was to have on this new interdisciplinary subject field.**
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52 **Indeed, not only did sociology make a recognizable aspect of human life appear strange by**
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54 **de-familiarizing the familiar, but it also provided the means to think differently about leisure**
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3 and its intimate relation to the often unfair (and ideological) functioning, organization and
4
5 development of society. In broad outline, then, a new, critical perspective of leisure was
6
7 established through a sociological analysis: patterns and configurations of leisure vary across
8
9 time and from society to society and culture to culture (Dumazadier 1974; Elias and Dunning
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11 1969; de Grazia 1964; Kelly 1978; 1983; Parker 1971; 1983; Roberts 1978; 1981), and
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13 leisure is transformed fundamentally by modernity in general (Rojek 1985; 1995) and the
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15 depredations of industrial capitalism in particular (Clarke and Critcher 1985).
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21 Yet, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, the crisis in the sociology of leisure has its
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23 roots in the aftermath this paradigm shift. Although the necessity of bringing to attention
24
25 social inequality in constraining the freedom and reducing the ability of some people to take
26
27 up 'leisure' on their own terms was important 30 or 40 years ago, it has by now run its course
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29 and is in need of an alternative vision. Why? By continuing to pose social inequality—
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31 particularly though not exclusively of class, of gender, and of ethnicity—as the primary 'fact'
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33 that needs to be explained with regard to people's leisure, sociology has ended up explaining
34
35 its *necessity* (Rancière 2004).
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41 This might appear a somewhat scandalous proposition; it is meant to be. As such, it demands
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43 a critical discussion of some of the dominant standpoints in the sociology of leisure. Let us
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45 consider two. On one hand there is the massive legacy of Bourdieu, the social theorist of
46
47 *Distinction* (Bourdieu 1984), whose theories and concepts are some of the most regularly and
48
49 uncritically applied in leisure studies; on the other is feminist sociology, and in particular its
50
51 foregrounding of intersectionality in the current theoretical landscape in leisure studies
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53 (Caudwell and Brown 2011; Henderson 2013; Watson and Ratna 2011; Watson and Scraton
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55 2013). Here my aim is to simply give two illustrations of what happens to understandings of
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3 leisure when inequality is presupposed. This is important to note, particularly with regard to
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5 feminist sociology of leisure with its qualitative evidentiary bases and miscellany of
6
7 theoretical argumentation. Of course, it is important to remember that intersectionalities
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9 perspective must be understood as just one of many developments in feminist sociology of
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11 leisure. But there is no getting away from the fact that it is central to *current* feminist thinking
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13 in leisure studies and as such it provides an ideal theoretical and methodological framework
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15 in terms of which one could apply Rancière's polemic and respond to it.
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20 21 **The sociologists of the leisure and 'the poor'**ⁱ

22
23 *Bourdieu: the arbitrary as necessity*

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28 Let us begin with Bourdieu. Bourdieu is someone whose work is widely taught (if not applied
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30 empirically) in sociological leisure studies (Jarvie and Maguire 1994 ; Harris 2005); one of
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32 the main reasons for this is that the key theme underlying his oeuvre is to understand the
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34 resources—namely economic capital, social capital and cultural capital—brought to bear in
35
36 competitive struggles for leisure. Yet there is a paradox at the heart of his sociology:
37
38 although it is extremely critical of social inequality in leisure, its subjects have no social role
39
40 in it other than to perform this social inequality as they endure it as their life. As Swenson
41
42 explains, for Rancière, this leads to 'a theory of the *necessary* misrecognition of social
43
44 relations as the very mechanism of their reproduction' (2006: 642). This tautology is
45
46 important for our purposes since it clearly identifies the limits of Bourdieu's sociology for
47
48 understanding leisure. Not only is social inequality built into the deep structure of Bourdieu's
49
50 sociology, but it also performs the brilliant feat of making 'the poor' feel ennobled while
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52 confirming their extirpation from the world of leisure choices (see for example Bourdieu's
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54 magnus opus *The weight of the world* (Bourdieu *et al.* 1999)). It isn't that Bourdieu's respect
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3 for 'the poor' isn't genuine, it is simply the case that his insights are not convincingly
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5 constituted of the different situations in which social inequality occurs. In a nutshell, the great
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7 sociologist of reflexivity thinks that the majority of 'the poor' do not have any time for
8
9 leisure and he presumes that those who do of being incapable of having any—well, any that
10
11 doesn't incite the kind of disapproving, puritanical look made corporate by the Frankfurt
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13 School, whose ghost lives on in Bourdieu's sociology, grimly looking down and shaking its
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15 mocking head at those amongst 'the poor' 'aspiring to reranking [*reclassement*] through
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17 [their] feats in the great simile industry of the new petty bourgeoisie: the manufacture of junk
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19 jewelry or sale of symbolic services; the commerce of youth leaders, marriage counsellors,
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21 sex therapists, advertising executives, or dieticians determined to create within people the
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23 symbolic need necessary for the enlargement of their market, hence for the reconquest of
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25 their inheritance' (Rancière 2004, p.p. 192-193).
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32 *The limits of the leisure intersectionalities perspective and methodology*

