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PUNK SOCIOLOGY

David Beer

Punk Sociology

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David Beer
University of York, UK

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For Joe and Mad

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Preface and Playlist

Malcolm McLaren, the vanguard of punk, has this simple message etched on his gravestone: 'Better a spectacular failure, than a benign success.' By coincidence I came across this epitaph at around the time I started writing this book. For some reason it seemed fitting. Not only does it relate directly to one of the core topics of this book, punk, but it also captured the way I was feeling about the project. At the time, this book felt like a fairly significant risk to take. I think this probably says more about the limiting conventions that can be felt in academic work, which I discuss a little in the first chapter, than it does of how genuinely risky or radical this book actually is. But, nevertheless, I have written a book that I hope will be provocative and challenging. My hope is that you will read the following book in the sentiment in which it is intended. That is to say, I hope it will be read as a positive statement about the future of sociology, rather than as a negative or destructive statement about the discipline as it is. In this book I will hint at, and sometimes explicitly point towards, the limitations that I see in sociology; this is a necessary step in setting up the ideas I am trying to communicate here. I raise these points of limitation in the spirit of collaboration and genuine academic debate. I present these issues because I have an investment in a discipline that helps thousands of students, year on year, to see the world in new ways whilst also providing a much needed and fertile space for critical reflection. I raise these points because I'm keen to see a vibrant future for sociology.

As I make clear in the conclusion to this book, the vision I offer for sociology in this text is intended to be provocative.

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I hope that it will stimulate debate. I offer one vision here, one amongst many. I want this book to provoke debate about sociology and what it might be, where it might go, and what it might hope to achieve. I am not suggesting that the vision I offer here is the only option for sociology to take. Indeed, as is fitting with the type of sociology I propose here, there is plenty of room for an eclectic mix of different types of sociological work. Different types of sociology can work together, can respond to one another, can argue, and can disagree. This book might give you some ideas about the type of sociology you would like to see, it might give you some ideas about the type of sociology you want to stand against, it might even force a rethink or reconsideration of what sociology is. I hope it will. What this book will do is provide an unapologetic take on a form of sociology that embraces its uncertainty and turns it to its advantage. This is a form of sociology that doesn't hesitate to ask questions. It is a book that looks towards a vibrant and exciting future for the discipline.

Given its focus on the future of the discipline and its desire to spark debate and questions about the very nature of sociology, this is a book that has been written for sociologists at any stage of their career – from undergraduate and postgraduate students through to established professors. It might even be a book that could be used to trigger interest in prospective sociology students. It is no textbook, but I have tried to make the discussions and ideas accessible and broad in their appeal. This book will be for anyone with an interest in sociology. This text will look to provoke a response from any reader. I'm hoping, and this is, of course, overambitious, that it might be used to fire the sociological imagination of sociologists whoever they are (even if they don't yet know that they are budding sociologists).

When compiling this book I began to wonder what attitudes punks themselves might have towards sociology. During my research I stumbled across this direct reference to the discipline:

> Right!
> Here we go now
> A sociology lecture
> A bit of psychology
> A bit of neurology
> A bit of fuckology
> No fun!
>
> (John Lydon's improvised intro to 'No Fun' from October 1976, taken from Savage, 1991: 156)

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It would seem, if potentially only in jest, that Johnny Rotten is prepared to think of a punk song as a kind of sociology lecture. As well as providing a direct connection between the two terms at the centre of this book, this discovery also served to remind me of one final thing I'd like to emphasize before I begin. As I have already hinted, it is important that this book is not seen to be an attack on the discipline of sociology. I am not saying that sociology is 'No Fun'. This book does not represent a statement about what is wrong with sociology today, it does not allow itself to become overly occupied with failings. There are some hints at the issues that the discipline faces, and there are some problems that need to be tackled. But this is not a negative statement. Rather I intend provide a positive set of assertions about the way in which we might manage and negotiate the future of the discipline – to wrestle back our intellectual agenda in what might be a difficult social, cultural, and economic environment. For the moment we've probably had enough talk of crises. Such 'crisis' debates have been very productive, but they can also be potentially disconcerting, demoralizing, and even inhibiting for sociologists (particularly those early on in their careers). I am not going to dwell here on what might be wrong, but I do intend to say quite a bit about what might be done.

A playlist

Whilst writing the book it occurred to me that much of the vibrancy and energy of punk is captured in its audio and visual properties. These are hard to communicate solely through text. I thought it might be helpful to provide some guidance in this regard, although I'm sure that many readers will already have varying experiences and knowledge of punk and its outputs. The images and videos are easy to locate through a simple web search or by referring to some of the books I cite in Chapter 2. The music though is a little more difficult to navigate. In terms of understanding the audio aesthetics of punk, the key moment comes with the discussion of the punk ethos in Chapter 2. With this in mind, below is a short playlist that is intended to accompany Chapter 2 of this book. It is by no means a comprehensive playlist, but it might help to soundtrack the key features of the punk ethos that I describe and it may be useful in helping the reader to experience the vitality and visceral properties of punk more directly. This list is intended to provide a sonic dimension, to orientate

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anyone who is fairly new to the movement, and to bring alive the punk ethos discussed in Chapter 2.

A playlist to accompany Chapter 2 of this book:

I wanna be your dog	The Stooges
Blitzkrieg bop	The Ramones
Heart of glass	Blondie
One chord wonders	The Adverts
New rose	The Damned
I'm a cliché	X Ray Spex
God save the Queen	The Sex Pistols
White man in Hammersmith Palais	The Clash
Typical girls	The Slits
Magnificent seven	The Clash
What do I get?	The Buzzcocks
Holidays in the sun	The Sex Pistols
Hong Kong garden	Siouxsie and the Banshees

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Part I
The Background

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1

Introduction: Sociology, Uncertainty and the Possibility of an Imagined Future

Abstract: *This chapter focuses upon the disciplinary and social contexts in which sociology operates. It identifies a general sense of uncertainty in the discipline. It also outlines the challenges of the neoliberal academy. This chapter argues that in order to prevent sociology from withering, and to ensure its vibrant future, we need to turn to alternative forms of knowledge. This chapter suggests that punk might provide a source of inspiration for developing creativity, inventiveness, and liveliness in sociology.*

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It is probably fair to say that there is quite a bit of uncertainty in sociology at the moment. This sense of uncertainty doesn't look like it is likely to leave any time soon. This is nothing new. Sociology is renowned for its almost chronic sense of crisis. It could even be said that a continual sense of crisis has dogged large parts of its history. John Holmwood (2010: 650) has pointed out, for instance, that 'sociology has to be achieved against an internal tendency to self-subversion'. This is perhaps illustrative of a discipline that lacks self-esteem, a discipline that is self-conscious, and maybe even insecure – as Arthur Stinchcombe (1994) has put it, a 'disintegrated discipline'. Stinchcombe (1994) argues that fragmentation is a central problem in forging a solid future for sociology. What Stinchcombe is concerned with is the growing inability of sociology, as a 'disintegrated discipline', to defend itself. At the heart of the fragmentation or 'disintegration' described by Stinchcombe (1994: 283) is the 'wide variety of substantive subject matter in disintegrated disciplines, and the strong boundaries around substantive specialities'. Stinchcombe suggests that this simply 'means that people cannot get interested in each other's work'. This type of disciplinary segmentation has been echoed in Andrew Abbott's (2001) classic study of the *Chaos of Disciplines*. In this book Abbott describes how 'fractal distinctions' carve up disciplines and make dialogue both within and between disciplines extremely difficult. As I will describe in this book though, a more open form of diversity in the discipline is something we might strive for. We need to find a way to resolve the heightened forms of specialization that translate into the barriers that prevent cross-fertilization. Despite the problems and difficulties, and this might be considered a little naïve and utopian, we might look to cut across the distinctions and specialisms that currently divide those with a shared if diverse interest in what Becker (2007) calls 'telling about society'.

Given the apparent fragmentation it has experienced, it is perhaps not surprising that Steve Fuller (2006: 1), in his attempts to think through a 'new sociological imagination' suitable for our times, has even suggested that sociology is 'suffering from an identity crisis'. But can we let this broader sense of uncertainty permeate into our sociology? Can we let it shape and define our practice and our collective sociological imagination? Perhaps a better question would be to ask if we should let this uncertainty come to inhibit and restrict what C. Wright Mills (1959) called the 'promise' of sociology. A sense of crisis might help us to rethink our purpose and approach, but if left unattended it might also

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become inhibitive and restrictive. If it undermines our confidence then it is likely to limit and restrain our approach and ultimately hold us back. A sense of crisis, in itself, is not a productive thing, but, if dealt with properly and directly, it might lead to productive outcomes.

In the face of the challenges and questions that are being posed it would be understandable if sociologists were to be overwhelmed by a desire to 'play it safe'. Yet this retreat to apparent safety might in itself become counterproductive. It is likely to de-energize the discipline, to restrict its scope, and to place sociology in the background of public dialogue. It might mute our voice amongst the din of dialogue on social matters. We sociologists might simply be left to whither on the vine. Playing it safe and moving into the background might even come to undermine the credentials of the discipline, a discipline intended to be at the forefront of social commentary, particularly in the eyes of the next generation of prospective students and sociologists – who will no doubt be drawn towards engaging and exciting ideas and accounts of the world that they can associate with or that speak to them. In a context in which narratives and commentaries of the social world are to be found densely packed into the cultural forms we consume (Beer & Burrows, 2010), can we afford to be tentative? Will the discipline thrive and regenerate if it is not able to spark interest and to speak to the next generation of sociologists? These questions are, of course, open to some debate, as are the potential responses. So, instead of playing it safe, being tentative and conservative, and living by the newly forged rules of the game, my suggestion, no, my demand here, is that we respond to our uncertainty by being bold, creative, imaginative, and, if we can bring ourselves to manage it, unapologetic and maybe even radical. I will use this opening chapter to try to set up the issues and to think about the conditions and circumstances that sociology is responding to and that are likely to shape the possibilities and opportunities that we face.

Put simply, this book develops the notion of a *punk sociology*. This is a form of sociology that takes inspiration from, what might be described as, *the punk ethos*. The book uses the punk ethos to re-imagine sociology. The argument of the book is that the attitude and sensibility of punk can productively be used to regenerate and energize the sociological imagination. What motivates this agenda is the pressing need to look for inspiration in shaping the future of sociology in a changing social context. It is part of a broader project aimed at thinking through the possibilities of drawing upon cultural forms and alternative forms of knowledge in

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order to re-imagine sociological practice, ideas, and forms of communication. As it works through the various features of the punk ethos, the book demonstrates how these ideas, approaches, and attitudes might be adapted to sociology. At a time when the focus has been absorbed or hijacked by what is often referred to as the 'impact agenda', this book aims to show how we might develop a form of sociology that is engaging for the wider public, that is relevant and responsive, and that makes people feel like anyone can engage in sociology. This, I claim, will lead to a vibrant future for sociology in terms of both its research and teaching. This is a book aimed at firing the sociological imagination by rethinking the principles and values that are at the heart of sociology and sociological work.

As the above suggests, this is a book that aims to imagine a productive and vibrant future for sociology. The book opens with such a 'promise', to return to C. Wright Mills, and then elaborates the different features of the punk ethos that might be used to shape sociology. The book returns to some key literature on the punk movement; it uses these to outline the core principles, attitudes, and practices that are central to the punk ethos. The book then moves to focus upon how this ethos might be imported into a punk sociology. The second half of the book explores these features in turn, and critically applies each to the sociological project. The book then concludes by summarizing the key features of a punk sociology and by imagining where this approach might take us over the coming years. There will be a number of places throughout this book that will engage with cutting-edge issues and debates within sociology, and the book will explore what answers a punk sociology might have for the types of problems and issues that have been highlighted by sociologists over recent years. These include the apparent public indifference shown towards sociology (particularly off the back of the economic downturn), the problem of a public sociology, the challenges to sociology's jurisdiction from commercial and cultural forms of sociological discourse and analysis, the perceived waning of the promise of sociology, the opportunity and challenges of digital data and digital sociology, the position of the discipline within the audit culture and the neoliberal university, increases in fees and reductions in research funding, and the opportunities for re-imagining the craft of the discipline, along with a range of other issues outlined in visions of disciplinary fragmentation, crises, and the like. This book is not an indulgent or nostalgic return to a particular cultural moment; it is instead a reflection upon the state of sociology

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within the contemporary context in which it operates. It shows how we might use cultural resources as inspiration, as alternative forms of knowledge, which might be powerful in thinking about how sociology might respond to its contemporary challenges and opportunities. This book attempts to show how our response can be creative and imaginative as we attempt to engage people in sociology and as we carve out a successful future for the discipline.

In a time of uncertainty, which sociology appears to be in – as a result of a range of largely external social, cultural, and economic conditions – it is important to return to the core issues within our discipline and to reflect upon their purpose and value. This book looks to do just that. It looks to provoke imagined futures for sociology and to reflect upon how we might develop particular responses to these imagined futures. This book offers what I hope will be seen as an imaginative response, a response that resists particular pressures to *play it safe* – which in turn are likely to narrow sociology's remit and limit its scope. It is a book that promotes diversity and resistance in the discipline. It is a direct response to calls for a renewed creativity in the deployment of the sociological imagination (which I will describe in a moment). I suggest here that in order to develop a response to these calls, which are actually quite difficult to respond to, we might look back to punk for inspiration. We can use punk's ethos or sensibilities to imagine just one alternative future for sociology.