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36 Another version of this theme is replayed in the theoretical perspective and methodology
37
38 known as 'intersectionality' some feminists have adopted in leisure studies, which works on
39
40 the basis that social inequality in leisure is relational and has multiple dimensions. The clear,
41
42 rational logic of this perspective suggests that by taking into account the concept of 'class'
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44 multiplied by 'gender' multiplied by 'race' and so on what is revealed is something even
45
46 more unequal. However, it never stops to consider, that in practice, an odd kind of polarizing
47
48 effect might just take place. Rather than amplifying each other, social inequalities multiplied
49
50 might just cancel each other out. A good example of this approach is Watson and Ratna's
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52 (2011) research in the UK. Their article claims that intersectionality offers us a way to move
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54 beyond static interpretations of compound social inequality by taking into representations of
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3 shifting, multi-layered social inequalities which are constructed across racialized, classed and
4
5 gendered social relations in particular leisure spaces. Yet Watson and Ratna's account offers
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7 very little that is concrete or geared to representing the social conditions under scrutiny. What
8
9 it does instead is lock the ostensibly multi-disadvantaged into a singular, self-contained
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11 leisure *world*. In so doing, what it fails to recognize is that 'the poor', in common with most
12
13 other men and women in liquid modern societies (Bauman 2000), actually inhabit pluralized
14
15 *worlds* where there are different possibilities. In liquid modernity, *everyone* wears many hats
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17 and inhabits many worlds. It is sociologists who wish to lock them into a single,
18
19 disadvantaged world.
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25 Whereas those who theorize leisure by 'thinking intersectionally' see a singular *world* made
26
27 up of complex intersections of social inequality, there is another approach to thinking
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29 sociology that sees *worlds* in the plural. This is a view that is not only critical of the
30
31 assumption that the theoretical world is the only horizon from which really existing realities
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33 take their meaning, but one which argues that when we understand the world (*sic*) in the
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35 plural, as the social philosopher Peter Sloterdijk does, 'then there are different existential
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37 possibilities, that is to say, difference itself becomes the unity into which life draws its
38
39 breath' (Davis 2013, p.p. viii-ix). This view is confirmed by some research in leisure studies
40
41 which suggests that an individual may inhabit several different worlds at once and often
42
43 within an ordinary day (AUTHOR 2003; AUTHOR and AUTHOR 2004; AUTHOR 2013). It
44
45 is scarcely any longer possible (if it ever was) to explain really existing realities (or identities)
46
47 rationally as unfolding in time and space with any kind of fixity.
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54 Let us explore this argument in a little more detail. Robert Musil, the great Austrian writer,
55
56 suggested 80 years ago (in his highly influential unfinished novel *The Man Without*
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3 *Qualities*) that what gives modern life its uniqueness in the absence of any sign of singularity
4
5 is the universal ability of men and women to exceed whatever identity they have been
6
7 allotted. In other words, we learn from Musil that ‘universal man can only be a man without
8
9 qualities, for a man without qualities is the only one who can possess *any* quality’ (Jonsson
10
11 2010: 117). That is, whilst there are many ways of becoming-in-the-world, all humans share
12
13 the meaning of what it means to be human—in other words all human beings have the sense
14
15 of an inevitable, universal, relation but with contingency attached to the individual form their
16
17 life will take. As Jonsson goes on to explain:
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21
22 There is a slogan for this mode of universality as negativity: the right to difference. But
23
24 human beings possess no such ‘right’; rather, they practice such difference inseparably
25
26 from their life process. There are situations in which this negativity becomes
27
28 politicized, such as when an external power seeks to fix a person or a group in a certain
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30 identity—as Jews, women, Muslims or youth—thus disavowing their capacity for
31
32 negativity (*ibid*: 117-118).
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37 Indeed, the satisfaction we find in our leisure is often the satisfaction of finding another
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39 aspect of ourselves, which permits us to be somebody else and this has nothing to do with the
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41 desire of external powers (such as sociologists) to recognize us ‘for who we really are’.
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46 This observation leads to a further troubling aspect of intersectionality. This is the argument
47
48 that despite its adherents’ claims to the contrary, ‘thinking intersectionally’ does a double
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50 disservice to ‘the poor’, by not only being resolutely determined to ‘give voice’ to the
51
52 conditions of the multiplicity of their subjugation, but also by judging ‘them’ as oppressed
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54 creatures. As Rancière (2004) would say, in the kind of sociology promulgated by the
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56 intersectionality perspective, there are no ‘thieves’, only ‘the possessors and the disposed’.
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3 One of the consequences of this is that in trying to understand leisure through relational and
4 multiple dimensions of inequality, the world of the research subjects under scrutiny is always
5 bound to remain partial to say the least, and if the intersectionality perspective is one that is
6 successful in giving voice, the only voices really heard are those of the sociologists. One of
7 the other consequences is that ‘thinking intersectionally’ has to nurture with its thought the
8 lives of its ‘subjects’; but in so doing it fails to grasp the fact that its monsters cannot be
9 tamed by bolting together objectified versions of their existence from intersections that never
10 quite cohere with one another. The overall effect is so full of its own virtuousness that it gives
11 the impression of showing little regard for its respondents, and the arch structuring the
12 sociology—with its inability to grasp the existential contingency of the individual lives at
13 stake in the commentary—renders the perspective critically inert. As that most discerning
14 critic of this social scientific fixation with turning subjectivity into objectivity and converting
15 people from subjects into objects of investigation, Jacques Derrida once put it, ‘One cannot
16 say: ‘Here are our monsters’’, without immediately turning the monsters into pets’ (1990, p.
17 80).

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What is perhaps most problematic with ‘thinking intersectionally’, then, is that it ends up overstating the significance of the relationship between difference and subjugation. This constitutes the limit of a particular sort of sociology, for which true freedom is only that of the sociologist, and which is conceivable and functions as the exact opposite of the ostensible powerlessness of those who are subjugated. As Rancière would say, here sociology ends up as the very thought of inequality because by posing social inequality as the primary fact that needs to be explained it ends up explaining its necessity.