To situate the arguments of this book, in what remains of this introductory chapter, I will discuss briefly some of the contemporary conditions under which sociology is being performed. I have already suggested that sociology is in a moment of uncertainty, but we might wonder what the conditions are that have contributed towards this shaky self-esteem. This short chapter, and even the book as a whole, cannot aim to fill in all the gaps in this particular story. There are actually some excellent resources that we might turn to in order to understand the issues faced by sociology throughout its history. In the British context we can see the battles over the form and direction of sociology from its inception. An instructive example is Chris Renwick's (2011) account of sociology's relations with biology and the appointment of the first British chair of sociology at the London School of Economics. Renwick's account shows that sociology might have gone in a very different direction if this single appointment had been made differently, which is illustrative of how sociology was, in a sense, uncertain about its identity from the outset. To continue the

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narratives around the changing identity of sociology we could also turn to Mike Savage's (2010) accounts of post-war British sociology. There are also other prominent histories of British sociology, such as that provided by Halsey (2004) and across a range of articles (with a new book on the history of sociology edited by John Holmwood and John Scott soon to be published). The competing narratives and complex histories we find in these accounts only afford an understanding of sociology in one particular national context. If we were to look internationally we would find vastly different forms of sociology, with equally if not more profound complexities in the cultivation of disciplinary identities and values. Hence, it is not really possible here to attempt to elaborate a full historical account of our uncertainty, rather this is something that might be pieced together from these various resources and might then be explored in its contemporary manifestation through a range of accounts of crisis, limitation, and instability (the range of literature here is significant in its volume, but prominent examples would certainly include Savage & Burrows, 2007; Burawoy, 2005; Adkins & Lury, 2009, 2012, Osbourne et al., 2008; Ruppert et al., 2013 amongst many others). What we see then is an emergent desire to 're-imagine' the 'practice of sociology' (Fuller, 2006: 7), or as John Holmwood (2010: 649) has put it, it is seen to be 'a discipline that has to be "achieved", or continually re-invented, in new circumstances'.

What I am particularly interested in here are accounts that, responding to this general sense of crisis, provide some thoughts on the future of sociology, the values that we might cling to, and the ways in which the discipline might be re-imagined or re-invented. These are accounts that tend to endorse a renewed engagement with Mills notion of a 'sociological imagination', alongside an eagerness to hone and rework this concept to suit the particular problems and challenges of the contemporary world. It is in this type of work that we find a set of questions to which we might respond. These are questions that are a little more particular and go beyond the more general sense that sociology might be reshaped and re-energized. What we find is a growing set of literature in which sociologists are being encouraged to be 'creative' and 'inventive'. This is a call that many of us would agree with in broad terms, but that we may also find to be extremely hard in practice. Let us consider what these calls are suggesting and what they leave open to interpretation, before moving on to think about the particular response that I suggest in this book.

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Of course, visions for the future of sociology are not likely to converge around any particular shared ideals. As Abbott (2006) has shown, the very basis of the discipline is far too fragmented for this to happen. But there is a growing sense that we will need to think radically about the way forward. In some cases this might be to reaffirm and rediscover some of the important concepts that have fallen by the wayside, such as 'value' and 'measurement' (Adkins & Lury, 2012). In other cases the suggestion might be that we will need to build a sociology that is responsive to social transformations and that adapts with them, such as the recent call for an interest in new social connections (Burnett et al., 2010), digital sociology (Orton-Johnson & Prior, 2013), or the 'social life of methods' (Ruppert et al., 2013). Underpinning many of these positions is a sense that we need to be creative and imaginative in rethinking what sociology is and what it does. This stream of thought found a voice in a recent article reflecting on the work of C. Wright Mills some 50 years after his death. In this piece Nicholas Gane and Les Back (2012) return to the 'promise' and 'craft' of sociology laid out in the work of Mills. They attempt to argue that 'the enduring relevance of Mill's legacy is his way of practicing intellectual life as an attentive and sensuous craft but also as a moral and political project' (Gane & Back, 2012: 404). In other words, returning to Mills work, Gane and Back remind us that sociology need not be restricted in the form it takes, and in fact that sociology needs to use Mills' work to rediscover an interest in experience, the senses, and its place in moral and political debates (an argument on the importance of experiences and senses to the sociological imagination can also be found in Fraser, 2009). Again, this might be contentious, particularly in a discipline where neutrality has become a central feature. Gane and Back's piece is important because it represents a direct call for sociologists to re-engage with Mills' work and to use it to think about the way we might develop the craft of sociology in new and creative ways. As they put it, 'it is necessary to think again about the promise of the discipline and, beyond this, what might be brought to this promise by the kinds of critical attentiveness, of dialogue and critique, and of different forms of writing or inscription that are central to the sociological craft' (Gane & Back, 2012: 415). The argument here is that, in order to do this, 'Mill's vision of what sociology can be, in its exercise of an attentive and imaginative craft, still has much to offer' (Gane & Back, 2012: 418). Clearly then the theme of the day, in response to a sense of crisis and a changing social setting, is that we need to be imaginative in re-imaging the craft of sociology.

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This argument, concerning the craft of sociology, continues in a recent collection of pieces on *Live Methods* (Back & Puwar, 2012). This collection gathers together pieces concerned with offering a lively and imaginative engagement with how sociology is conducted (see for example the account of curation in sociology in Puwar & Sharma, 2012). The scope of the collection is far reaching, and actually shows the range of ways in which this re-imagining of sociology might lead us. Rather than attempt to sketch all of these out, we can remain focused on the core idea: liveliness. In a central piece designed to orientate the collection, on the topic of 'live sociology', Les Back (2012: 18) suggests that there 'is more opportunity to re-imagine sociological craft now than at any other point in the discipline's history'. The argument here is that sociologists are faced with a world that is producing new forms of data, a social world that is media saturated with versatile devices and where social media lead individuals to broadcast aspects of their everyday lives. For Back, we are re-imagining sociology at a time when new opportunities for social research are rapidly opening up. These opportunities are presenting themselves, particularly if we open up our understanding of sociological research and attempt to exercise our sociological imagination in ways that perhaps diverge from our established understandings of sociological practice. There is an absence within these emergent cultures, Back argues, of the attentiveness that sociology can bring. The core point is that, for Back (2012: 34, italics in the original), we need to bring 'a *bit of craftiness into the craft*'. Clearly then this requires the creativity and craftiness of the sociologist to be exercised. Back (2012: 34) summarizes his position in the following terms:

> live sociology involves developing the methodological opportunities offered by digital culture and expanding the forms and modes of telling sociology through collaborating with artists, designers, musicians and film-makers and incorporating new modes and styles of sociological representation. The use of digital devices ... offer the opportunity to augment sociological attentiveness and develop mobile methods that also enable the production of empirical data simultaneously from a plurality of vantages.

Back's vision of 'live sociology' then is something of a creative engagement with the world, which attempts to think not just how we might conduct a sociology of these changes but also how sociology might be a part of these changes in its forms of analysis and communication. It is seen to be a collaborative endeavour that draws on new knowledge. We

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are left to wonder what types of ideas and approaches might structure such an expansion of sociology's promise. In the conclusion to his piece Back (2012: 36) makes the claim that we, as sociologists, 'need to argue for an alternative future but also craft one into existence'. This sentiment is a call to sociologists to respond to their conditions. But it does leave some questions about exactly how we might 'craft' an alternative sociology 'into existence'. As I will discuss in a moment, one option is to borrow such a vision or ethos from another place and to transpose it onto sociology. This, I suggest, might help us to move beyond the fairly intimidating or scary, maybe even inhibiting, idea that we might be responsible for coming up with a viable and re-crafted future for sociology.

Elsewhere, Celia Lury and Nina Wakeford (2012a) invite us to involve ourselves in developing 'inventive methods'. In the introduction to the edited collection on this theme, Lury and Wakeford (2012b) attempt to provide an agenda for these 'inventive methods'. They base this agenda around a series of assertions about what makes for a particularly inventive method, these are then pursued by the various contributors – whose chapters range from dealing with the inventive use of anecdotes, experiments, numbers, photos, patterns, sounds, amongst others. Again, Lury and Wakeford position this piece, echoing the earlier collection on the question of 'what is the empirical?' (Adkins & Lury, 2009), as a response to what they describe as 'the current renewal of interest in the politics of method' (Lury & Wakeford, 2012b: 1).

In general terms, they contend that inventive methods are 'oriented towards an investigation of the open-endedness of the social world', they add that their hope is that these methods will 'enable *the happening* of the social world – its ongoingness, relationality, contingency and sensuousness – to be investigated' (Lury & Wakeford, 2012b: 2, italics in the original). They attempt to work some specificity into these quite general aims. The assertions that they work with, and that, they state, are not intended to 'aspire to either unity or completeness' (Lury & Wakeford, 2012b: 2), revolve around a number of key statements. For example, they argue that 'it is not possible to apply a method as if it were indifferent or external to the problem it seeks to address, but that method must rather be made specific and relevant to the problem ... if methods are to be inventive, they should not leave that problem untouched'. (Lury & Wakeford, 2012b: 3). There is a sense of immanence here, with methods operating from the inside of the issues they aim to investigate. The implicit suggestion here is that methods, which are integrated into

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the social world, will need to change with that social world. They talk of reconsidering the 'relevance of method' and how it might fit with the 'here and now' (Lury & Wakeford, 2012b: 3). This attachment of methods to the changing social world is something that has been examined historically by Mike Savage (2010). Savage's book performs the exact role of exploring 'how methods contribute to the framing of change' (Lury & Wakeford, 2012b: 6). We can start though with the general point that, according to Lury and Wakeford's (2012b: 10–11) vision, inventive methods are 'devices' that are usable in 'multiple contexts' and are also part of the 'assemblage' and 'apparatus' of 'particular situations'.

Perhaps unsurprisingly Lury and Wakeford (2012b: 4) also assert that inventive methods are not bound to particular disciplines, they need to be interdisciplinary in nature. Alongside this, and returning to the issue of relevance, they also argue for the need to think of our approaches in distinction to commercial forms of research, this is a challenge they too suggest that we need to take on. Perhaps the most telling of the assertions they present concerns the point that 'inventiveness does not ... equate to new' (Lury & Wakeford, 2012b: 6). This approach then is not just about finding new things and using new methods to do it, it can also be to use old resources to think in inventive ways. These assertions, of which I have picked out only a small handful, come together to define the notion of inventive methods. For example, Lury and Wakeford (2012b: 7) state that their proposal:

> is that the inventiveness of methods is to be found in the relation between two moments: the addressing of a method ... to a specific problem, and the capacity of what emerges in the use of the method to change the problem.

We have something here that is illustrative of the way that such approaches might be embedded in the world. They continue, 'All of this is a way of saying that inventiveness is a matter of use, of collaboration, of situatedness, and does not imply the ineffectiveness of methods, only that their inventiveness ... cannot be secured in advance' (Lury & Wakeford, 2012b: 7). This would indicate that it is by having a go, by trying things out, that inventiveness might emerge. It might seem an obvious point but it is not until we try things out that we know if they will work. This experimentation takes a level of commitment and bravery, it is to invest an effort in something that is risky and may not pay off.

If this collected volume on inventive methods is not a 'conventional set of "how-to" recipes for research' (Lury & Wakeford, 2012b: 7), then what

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is it? Inventive methods, we are told, 'act as a provocation' to 'the reader' that might allow them to 'consider (more) methods in relation to your own purposes, to begin devising yourself' (Lury & Wakeford, 2012b: 2). So, although we have some substantial discussion of inventive methods and a series of examples of how they might pan out, the collection is not prescriptive. It is still left to the reader to follow this lead and be 'inventive'. This is no easy feat. And again, we are left to wonder what might provoke this invention. Lury and Wakeford provide us with a tantalizing hint in concluding their agenda setting piece. They say that:

> Grasping this excess, configuring it, is one of the principal sources of a method's capacity to be inventive, a capacity that can only be enhanced by the use of the material-semiotic properties of materials and media to expand relations between the sensible and the knowable. (Lury & Wakeford, 2012b: 21)

The suggestion here seems to be that we should turn to materials that we can think with and that might then provide us with a means to be inventive. At least that is one possible reading of this passage. And this is only a hint. The sense again though is that sociology needs to look outwards for inspiration. It leaves us to wonder where we might turn for the apparent mass of opportunities that are available for us to rethink our approach.

All of the above leaves us with some difficult questions to answer. We can see that there are debates about where sociology might go and how it might be performed, but we are left with some unanswered questions about how this might happen. These questions concern the way we might proceed with such a renewed engagement with the sociological imagination, especially one that is based upon a more creative and inventive craft. We have been given this as an opportunity, but I'm not sure that we have been presented with much in the way of a model of how to proceed, of where we might look for inspiration, or how we might appropriate other forms of invention and creativity into sociology. How do we re-imagine the craft and promise of sociology? How do we find ways of being creative, inventive, and lively? How can we deploy the sociological imagination in creative ways? How can we resist the restrictions of uncertainty, crisis, and measurement? My answer in this book is to use cultural resources to help us to be creative and to re-imagine. In this case I turn to punk; the explanation for this choice will, hopefully, become clearer during the book. But for the moment at least, let us reason that it

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provides us with a model for guiding or provoking creativity and invention. It provides a tracer bullet for a potential direction in which sociology might travel. It gives us a model for being creative and inventive and it affords us, in my view, an approach from which sociology might learn to rediscover its promise.

Of course, one thing I have said little about here is the changing environment within which sociology is most usually being conducted: the university. It is widely acknowledged that universities are changing (Wernick, 2006). This has undoubted implications for how knowledge is produced. It is also likely to have differential impacts amongst academic disciplines (Holmwood, 2010). The form the university takes, the way it is funded, how academic practice is managed and measured, and how the university is seen within broader systems of governance are all likely to have consequences for how sociology is done and the form it ultimately takes. Without wanting to get too bogged down within current higher education policy, which of course takes many forms across many national contexts, it is worth dwelling for a moment upon the institutional context of sociology, particularly as this is likely to continue to have powerful outcomes for sociological research. What is perhaps most notable currently is the turn towards political theory in order to understand the trajectory of university life. This is particularly appealing because it allows us to think of global differences whilst also attempting to see what universities share as a common future. However accurate it might be, the currently popular concept of neoliberalism is often invoked in order to explain the current conditions that academics find themselves working in (the references are numerous and growing; for just one recent example, and making the common connection between neoliberalism and zombies, see the various mentions of neoliberalism in Whelan et al., 2013).