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3 What ‘thinking intersectionally’ also does in this regard is deny the true interpretive role of
4
5 thinking sociologically since its conception of reflexivity (in common with Bourdieu’s),
6
7 foregrounds social inequality at the expense of understanding leisure worlds through the self-
8
9 understandings of social agents. Indeed, the awareness of what is lost, overlooked, and
10
11 distorted in the process of transforming people’s everyday worlds into sociology cannot help
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13 but be missing from ‘thinking intersectionally’; and what it shares in common with
14
15 Bourdieu’s sociology, is the inability to escape the tendency to impose its own narrative order
16
17 on all kinds of untidiness—worst of all, the necessities of sociological ‘Theory’ above the
18
19 identification with and compassion for those whose worlds it claims to be explaining—while
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21 failing miserably to reflect on the process by which that order has been achieved.
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27 **Rethinking social inequality and its relationship with leisure**

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32 The argument developed so far suggests that in sociological ‘Theory’ ‘the poor’ have to stay
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34 in their place: on the one hand, they have no time to go anywhere else because work won’t
35
36 wait for them, which is an empirical fact; and on the other, their immovability rests on the
37
38 belief that ‘God mixed iron in their makeup while he mixed gold in the makeup of those who
39
40 destined to deal with the common good’ (Rancière 2009, p. 276). This second reason is not
41
42 an empirical fact, but it provides the alchemical myth (‘the story of the deity who mixes gold,
43
44 silver, or iron in the souls’) that underpins the ‘natural’ order of things and which sustains the
45
46 idea that ‘the poor’ have to remain in their assigned places. In other words, in order for
47
48 sociology to function it has to rest on the idea that the social divisions and the inequalities
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50 emanating from these are performed by those who endure them ‘as their life, as what they
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52 feel, and what they are aware of’ (*ibid*). To use one of Rancière’s analogies, the identity of
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3 someone from 'the 'must fit like a handmade pair of shoes, but the type of shoe is never in
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5 question.
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10 Obviously, Rancière doesn't think that 'the poor' actually believe that God mixed iron in
11 their souls and gold in the souls of those higher in the system of social stratification, but it is
12 enough that they *sense* it and as a result feel obliged, responsible and actively committed to
13 this idea *as if* it were true. In other words, for Rancière, social divisions are not only a
14 reflection of actually existing conditions of existence, but also the extent to which
15 sociologists believe that they are natural and inevitable. In Rancière's scheme of things
16 'myth' and 'reality' and 'activity' and 'passivity' are not opposed; just as a 'reality' always
17 goes along with 'myth', so 'activity' always goes along with 'passivity'. In other words, for
18 Rancière, sociologists give their *own* meaning to the world through the patterns of hierarchy
19 and order which appear in their 'Theories' and which they help to create and sustain.
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34 Rancière (2009) argues that what sociologists need to grasp is that actually existing reality
35 and the ability to transform it lies not in their theories or their research but in the collective
36 passion of individuals. What he also argues is that when the status quo of actually existing
37 reality is challenged, 'a break of epistemology as the qualifying perceptual criterion for
38 political participation' (Panagia 2010, p. 98) takes place, which leads to a demand for a share,
39 a place, a *part des sans-part*, in the social order by those who do not have one. To this extent,
40 Rancière understands politics as a form of disruption of the established order of things by
41 those who challenge their own invisibility, silence and unimportance within that order. Here
42 Rancière is not talking about the empowerment of a group that already has a subordinated
43 part or a place. Rather, that 'politics is the emergence of a claim to enfranchisement by a
44 group that has been so radically excluded that its inclusion demands the transformation of the
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3 rules of inclusion' (Martin 2005, p. 39). What this suggests is that men and women acting
4
5 politically not only demand to be included in the world in ways that have previously not been
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7 open to them, but that they are also intent on a total transformation of the ways in which they
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9 are *seen* in this new 'part' or role—that is, they are after a radical transformation of
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11 experience. In other words, in order for them to be included, the world has to be transformed
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13 to accommodate them in different ways than it has done previously, and in order for the
14
15 world to be transformed, men and women acting politically need to conjure a different world.
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17 This is where often leisure comes in.
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23 The essential point I want to make here can be made by briefly discussing some of the
24
25 findings from my study of the 'Inbetweeners', the intermediary generation that provide the
26
27 focus of a life history interpretation of working-class life in northern England in the period
28
29 after the Second World War (AUTHOR 2013). Amongst other things, this study explores the
30
31 extent to which a generation of working-people found through their leisure interests and
32
33 activities the means to transform a world in which they had hitherto been predisposed to
34
35 remain invisible. As this study shows, through the life course this generation would re-
36
37 discover life as unintended and contingent and they would as a result set about re-making
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39 new worlds in their own image, and discovering also, by extension, that leisure is often
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41 pivotal to these reconstructions.
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48 What the evidence emerging from this study suggests is that when the balance of work and
49
50 leisure tilts over from the former to the latter, as it did for many working-people in England
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52 in the post-war period, the distribution of iron and gold is disturbed. Indeed, by stealing 'a
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54 certain sort of gold, a sort of gold which is at once more and less precious than the gold
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56 which is supposed to be mixed in the soul of the rulers' (Rancière 2009), the Inbetweeners
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3 were at the vanguard of the dawn of a new order of things in which leisure moved steadily
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5 into its position as the principal driving force underpinning the human goal of satisfying its
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7 hunger for meaning and its thirst for giving life a purpose (AUTHOR 2010). In other words,
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9 what the findings of this study demonstrate is that leisure was key to understanding the
10
11 interruption of a tacitly accepted order of things by working-people who had hitherto been
12
13 invisible in it. The result was, as the evidence of the study demonstrates, in the post-war
14
15 period, that leisure as a certain kind of gold, instead of being out of the reach of most
16
17 working-people, began to take up a more central and radical place in their lives.
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20 21 22 23 **Interim summary**