Neoliberalism has become a catch-all term for the wider political and social conditions that have come to impinge on the working practices of academics and sociologists. Neoliberalism is something of a slippery concept, but it occurs fairly frequently in writings and discussions on the state of higher education. In very general terms it has been suggested that the 'lynchpin of neoliberal ideology is the belief that open, competitive, and unregulated markets, liberated from all forms of state interference, represent the optimal mechanism for economic development' (Brenner & Theodore, 2002: 2; and for a detailed response to Foucault's key accounts of neoliberalism see Gane, 2012b). Now, of course, this starting

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definition is quite open and can translate into different forms in different contexts. Brenner et al. (2010) describe this variability in terms of 'variagated neoliberalization'. They use this term to do two things. First, it shows that neoliberalism is not a discrete and coherent ideological project. And, second, it redefines neoliberalism as an ongoing project or process of neoliberalization. Given this broad scope, it is easy to see how the central focus upon the imposition of markets and competition on the social sphere mean that neoliberalism is a concept that academics might be able to readily apply to their own conditions. Research assessment exercises, league tables, student fees, citation scores and impact factors, virtual learning environments, time allocation models, funding bids, and so on are readily understood to be the materialization of neoliberal ideologies within higher education. For example, Robyn Dowling (2008: 2), reflecting on some of the growing literature that talks of the neoliberal university, contends that:

> Neoliberalism is the dominant trope here, with geographers, like other social scientists, exploring the neoliberalization of the contemporary university (...). These neoliberalization processes include the infusion of market and competitive logics throughout universities, the rise of audit processes and cultures of accountability, and the replacement of public with private (...) funding.

Indeed, we even find that neoliberalism is seen to be embodied in the lives of academics. To pick out an example, Ros Gill (2010) has spoken of the 'hidden injuries' of the 'neoliberal university'. In this case we see an account of the affective responses caused by the apparent encroachment of neoliberal ideologies, with bodily and emotional outcomes for individuals. Gill (2010: 241) argues that 'academia represents an excellent example of the neoliberalisation of the workplace and that academics are, in many ways, model neoliberal subjects, with their endless self-monitoring, flexibility, creativity and internalisation of new forms of auditing and calculating'. This plays out, she argues, in the form of 'insecurity, stress, anxiety and shame' (Gill, 2010: 241).

It should be added that Gill is not alone in her assertions. In a piece titled 'Living with the h-Index?', which refers to a way of calculating citations, Roger Burrows (2012) also describes in some detail the way in which the rise of new types of metrics, or number-based measures, have made aspects of academic life increasingly visible and measurable, with profound consequences. Again, directly linking this to a wider neoliberal

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agenda, Burrows describes the increasing possibilities for audit that arise from the university sector's vast new 'data assemblage'. Like Gill, for Burrows, academics, including sociologists, are complicit within this. According to Burrows (2012: 368), the central problem is that 'academic value is, essentially, becoming monetized, and as this happens academic values are becoming transformed'. Again, the practices of sociologists are *not just being measured but they are also being altered*. The interpretations vary, but the broader movement towards market-based higher education, which takes many forms, is often seen to be an 'attack' on education as a 'social right' (Holmwood & Bhambra, 2012) as well as potentially eroding the values of certain types of work whilst pushing researchers and lecturers towards others. These systems of measurement don't report on practices; they change behaviours and shape experiences. Indeed, they cajole the academic towards certain types of work, they encourage the academic to play it safe, even though, as I discuss in this chapter and in Chapter 7, this is actually counterproductive – if we play it safe there is a chance that few people will have an interest in what we have to say.

We have to wonder what these conditions might mean for the cultivation of academic disciplines such as sociology. The outcomes are not yet clear. But it would seem that there is a need to tackle such issues and to think deeply about how sociology might respond to these conditions. We may not necessarily agree with Ros Gill and others, with regard to the consequences and hidden injuries (although there is a good chance that we might), but there is a need to understand the broader social, political, and institutional conditions that shape sociology. In other words, we cannot leave our sociological imaginations at the door when we think about what sociology is. We need to understand how the biography of the discipline of sociology is also being shaped by its wider social conditions. I do not have any particular answers for this. My expectation is that the readers of this book will actually be experiencing different types of contextual issues in their work, across geographies, and across time. It would seem though that sociologists are already suggesting that neoliberalization is coming to directly impact upon how they do sociology.

It is obvious that we are not going to reverse the apparent marketization and neoliberalization of higher education. Instead, we need to think about how we should respond. The best response, that is to say the best form of protection, is to shape a discipline that is attractive, lively, and exciting. A discipline that draws people in. This will ensure that sociology has a ready-made and substantial audience, and that it is able to

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attract those who will then go on to be the future of the discipline. It will also make it far more likely that value is seen to reside in the sociological project. This does not mean that we are 'selling out', it is not to go with the flow and to simply adopt the spirit of market-based competition into our lives. Rather it is to work towards a version of sociology that thrives under these conditions by offering an alternative voice and an engaging tone. Sociology will then thrive, because it will draw people into its debates, into its ideas, and into its findings, all of which are likely to provide alternative visions of the social world. This is a version of sociology that plays the game to its advantage. It is a version of sociology that succeeds by its own rules. This is a version of sociology that operates in the contemporary, if you will forgive the expression, knowledge economy, whilst providing a space for thought and provocation. My suggestion is that the best way to achieve all of this is to work on producing a discipline that fires people's imaginations. Sociology might then work at creating messages that seep out into the circulations of data in social media, that draw responses, that speak to different audiences, in different places, that show the world in new light, that responds quickly but also offers considered and timely reflection – in each case stimulating and provoking. A dull, disconnected, and worthy discipline might survive for a while, maybe even indefinitely, but it is likely to wither whilst becoming increasingly marginal. We do not want sociology to become an esoteric pastime for a small band of insular followers.

This changing context of knowledge production is bound to have a constitutive effect on sociology. This is inevitable. In this instance, what I am suggesting with punk sociology, is that we attempt to play along with the demands placed on us, but that at the same time we try to preserve a creative space. This will be a space in which sociology is not entirely bounded and shaped by the directions that are intended for it (by systems of government, measurement, and the rhetoric of impact). In other words, it uses an engagement with a creative cultural form to help direct it away from the obvious and to give it space to react and respond to the challenges it faces. The punk ethos, as one example, gives us the type of creative space and imaginative framework that might allow us to continue to thrive in a changing academic and social context, whilst also enabling us to be bold and confident, and to think in ways that escape from orthodoxy and conservatism. It is to find a way of productively responding to the requirements we face whilst also turning them to our advantage. Perhaps most of all, it is not an attempt at escape, rather it is

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to face up to the challenges and to respond accordingly. It is not to shy away but to stand up to structural, systematic, and external pressures in the same way that it is also a call to stand up to internally manifested senses of crisis, uncertainty, and disciplinary convention.