24
25 Amongst all the issues that emanate from the cognitive dissonance found in sociological
26
27 leisure studies discussed in the preceding section of this article, the following stand out. First
28
29 and foremost, the prevailing discourse underpinning some orthodox sociological accounts is
30
31 premised upon situating ‘the poor’ in a singular, self-contained leisure *world*. One of the
32
33 upshots of this is (as we saw with intersectionality), while it provides its adherents with a
34
35 vocabulary for analyzing how social inequality in leisure is relational and has multiple
36
37 dimensions, it does this at the expense of understanding that all men and women today—
38
39 notwithstanding whether they are ‘the poor’ or not—inhabit pluralized *worlds* where there are
40
41 different possibilities for leisure. We also saw that such an outlook can lead to some
42
43 sociologists equipping ‘the poor’ with an excess of the most unattractive, but also most
44
45 necessary features of ‘people like them’—features that while purporting to ‘give them voice’
46
47 actually turn them into monsters, or even worse still, pets, whose leisure interests incite the
48
49 kind of disapproving, puritanical look made universal by the Frankfurt School.
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55 What is also clear from this discussion is that the discursive formation known as the
56
57 sociology of leisure has been too insular, too parochial, and too complacent in framing the
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3 idea of its subject, and while many of the once bright academics from the 1970s are still
4
5 around, the waves that they make nowadays seem much more modest. Beyond the odd blue-
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7 moon gem from Rojek, the sociology of leisure seems to have reduced its ambitions to the
8
9 shrinking comfort-zone of coterie approval that is its key associations, conferences and
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11 journals. Moreover, what is hardly debated in leisure studies is that the subject field has lost
12
13 its lustre. The study of leisure has by and large dropped off the curriculum at most
14
15 universities and most bright young postgraduates nowadays seem more attracted to subjects
16
17 like sport, criminology and cultural studies. The fundamental issue at stake here can be found
18
19 in the failure to incorporate into the sociology of leisure what has happened in social,
20
21 cultural, political and economic life over the last thirty or so years.
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28 It is important to qualify something at this point. I am not suggesting for a moment that social
29
30 inequality is by now unimportant to leisure studies. That is not my argument. My argument is
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32 that there is now an unacceptable gap between sociological accounts and quotidian leisure.
33
34 This gap has arisen as a result of the discursive formation's anxious reluctance to let go of
35
36 the 'zombie categories'—zombies frighten us by being both dead and alive—associated with
37
38 orthodox sociology, which no longer have a compelling grip on reality. What I am talking
39
40 about in this regard are the zombie concepts associated with social inequality which have a
41
42 strange ghost like presence in the sociology of leisure, which still uses them as if they
43
44 represent something, including power; and to some extent they do still represent power. But
45
46 the social networks and patronage, the paddings of privilege and the stereotypes leftover
47
48 from modernity in its 'solid' phase do not carry the same power that they once did—even if
49
50 sociologists carry on 'business as usual'. Breaking this spell is a game that sociologists of
51
52 leisure need to play if the discursive formation is to emerge from the current crisis.
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3 So how to refresh the sociology of leisure in a way that thinks outside social inequality? The
4
5 first answer to this question must be that the explanations I have given for the decline of
6
7 sociological 'Theory' have implications which reach much further than just theory. Indeed,
8
9 the whole function of sociology is in question if we can no longer accept that it has the
10
11 authority to either lock individuals (no matter how ostensibly multi-disadvantaged) into a
12
13 single identity or to convince us that the theoretical world is the only horizon from which
14
15 human existence takes its meaning. What this suggests is that the sociology of leisure needs
16
17 some new 'rules of method'. To understand why, we must consider yet another answer.
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20 21 22 23 **Towards an alternative sociology of leisure**

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26 Today we find ourselves living in a society at once strange and yet strangely familiar. It is
27
28 still far from being an equal one, which means that a democratic deficit continues to bedevil
29
30 the leisure opportunities of many. However, with the emergence of what Bauman (2000) calls
31
32 'liquid modernity' there has been a shift from a structured and structuring society in which
33
34 our identities were largely predetermined by our social class, gender, 'race' and the like, to an
35
36 unstructured and de-structuring one in which *individualization* dominates more than anything
37
38 else, and where our identities always remain a work in progress. Social class, gender and
39
40 ethnicity may still exert *some* degree of influence on our leisure lives, but they certainly do
41
42 not dictate them. There are many reasons why this is so, but it is still difficult to define this
43
44 change briefly. But what individualization involves, fundamentally, is the change, as
45
46 Raymond Williams once observed, from *unaware* alignment to *active* commitment, or in
47
48 other words, the moving of social relationships to human consciousness. Unaware alignment
49
50 refers to the kind of life you are born into and stuck with, while active commitment refers to
51
52 the kind of life we make for ourselves because we *feel* it our duty to do so. And this is
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3 because all of us—modern men and modern women both rich and poor—are existential
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5 agents who are very much aware of our social contingency.
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8 The implications of these observations for sociology are profound. In the rest of this article I
9
10 shall develop a thumbnail sketch of an alternative sociology of leisure with certain
11
12 epistemological, ontological and ethical implications. In so doing, my approach differs
13
14 noticeably from the *doxa* of orthodox sociology of leisure, by which I am referring to the
15
16 knowledge it thinks with, but not about. The views that I shall develop below have their point
17
18 of origin in another kind of sociological thinking which begins with the assumption that truth
19
20 is better revealed through essential action rather than ‘Theory’. These views are intimately
21
22 shaped by the work of social philosophers such as Bauman, Heller, Rancière, Rorty and
23
24 Sloterdijk, who each stress the ambivalence and social contingency of modern life, and which
25
26 culminates in a way of thinking that reverses a number of assumptions underpinning
27
28 orthodox sociology’s rational theorization of the modern world.
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33 The first merit of this way of thinking is that it abandons the binary oppositions orthodox
34
35 sociology inherited from the Enlightenment tradition. Its second strength, and a considerable
36
37 one, is that it inscribes social theory within modernity by taking it out of the academy and
38
39 placing it politically into everyday life (Badiou 2005). Its third virtue is to foreground the
40
41 question of what it means to be human in the modern world. In so doing it frames human life
42
43 as an existential problem. However, contra Heidegger, it stresses ‘becoming’ over ‘being’
44
45 and the recognition that modern life is irreducibly mutable and heterogeneous. In addition to
46
47 this, it argues that rather than finding ourselves merely ‘being-thrown-in-the-world’, we are
48
49 knowledgeable actors who recognize the conditions of our own social contingency. The fourth
50
51 virtue of this way of thinking is that it replaces the idea of a singular world as an ontological
52
53 given with the idea that we in fact inhabit pluralized worlds—contingent, shape-shifting,
54
55 fractured, underdesigned and undesignable, fuzzily-hierarchical, imperceptible worlds—in
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3 which life is lived *noch nicht* surrounded by possibilities that have not yet been realized, and
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5 where freedom is considered as our duty. Its fifth distinguishing feature, and perhaps its most
6
7 contentious, is that it brings the idea to sociology that what we understand about the
8
9 pluralized worlds in which we find ourselves is only knowable through some kind of story.
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11
12 Let us look at this fifth feature in some more detail. My way of thinking sociologically
13
14 attempts to fasten the delight we find in the pluralized worlds of liquid modernity (Bauman
15
16 2000) onto new kinds of narrative informed by the kind of passion found in the best works of
17
18 literature and poetry. In other words, in deconstructing binary oppositions—between ‘subject’
19
20 and ‘object’, ‘concept’ and ‘existence’, ‘knowledge’ and ‘action’, and so on—and in the
21
22 absence of ontological certainty, it is my contention that ‘rules of method’ have to be
23
24 assigned on what are essentially aesthetic grounds—on the basis of whose narrative has the
25
26 more attractive language, or the more engaging style. For a second time, I have put forward
27
28 what might appear a somewhat scandalous proposition—though once again for good and
29
30 assignable reasons.
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34 35 ***Telling stories: sociological hermeneutics and the role of the cultural intermediaries*** 36