What this introduction suggests is that there are significant possibilities for turning to cultural resources in our re-imagining of the methodological, conceptual, and communicative repertoire of sociology and the social sciences more generally. This could take many forms; there are many cultural resources that might provide such a schema for thinking about disciplinary practices and approaches. In this case I have opened by claiming that we might look back to the punk scene to respond to calls for a re-energized engagement with the 'promise' of a 'creative' and 'inventive' engagement with the social world. Drawing on cultural resources, such as punk, might give us scope to imagine the discipline in ways that are not possible with our established conceptual and disciplinary ideas. In other words, cultural resources give us imaginative spaces in which disciplinary ideas might be completely reworked away from contemporary academic, cultural, social, and economic pressures and structures. This introduction sets the background to the project of a punk sociology. It intimates towards the hope that this book might be seen to be a direct intervention across a range of contemporary debates within sociology and the social sciences, and it is also suggestive of how, more broadly, we might draw upon cultural resources to rethink and play with conventions and ideas. It might seem strange to look back nearly 40 years in order to do this, but, as I will show, the punk ethos is there to be refreshed and reused in ways that respond to distinctly contemporary questions. This book stands as a direct response to both the sense of crisis and uncertainty we may be experiencing, which is likely to be particularly profound for those in the early stages of their sociological journey, and to the calls for a renewed sociology that is responsive to the social world. It is also an attempt though to provoke and engage sociologists in the promise of the discipline and in an unlimited and unconstrained engagement with its future. The rest of the book is concerned with elaborating upon the notion of a punk sociology and with trying to convince the reader that it might be a good idea to pursue further, or at the very least it will provide a framework to react against and argue with.

To this end, the book itself is separated into two parts. The first part of the book contains two chapters that provide the background for the book. This chapter has set the book in the context of contemporary sociology,

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the second sets up the key features of a punk ethos. The chapters in part two attempt to apply the key features of the punk ethos to sociology. It begins with a short chapter that outlines the move from the punk ethos to punk sociology, and follows this with chapters that explore this move in detail. These will be relatively short and concise chapters that take the basic ideas outlined and try to adapt them to help in rethinking how sociology is done and the type of approaches and ideas it might develop. Each chapter uses particular features of the punk ethos to open up questions about sociology and how it might be developed. In keeping with the punk aesthetic, these chapters are short, explicit, and suggestive – intended to be the sociological equivalent of a direct burst of energy in a 2- or 3-minute song, with no solos and little tangential or unnecessary content. These chapters are structured to be representative of the features they describe. They provide ideas that the reader might use or respond to. These chapters are not detailed instructions about how sociology should be done. They are rather intended as interventions, thought experiments, encounters with an imagined set of possibilities. Part two closes with a short concluding chapter that reiterates the notion of a punk sociology and begins to imagine where it might take sociology in the future. Let us begin though by opening up the punk ethos.

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2
The Punk Ethos

Abstract: *This chapter provides further background to the book by outlining the key features of the punk ethos. This chapter uses various historical and biographical sources to uncover the key features of the punk movement. The chapter does not aim to provide a detailed history of punk, instead it looks across a range of resources to define the punk ethos.*

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The term punk has a long and fairly complex history. To reduce this history down to just a few lines:

> The word 'punk', in its archaic meaning as 'prostitute', first appeared in print in England in 1596, and was soon in common use ... But in the twentieth century it acquired a new meaning in the US as a petty criminal, especially a young male hoodlum. Both these outsider senses of the word made it ideal to be co-opted by the rock critic Dave Marsh, who used it in 1970 ... in this sense of the word 'punk' – anti establishment dissenter, Roundhead rock rebel, willful iconoclast. (Maconie, 2013: 190–191)

Focusing upon the more contemporary use of the term this chapter seeks to outline the key features of the punk ethos, rendering it open to application in the following chapters. However, this chapter is not going to rehash the history of punk, this has been covered many times in the past (the key work here is the insider account offered by Jon Savage, 1991). Punk has been well documented and these histories do not need to be reiterated. There is no real point in reproducing such histories here (there is also an account of punk's long-term cultural influence in Savage, 1996). Rather, my intention is to call upon some of the key works on punk in order to build a set of key characteristics that rest at the heart of a punk sensibility. This chapter will look to mine these historical and biographical texts to pull out the key features of the punk ethos, its sensibility, its attitudes, its general approach, its techniques, and its practices. These explorations of punk's features will be illustrated through specific instances, pieces of music, performances, participant quotes, and the like. The examples from punk serve here as vehicles for thinking through the punk ethos. The chapter will conclude by outlining and grouping the key features of the punk ethos so that these might then be transposed onto sociology.

Like the music itself, I want to try to be direct and cut away any unnecessary sounds. What we get here is the equivalent of the punk riff. Or, as one punk fanzine put it: 'This is a chord', next to a diagram of an A chord, 'This is another', next to an E chord, and 'This is a third', next to a G chord, it concludes 'Now form a band' (this is described along with an image in Savage, 1991: 280–281). This sentiment was embodied in The Advert's 1977 song *One Chord Wonders*. We are looking for the three chords that you need to play along with the punk ethos – which in the second half of the book will become the three chords that are needed to play punk sociology. This is a concept, this is another, this is a third, now be a sociologist.

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One of the immediate problems that we are faced with in trying to define punk (for an 'etymology' see Kugelberg & Savage, 2012: 348–351) is that a key feature of the movement is its discomfort with labels, categories, and boundaries. As such, it is a movement that is hard to tie down to a clearly defined set of characteristics with discrete boundaries. As Marc Bayard has put it:

> The major problem with trying to explain punk is that it is not something that fits neatly into a box or categories. Not surprising as punk had made the explicit aim of trying to destroy all boxes and labels. With that as a major hurdle, any project that tries to define punk or explain it must do so with very broad brush strokes. Punk and punk music cannot be pigeonholed to some spiked-haired white male wearing a leather jacket with a thousand metal spikes listening to music real loud. If that's all it was and is then I'm not evenly remotely interested. (Bayard in O'Hara, 1999: 11)

This reveals two things. The first is that we may have trouble if we try to be too prescriptive or reductive in setting out the punk ethos. The second, and turning this to our advantage a little, is that one of the defining characteristics of punk is this very discomfort with categorization and definition. This discomfort with labels and the sense of inward facing iconoclasm is expressed neatly in the following statement from John Lydon, perhaps the person most associated with the punk movement, talking about the term punk:

> It's meaningless! Once you accept a title like that you are a slave to the system. The very thing you think you are rebelling against you are replacing. You're just a different structure with the same moronic mentality. I have to go for being an individual, and I'm sorry but a category like punk is not about individuals. (John Lydon in Robb, 2006: 411)

Part of the punk sensibility is to look to cross-boundaries and barriers and to escape the restrictions of normalizing categories and labels. For some, like Lydon, the term punk is self-defeating. It simply becomes a label or category for those who set out to avoid the restrictions of such labels and categories, as such it becomes a label to be escaped from not into. In his classic study of subculture, Dick Hebdige (1979: 106) noticed a similar pattern of behaviour embodied in an acute desire to 'disrupt and reorganize meaning'. As he notes, 'no subculture has sought with more grim determination than the punks to detach itself from the taken-for-granted landscape of normalized forms, nor to bring down upon itself such vehement disapproval' (Hebdige, 1979: 19). This is both an outward

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and inward looking attempt to question norms and to disrupt cultural hierarchies. It is the subversiveness typical of punk (O'Hara, 1999: 33). This problem then becomes the first potential characteristic, the punk ethos requires the punk to aim to cross barriers and to eschew simple labels. This gives us something of a starting point, however slippery, that contextualizes much of the discussion that follows. We need to be wary of the playfulness and discomfort of punk when we start trying to define it. We need to keep in mind that punk has the potential to be protean and changeable, that it reacts against being defined, and that its attempts to cross-boundaries make it hard to contain. Bayard suggests that we proceed with large brush strokes, the problem though is that if the definition becomes too broad then the focal points of punk will be lost and it will become amorphous or nebulous.

We see these types of problems of definition recurring in the literature on punk. Simon Reynolds (2011: 240) points towards what he observes as 'a paradox right at the heart of punk: this most revolutionary movement in rock history was actually born from reactionary impulses'. This in turn points us towards some potential problems in working with a movement that is about rejection. Such a movement would inevitably be defined by what it is rejecting and what it is reacting against (which are often understood to be the economic downturn, oppressive social norms, and the rise of progressive rock music, amongst other things). Indeed, punk is often defined by its reactionary impulses, but this is not solely about rejection (as Reynold's goes on to argue, punk often looks to the past to find new possibilities). Punk cannot be reduced to or defined by the things it rejected or rejects, it has its own properties rather than merely being a reaction against things (Savage, 2012).

Where punk followed its reactionary impulse, it was often attempting to find new cultural terrain and new perspectives, and perhaps even trying to break out of established conventions and ideas. Often this would take the form of playful and ironic swipes at the cultural forms it saw as being established and staid. This playfulness was just a symptom of some wider concerns in the punk movement with the oppressiveness of established norms and values. The punk movement can be seen as an attempt to question such norms. O'Hara frames this in terms of authority and conformity – of which The Sex Pistols' famous performance of 'God Save the Queen' on a boat on the Thames during the 1977 jubilee celebrations would be *the* archetypal example (for a short account see Maconie, 2013: 189–197). He claims that 'Punks question conformity not only by looking

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and sounding different ... but by questioning the prevailing modes of thought' (O'Hara, 1999: 28). The image here is of a movement concerned with questioning established visions of the world. If orthodoxies are challenged then questions might be asked, O'Hara suggests, that tend not to get asked by conformists. The result may well be the emergence of new types of questions, something that sociologists may be keen to embrace. This is to break free from the confines and limits of conventions and established accounts so as to develop new perspectives and reveal new types of questions. Of course, 'the questioning of conformity involves the questioning of authority as well' (O'Hara, 1999: 28). As Savage's rich history tells us, punk is not just a reaction to 'hippy excess' (Savage, 1991: 81), it has wider aims and targets.

Similarly there is often some resistance to reducing punk to a few superficial aesthetic properties. Instead, such notions are often firmly rebuked, with punk being seen as a deep-rooted and almost vocational calling. For example, John Robb (2006: 1) reflects, 'Punk changed everything. Not just our trousers. Our Lives'. This echoes Hebdige's (1979: 108) observation that 'punk did more than upset the wardrobe. It undermined every relevant discourse'. Here punk becomes a way of life and a sensibility that resonates beyond fashion. Again, the following insider account reveals such a reaction:

> I'll tell you what I think Punk isn't – it isn't a fashion, a certain style of dress, a passing 'phase' of knee-jerk rebellion against your parents, the latest 'cool' trend or even a particular form of style or music, really – it is an idea that guides and motivates your life. The Punk community that exists, exists to support and realize that idea through music, art, fanzines and other expressions of personal creativity. And what is this idea? Think for yourself, be yourself, don't just take what society gives you, create your own rules, live your own life. (Mark Anderson, Positive Force handout in O'Hara, 1999: 36)

There is a sense here of an eagerness to prove that punk should not be dismissed as something frivolous and short-lived. Rather it is suggested that it is a way of thinking that permeates into cultural forms. In this particular quote, we see punk described as a community that supports the shared re-working of rules. A Do-it-yourself movement, in which forms of communication, creativity, and dissemination are co-opted to work towards this shared project. Again, this is not a prescriptive re-ordering of everyday life, but a much more relative take on the part that rules and social norms play within people's lives, with individuals being

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encouraged to 'create your own rules'. This type of sentiment arises fairly frequently in accounts of punk, in both the historical accounts and the fanzine content and song lyrics of the time. In the introduction to his oral history of punk, John Robb (2006: 3, italics in the original) describes such an approach in these terms:

> the best thing about it was that we were not just passive consumers: we owned it as well. We were all involved. It wasn't just the superstar groups dictating the debate. We all were! Everyone had their own version of punk. Everyone decided what punk was *for them*.

Again we see here not just the sense of activity and energy attached to punk, echoing the sense that punk was a profound choice and a way of life, but we also see the problems of definition that arise when the essence of punk is seen to be its mobility and flexibility. As a relativistic social movement, in which hierarchies were not allowed to dominate expression, the cultural forms were seen to be a product of the individual's vision of punk rather than some overarching hegemonic ideological vision of what it should be. Although, as I return to in the conclusion to this book, this can also lead to fragmentation and a lack of coherence at the heart of the movement, and thus this relativism can also be seen as a pathological presence. However, Hebdige (1979: 113) claimed that there was a unifying order to this fragmentation and that the 'chaos cohered as a meaningful whole', but later accounts point towards some deep tensions between key protagonists within the movement (see for example the account of the relations between The Clash and the Sex Pistols in Gray, 2001: particularly pages 196–197). This vulnerability is a tension that resides within punk and that might need to be considered as we potentially move such a project into our own practices.

The relativistic tendencies of punk play out in a number of ways. Perhaps the most telling is in the way that punk attempted to break down barriers and hierarchies. This is most notably achieved by artists focusing upon making music that was so patently and aesthetically stripped back, raw, bold, and fearless. Referring to the New York Dolls and the Stooges, who are often seen as Punk 'precursors', Reynolds (2011: 246) points out that the 'songs were short, solo-free, stripped raw and swaggering'. This is a kind of sonic iconoclasm, in that it attempts to bring the music down-to earth, rather than allowing it to appear to belong to a cultural elite. This sense of hierarchy and its subversion can be found in many of the insider accounts of punk, as this excerpt illustrates:

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> the great thing about punk was that everything was independent. Before that there was only big promoters, there was no room for you. Before punk there was only the bourgeois life of other musicians; it seemed like they were very grand, reminiscent of classical musicians of the aristocracy of the French revolution period. (Poly Styrene in Robb, 2006: 280)

Here the locked-in presence of a cultural elite is compared to the aristocracy. The vision is of cultural production as being the preserve of the fortunate few, based upon patronage and nepotism. For Poly Styrene, the punk movement was a move towards a more democratic cultural landscape, which was a product both of the music and style and of the introduction of independent structures in cultural production. The punk sensibility spread into the business models of the cultural industries of the time.