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38 Let us look at this feature in more detail. Sociology will never be quite equal to the
39
40 complexity and infinite nuance of what takes place in everyday life, but it is impossible to
41
42 think sociologically without arriving at some kind of interpretation, or another. However, and
43
44 to paraphrase what the great Canadian literary critic Northrop Frye (1963, p. 24) in his
45
46 Massey Lecture *Giants in Time*, drawing on Aristotle’s idea of the ‘universal event’, said of
47
48 the work of poets, what we meet in any interpretation is neither ‘real’ nor ‘unreal’: it is the
49
50 product of the educated imagination—if by imagination we mean not, as is sometimes
51
52 thought, the ability to invent, but the ability to disclose that which exists (Berger cited in
53
54 Burn, 2009). Thinking sociologically is neither fixed nor definitive. It is, on the contrary, a
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3 place of perpetual deliberation, speculation calmed by an awareness of the ‘facts’ that lie
4 behind what is often naively called ‘reality’ and the sociological imagination, and which
5 makes them one and indivisible. Quite simply, sociologists make a good deal of assumptions
6 about everyday life and that there is a good deal of truth behind these, and these assumptions
7 are as good a place to start as any.
8
9

10
11 To continue with Frye’s synopsis, sociologists should never try to make any ‘real’ statements
12 at all, certainly no particular or specific ones. It is not our job to tell our readers what
13 *happened*, but what *happens*: not what *did* take place, but the thing that *always does* take
14 place. The biggest charlatans in sociology are the ‘Theorists’; the ones who claim that they
15 are telling their readers how things ‘really’ happened’. As Giddens (1974) has convincingly
16 argued, the relation between sociology and its subject matter—the two-way process by which
17 everyday experience is turned into sociology and sociology is turned into everyday
18 experience—has to be understood in terms of a ‘double hermeneutic’. In volunteering
19 themselves as cultural intermediaries in this way, what sociologists do is demonstrate that
20 virtue is better revealed in action rather than ‘Theory’. In so doing they reveal themselves as
21 the most honest of sociologists who say ‘This is my interpretation of the world and I’m going
22 to try like hell to make you believe that it’s true; all I ask is that you suspend your own
23 ontological assumptions for a little while until I have told you my story’.
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45 In other words, sociologists as cultural intermediaries challenge their readers to engage in
46 what Rorty (2007) calls ‘cultural politics’: the beginning of a conversation about what words
47 to use to create a better vision of the society we want to live in. What this tells us is that
48 rather than trust sociological ‘Theory’; we should trust sociologists’ stories instead. This is
49 because sociology conducted under the auspices of cultural politics can only be good or bad
50 in its own categorization. Sociologists as cultural intermediaries know what they are
51 presenting us with is both a superior and an inferior world than the one we usually live with,
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3 but what they demand is that we keep looking steadily at them both. In this way of thinking
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5 sociologically, no idea of reality is final and no interpretation, however good, is going to
6
7 pronounce some final absolute truth. Every new interpretation, every new formulation
8
9 emerging from this or that interpretation has the potential to change our understanding.
10

11
12 In anticipation of my critics, I am acutely aware that, as the eminent philosopher R.G.
13
14 Collingwood (1994) famously pointed out, the work of the scholar is constrained by two
15
16 important issues that need not concern the novelist or the poet. First, its narrative must be
17
18 localized in a time and space that has actually existed; and, second, it must be allied to
19
20 evidence which the scholar has gathered from reliable sources. In other words, as
21
22 sociologists, we do not have the freedom of the novelist or the poet; we are constrained by the
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24 evidence.
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29 Walter Benjamin, a scholar who occupied the opposite pole on the continuum on which the
30
31 rather conservative Collingwood's views could be plotted, offered a more radical solution. To
32
33 scholars who wish capture the lives and times of any era, Benjamin (1974) suggested, they
34
35 should develop a 'procedure of empathy' by turning to the period in question in order to
36
37 redeem its sufferings. Benjamin's invocation gives a crucial role to developing solidarity with
38
39 the worlds of those whose lives we seek to understand. This concern is captured succinctly by
40
41 Brewer's (2010) practice of 'refuge history' whose 'procedure of empathy' forms the basis of
42
43 the 'rules of method' underpinning the aforementioned book *TITLE*. As Brewer explains,
44
45 'refuge history'
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49
50 is close-up and on the small scale. Its emphasis is on a singular place rather than space,
51
52 the careful delineation of particularities and details, a degree of enclosure...Within the
53
54 space of refuge historical figures are actors and have agency, motives, feeling and
55
56 consciousness. They are the subjects not objects of history. The emphasis is on forms of
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3 interdependence, on interiority and intimacy rather than surface and distance. The
4 pleasures of refuge history derive not from a sense of control of history but from a
5 sense of belonging, of connectedness—to both persons and details—in the past.
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7

8
9 Whether as the expression of a certain common humanity or as an identification with a
10 particular group, this sort of history sees sympathy and understanding—a measure of
11 identification which can range from the quite abstract to the deeply emotive—as
12 essential to historical knowledge and insight. Refuge history is therefore... *Heimlich*
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19 (2010, p. 89).

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22 Trying to understand different worlds with different rules demands a special kind of
23 sociological inquiry. This is the kind of inquiry that takes into account the objective features
24 of the world while contemplating real-life situations—research respondents' inner and outer
25 worlds—by accounting for their personal priorities and relationships with others. There are
26 two other important building blocks to this kind of inquiry. First it begins with the
27 assumption that the human 'becoming-in-the-world' is knit together with its own sense of
28 security and comfort—with *feeling* just right—and second that every world has its own sense
29 of morality—its inhabitants *living* life in a way that they deem right.
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40 ***Thinking with feeling: how to make the sociology of leisure heimlich***

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44 These insights form of the basis of my own sociological 'rules of method', which demand
45 that if we should seek to record the leisure lives of our research respondents accurately, we
46 must also aim at getting into the evidence of how and in what ways they *experience* leisure
47 and its *social meaning* for them, as well as something of its disorderly continuity— often
48 invisible, but all the more consequential for being so—which makes life palpable, and in
49 some cases, bearable. To paraphrase Foucault (1970, p. xi), the purpose of researching
50 leisure *heimlich* is to try to restore what usually eludes the consciousness of the sociological
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3 imagination, which is looking at a milieu and its people from the inside and trying to feel
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5 what it feels, what they feel.
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8 One of my key concerns in the aforementioned book is to explore and evoke the emotional
9
10 contours of my respondents' collective history. In other words, to paraphrase Nora, it is
11
12 concerned with what wells up from this generation that memory has welded together (1996,
13
14 p. 3). In developing this study, I inhabited a realm between the past and the present, moving
15
16 back- and-forth, in dialogue, constructing a narrative as an interpretive device made between
17
18 me and my respondents. The study works with the assumption that reality cannot be
19
20 reproduced in history, but the concentrated act of reproducing some of reality's dynamics
21
22 can, of turning history into an essential action—even if the best it can hope to achieve is
23
24 make the world it renders in its pages feel human and not merely academic machination. In
25
26 other words, refuge history—understood here as the empathetic study of what Hegel called
27
28 'absolute spirit home-experience' (Heller 2011) and the narrative that moves it—is the
29
30 domain *par excellence* of sociological hermeneutics.
31
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33
34

35 Sociological hermeneutics is reminiscent of what Foucault termed a 'general' history (as
36
37 opposed to a 'total' history). Whereas a 'total' history draws its resources around a single
38
39 unifying centre—'a principle, a meaning, a spirit, a worldview, an overall shape'; a 'general'
40
41 history, deploys 'the space of a dispersion' (1972, p. 10). Foucault's critical method
42
43 recognizes that all historical (and sociological) accounts are embedded in, and concerned
44
45 with, the exercise of power-knowledge. This critical awareness informs the study in question
46
47 in the sense that it deploys its own 'space of a dispersion' in the gap between what is
48
49 necessarily present and unnecessarily absent in the individual and collective memories of the
50
51 Inbetweeners. What this tells the reader of the book is that between the past and memory
52
53 there is something else at stake that is much more important than ensuring reliability and
54
55 representativeness. This is that interpretation itself is a moral issue: subject and object, the
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3 counterfactual and the ‘factual’, the necessary and the contingent, and so on, are
4
5 intermingled; in this study, contraries always come together.
6
7

8 *Metaphoricity and pictorial thinking*

9

10
11 And yet, whether we are always conscious of the fact or not, we scholars—historians or
12
13 sociologists or whoever, depending on our education or individual taste or contingent
14
15 encounters (or more often than not, I suspect, all three of these), will have been captivated by
16
17 certain theories, certain ideas. From these ideas we derive the framework of our own
18
19 intuitions, the underpinning convictions that form our own scholarship. Many of the shaping
20
21 beliefs (of which I am conscious) that underpin my own scholarship are located in the
22
23 sociology of Zygmunt Bauman—especially his ideas of ‘solid’ modernity and ‘liquid’
24
25 modernity—which attests that as the world alters, we need the right vocabulary with which to
26
27 interpret it.
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29

30
31
32 It is my view that Bauman sets the agenda for sociology today: for what we think
33
34 sociologically about when it comes to the modern world. Bauman came up with his own
35
36 narrative voice that allows him to interpret modernity in a special way. Writing the modern
37
38 world as ‘solid’ versus ‘liquid’ is the creation of two discrete modern experiences in
39
40 themselves on the page. The way the reader knows that Bauman has found the right narrative
41
42 voices for those experiences is because the sociology gives you access to those two
43
44 experiences—the felt life—that is those two opposing versions of modernity in themselves.
45
46
47

48
49 Used in the way that Bauman uses them, the metaphors of ‘solidity’ and ‘liquidity’ are
50
51 intellectual devices, not ‘things’ in the world (Beilharz 2010). In other words, Bauman
52
53 constructs the world as ‘ideal typical’ meaning (*ideal types* are not descriptions of reality, but
54
55 analytical tools sociologists use to try to understand it). This enables him (and us) to see the
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1
2
3 modern world through ‘solid’ and ‘liquid’ representations that he has imaginatively posed on
4
5 it by using these ‘ideal types’.
6
7

8 The juxtaposition of ‘solidity and ‘liquidity’ offers sociologists a fresh way of thinking about
9
10 leisure. This is a way of thinking that does not depend on ‘Theory’, but rather on metaphor,
11
12 which is the rhetorical tool that enables us to ‘defamiliarize the familiar’ and show it in a new
13
14 light (Bauman 1990). Metaphor is that part of language that enables us to practice
15
16 hermeneutics. That is, on the one hand, to make meaning i.e. make intelligible that which
17
18 could not otherwise be grasped, and on the other, to deepen our understanding so as to make
19
20 meaning even more meaningful, in the process creating some democratic operating principles
21
22 as we go along. Seen in this way, Bauman presents us with some intellectual devices which
23
24 signal the continuation the sociological imagination by an alternative means, which retrains it
25
26 into looking for both similarities and contradictions, in other words, the ambivalence of what
27
28 we casually call ‘reality’, and to see significance and meaning in unexpected places.
29
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31

32
33 This metaphorical reconstruction of modernity, as Bauman conceives it, is by no means a
34
35 simple replacement of ‘solid’ modern by ‘liquid’ modern considerations: on the contrary, the
36
37 central tenet of Bauman’s sociology is the need to exhort critical analysis to constant
38
39 juxtaposition. Bauman recognizes that thinking is unsurpassed when we juxtapose, when we
40
41 recognize the value of bringing opposites together, when we realize that two ‘realities’, one
42
43 posed next to the other, are in one way or another connected.
44
45
46

47 As the Wittgenstein scholar, Peter Hacker (2010), points out, questions about ‘what it is like
48
49 to be something?’ require contrasts in order to make sense. What is it like for a person born
50
51 into the working class to experience leisure? This is not a good question. For Hacker, critical
52
53 inquiry is dialogical in spirit. In other words, we should turn our attention to what two
54
55 things—in the case my study *TITLE* (2003), the certain solid modernity and the unpredictable
56
57
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1
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3 liquid modernity—might say about each other. What is it like for a person born into a solid,
4
5 seemingly permanent, immutable modernity to find themselves in a liquid modern world?
6

7 This is a perfectly good question. In other words, following Wittgenstein's emphasis on
8
9 *seeing* things differently and the associated notions of pictorial thinking through 'family
10
11 resemblances', there is a requirement that there be a juxtaposition, and once there is all sorts
12
13 of stories are likely to follow. From this shuttling between 'solid' and 'liquid'—concepts as
14
15 magic wands in and of themselves which illuminate, with an almost miraculous precision, our
16
17 way of thinking by maximizing contrast—it is my argument that it is possible to weave a
18
19 larger fabric, a sustained deliberation on some key themes, to be precise, a picture of the
20
21 always unrestful modernity.
22
23

24 25 26 ***Indisciplinarity*** 27

28
29 What the foregoing discussion tells us if nothing else is that every study is, in part, a
30
31 reflection of its author and his putative assumptions. This is not to say that I cannot look at
32
33 the world other than through the spectacles fitted for me by Zygmunt Bauman. Bauman's
34
35 sense of sociology, as he once told me, is that it is like a sponge, a creature porous in texture
36
37 and of uncertain outline, whose hollows embody countless visiting ideas which swim and
38
39 often stay to breed. Sociology will never be an academic discipline sure of itself, capable of
40
41 making authoritative statements or offering definitive answers. It will always be, for better or
42
43 worse, tentative in its deliberations. What this also tells us is that thinking sociologically
44
45 should never be content with any one way of making sense of the world, nor should it rest
46
47 content that there is any one discipline best placed to make sense of it.
48
49

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52 Steering a course between different perspectives, my own approach develops its own
53
54 hermeneutics of 'undecidability' that offers a principle of convergence that we extend beyond
55
56 sociology, history, philosophy and all the rest into the world of culture and our knowledge of
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2
3 it, the world of *Kulturwissenschaft*. What this tells the reader is that my approach attempts to
4
5 account for individuals and their worlds by operating on an *indisciplinary* basis (Rancière
6
7 2008), which is not only a matter of going above and beyond the call of duty of sociology as
8
9 we normally understand it, but also breaking with it. Whereas *interdisciplinarity* merely
10
11 signals a combination of approaches drawn from various disciplines, *indisciplinarity* moves
12
13 outside boundaries, setting itself free by subordinating the false divisions between sociology,
14
15 psychology, geography, philosophy and so on, to the sociological imagination, which affects
16
17 the whole person rather than just training the mind, bringing with it moral development that
18
19 leads to the discovery that the imaginative world and the world around us are different
20
21 worlds, and that the imaginative world *is more important* (Frye 1963).
22
23
24
25

26 **Conclusions**

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28
29 What these last observations attest is not only that all those awakened to rethinking
30
31 sociologically anew must be aware that ethical questions are today more difficult (Sloterdijk
32
33 2013, p. 90), but also that sociological theory means something different. As it rose from its
34
35 death it developed some ‘new rules of method’ which, following Wittgenstein’s emphasis on
36
37 *seeing* things differently and the associated notions of pictorial thinking through ‘family
38
39 resemblances’, abandons theorizing altogether. In other words, after ‘Theory’, narrative—
40
41 another expression for story-telling, as says Sloterdijk (2013, p. 11), bent on the ‘musical-
42
43 rhapsodic transmission of knowledge rather than the ‘prosaic-communicative procurement of
44
45 knowledge’—was now resurrected as a viable alternative to ‘Theory’, and not just as
46
47 intelligent but better made to the measure of the contemporary world. This ‘new’ method not
48
49 only entailed taking ‘Theory’ out of the academy and placing it politically into everyday life.
50
51 It was also to become a way of explaining social life that is on the one hand ‘indisciplinary’
52
53 and on the other content to rely on interpretations drawn from metaphors (and by default
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3 other tropes drawn from literature and poetry), rather than depending on facts or being fixated
4
5 with establishing grand ‘Theory’.
6

7
8 Those who use pictorial thinking through ‘language games’ argue two things: firstly, that it is
9
10 a different way of thinking that recognizes that as worlds alter, we need new vocabularies
11
12 with which to interpret them, and secondly, that sociologically there are many different
13
14 stories that we can tell and re-tell. What these stories do not do is try to *conceptualize* the
15
16 worlds under scrutiny through the rules of logic. What they do, instead, is *literalize*
17
18 metaphor. This is what makes pictorial thinking valuable. It alerts us to what abstract
19
20 conceptual thinking cannot: those stubbornly universal human dilemmas—questions to
21
22 which sociologists have found few compelling answers—which have never vanished from
23
24 life. The hallmark of this ‘rule of method’, then, is that it recurs perennially as our
25
26 understandings are revised and revived as society and culture shift and change.
27
28

29
30 As we have also seen, the practice of pointing out the questionable epistemological grounds
31
32 which form the basis of orthodox sociological ‘Theory’, while simultaneously asking ones
33
34 readers to temporarily suspend their own ontological assumptions, is one of the most
35
36 distinctive features of this reflexive approach. Some readers will no doubt find the
37
38 combination of outspoken epistemological criticism and deferred ontological judgement
39
40 troubling. Others will be equally unhappy about accepting such a frankly novelizing
41
42 methodological approach, especially when it is applied to certain aspects of abnormal leisure
43
44 (Rojek 2005; 2013), for example. However, the disorderly continuity of modern life is
45
46 infinitely less predictable and more strangely ambiguous than any sociological theory would
47
48 suggest. Sociologists must face up to the fact that each and every one of them is standing in a
49
50 moral quagmire as they try to illuminate the lived (leisure) life through their different stories.
51
52 As such, to paraphrase Sloterdijk, we must recognize that as sociologists we must be prepared
53
54 to be challenged where our own tacit assumptions are interrogated. When there is no solid
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3 ground under the sociological enterprise, no basis for moral certainty, the truth is that the
4
5 only other way the authority of any work can be enhanced is through the acknowledgment of
6
7 its predispositions.
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10
11 The effects of social inequality, we can agree, continue, and always will be important for
12
13 understanding leisure. In this regard we have learned from Giddens, the two-way process by
14
15 which everyday experience is turned into sociology and sociology is turned into everyday
16
17 experience should always be promoted by sociologists as a democratic activity. Any
18
19 sociologist intent on revealing the effects of social inequality on leisure must try to ensure
20
21 that they are showing us *both* of these things. There is no one theory or ‘rule of method’ in
22
23 this regard; the genuinely reflexive sociologist will write these the way that they must write
24
25 them. In the most compelling stories the writing will be clear and the ideas will be based on
26
27 things *seen* by the sociologist and *spoken about* by their research respondents rather than on
28
29 what they think as a professional sociologist and is excited to think they now understand it
30
31 all.
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38 This finally brings me to the sixth, and final, feature of my ‘new rules of method’. This is the
39
40 admonition to all sociologists that they must complicate their stories by questioning what it is
41
42 possible for them as researchers, or anyone else for that matter, to finally ‘know’ about other
43
44 people. It is all too easy to feel and to theorize people less fortunate than yourself (also
45
46 known as ‘the poor’) as part of a mass—or any other kind of social grouping vulnerable to
47
48 political manipulation. It is also all too easy to disapprove of what that mass do in *their*
49
50 leisure. But that kind of feeling and theorizing is as foolish as the disapproving is
51
52 reprehensible. To put some additional gloss on James’ (2009, p. 9) perceptive observations,
53
54 the mass are *us*: a multitude of individuals. They just happen to be leading less fortunate
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1
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3 lives. Any sociologist who speaks about social justice from their privileged position will not
4
5 be able to do so in any compelling ways unless they can dispel the disapproving, puritanical
6
7 attitude that often pervades sociology. In order to do this, they will not only have to replace
8
9 this attitude with compassion—as Paul Taylor (2009) observed, identifying with those less
10
11 privileged than yourself is not enough, you need to really feel their plight: ‘to identify is
12
13 merely to love one’s neighbour as oneself; to empathise is to love one’s neighbour for himself
14
15 or herself’—but just as importantly recognize that their own fortune begins with their own
16
17 freedom.
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22
23 What I have argued in a nutshell in this article is that, to paraphrase Bauman (1989), if
24
25 sociology is going to claim the right to speak with authority about leisure in the twenty-first
26
27 century, it is going to have to update its conceptual, empirical and normative understandings
28
29 of leisure. Currently it presents us with only a two-dimensional understanding of leisure
30
31 inherited from the dichotomous thinking that underpins the Enlightenment tradition. We need
32
33 a third dimension. What I have offered in the second part of the foregoing discussion is an
34
35 alternative way of thinking sociologically that gives us this dimension. This is the path
36
37 forward for the sociology of leisure. Bauman, Heller, Rancière, Rorty and Sloterdijk have led
38
39 the way. Given the resources of their scholarship, there is no reason not to follow.
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46 **Notes on contributor**

47

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14 _____
15 ⁱMy use of the term 'the poor' here is Rancière's which works with the assumption that the
16 history of Western thought is one in which freedom and the right to think are premised on
17 situating and excluding those whose social role is perceived other than to think. In applying
18 the term in this way I am also using it as a shorthand to include all those social groups who
19 are in one way or another subjugated and/or excluded.
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