The attempt to break down barriers required aesthetic sensibilities that stood against such hierarchies. In place of music that seemed hard to make, that perpetuated the lack of social mobility in the cultural sector, punk adopted what Jon Savage refers to as 'deliberate *un*learning' (Savage, 1991: 82, italics in the original). This was an attempt to strip the music back to its basic sounds and messages and to remove any possible pretension from its form and communication. This deliberate unlearning became the means by which the music communicated a sonic discomfort with the cultural virtuosity and slickness of the time. 'The music', Hebdige (1979: 109) also comments, 'was similarly distinguished from mainstream rock and pop [and] was uniformly basic and direct in its appeal, whether through intention or lack of expertise'. The roughness of the music was a part of the iconoclasm of the movement and the projection of its DIY ethic. This DIY ethic, for some, is central to punk, as Kugelberg (2012: 46) writes, the 'legacy of punk is simple: the immediate implementation of D.I.Y grassroots culture ... No distance. Form a band, start a blog, become an artist, a DJ, a guitar player, an editor'. This DIY ethic played out in a number of ways, in the music and in the business practices, but it was perhaps most clearly honed in the use of self-publication and alternative means of communication that often took the material form of fanzines. As Hebdige described (1979: 111), 'fanzines (Sniffin Glue, Ripped and Torn, etc.) were journals edited by an individual or a group, consisting of reviews, editorials and interviews with prominent punks, produced on a small scale as cheaply as possible, stapled together and distributed through a small number of sympathetic outlets'. Clearly the communicative possibilities and media have changed

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radically since the mid to late 1970s, and the possibilities for decentralized communication are now widespread in social media (which I will return to in Chapter 5). These strategies suggested to the audience that this was not a select esoteric group of self-perpetuating stars, but that anyone can join in, and cultural production then appeared more attainable and instant. Anyone can be involved and participate. It has been suggested that this was part of an attempt 'to break down the standard barriers present in the performer/viewer relationship' (O'Hara, 1999: 33). Hebdige (1979: 110) makes a similar claim, suggesting that '[m]ost significantly, they attempted both physically and in terms of lyrics and life-style to move closer to their audiences'. Punk then sought to make the audience part of the cultural form, to create the perception of proximity with the audience and to remove the barriers between musician and audience – something we have often seen associated with notions of postmodernism and post-structuralism, but in this case played out in a more tangible and material form.

What the above points towards is a general sense of cultural openness. Punk's relativism removes the obstacles of established hierarchies. As such it can be understood to be a cultural movement that draws upon a rich pallet of cultural resources. Far from being limited to a particular set of creative properties, punk is actually eclectic and open. It is far from being narrow or adhering to the caricatured vision of punk that is often seen in the image of Mohawk hairstyles and safety pins. Rather the original punk movement was culturally diverse and was extremely open to outside influences and sources of inspiration. Don Letts, who at the time was the DJ at the famous punk venue the Roxy club, recalls:

> mostly I played dub raggae, because I couldn't play those punk records all night and I love dub reggae. As the bands started getting signed they did start releasing records – the Damned's 'New Rose', stuff like that – I started slipping them in, and the punk's didn't want me to play them! They wanted me to keep playing the reggae. I soon realized that they were turned on by the anti-establishment vibe of the 'Burn Down Bablyon' business. (Don Letts in Robb, 2006: 283)

Here, in this account, we see the eclecticism and openness of punk. This came out in the diversity of music played in the venues, but it was also to be found in the music itself. The Clash famously blended different types of music and incorporated various styles from the outset, typified by their cover of Junior Murvin's song 'Police and Thieves'. Don Letts

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refers to the fusion found in another punk band of the time; according to him, the 'ultimate punky-reggae hybrid were the Slits, with their heavy bass, and they were eventually produced by Dennis Bovell of Matumbi' (Don Letts in Robb, 2006: 283). For Letts, this fusion of cultural styles was a product of the 'multicultural' environment, he claims that 'it was intravenous almost, not this abstract thing' (Don Letts in Robb, 2006: 283). But what this suggests, alongside the fluid definitional properties and relativism of punk, is that the punk sensibility is open to inspiration from outside resources. It is open, eclectic, and outward looking. We find support for this type of claim across many of the accounts of punk, and particularly where it intersects with (Dub) Reggae (see for instance Hebdige, 1979; Savage, 1991; and Gray, 2001).

Despite this musical fusion, it has been suggested that in may ways 'the non-sonic aspects of punk were more crucial in terms of generating all these "futures" than the music itself' (Reynolds, 2011: 258). This point permeates through this chapter. The music was an artistic embodiment of the punk ethos, it is a central and important part of the punk movement but it doesn't tell the whole story. Some of the features of the punk ethos find their way through in these 'non-sonic' forms, be they aesthetic, political, philosophical, and in the practices and actions of protagonists. As I suggested at the opening of this chapter, I didn't want to re-write the history of punk here, indeed this would have distracted us from the key function of this chapter. What I was keen to do was to provide a direct engagement with the punk ethos that might then be translated across into the sociological project, to give a sense of the punk sensibility that might be useful in thinking about its potential values as a resource for thinking with. The aim was not to discuss punk at length but to boil it down to its key features or characteristics, which in turn will serve as the foundation for the proposals made in this book – the reader can always turn to some of the resources I have referenced here if they wish to find out more about the punk movement, plus it is highly likely that the reader will already have at least some passing knowledge (if not a highly detailed knowledge) of the punk scene.

One of the problems was always going to be the slipperiness of punk that arises from its historical baggage and the frequent discomfort that those associated with punk might have with labels and categories. Despite this we can find some consensus in terms of the punk ethos and what it might be. These are often implicit within the stories and anecdotes that populate the biographies, autobiographies, and popular histories.

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And we have to obviously be careful that we are not too reliant on post-rationalized accounts of such scenes. Let us put such concerns to the side for the moment and close this chapter with some brief reflections on what the key features of the punk ethos may be. These closing thoughts will combine direct references to the earlier descriptions of punk, with a general overview that emerges from reading through historical accounts of punk.

The central properties of punk can be, and often are, contested. Rather than try to encapsulate everything here, let me focus on the key properties of punk that are of most use in the context of this book. Drawing on the above discussions, and the biographical and historical resources used, we can understand punk to be highly relativistic; it is not concerned with hierarchies and it attempts to see the world from plural and multiple perspectives. It is about the drive of the individual to make a contribution and to sometimes look to subvert restrictive or oppressive social categories, norms, or conventions. This in turn leads punk to be open and eclectic. It is outward looking and is keen to respond, react against, or draw upon alternative cultural resources. The products of this background and approach are then often quite raw, stripped back, and fearless. A punk is not afraid of their own limitations and vulnerabilities. Nor do notions of legitimacy or authenticity inhibit them. Punk seeks to break down and transcend boundaries and obstacles and to erode the lines between the performer and the audience. Finally, we can see this form of communication operating in a terrain in which cultural expression is relatively unrestricted. The punk can then be bold and inventive in their work. Conventions do not hold them back, and the idea of playing it safe is discordant with its central motifs. The driving force here is a strong commitment to a pro-activism that is often expressed as the do-it-yourself or DIY ethic. The DIY ethic is an extension of the inventiveness of punk and affords an unbounded engagement with the cultural world. This leads punks to use the opportunities and materials that they encounter to express their creative forces. This is often highly opportunistic and is based upon the use of media and social networks in new and unpredictable ways. The punk finds a way to make things happen and finds a way to be unconventional in carving out pathways of expression and communication. The punk adapts to the terrain in which they are operating and refuses to be restricted by the limitations of access and funding. Punk is based on resourcefulness.

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Beyond these core features there are some other general issues that are worth a moment of reflection. We have seen in this chapter that the punk sensibility is founded upon the questioning and challenging of established 'modes of thought'. It attempts to open up new questions and find new perspectives and new ways of seeing. It has a deep-seated discomfort with established ideas about the world, with consensus and with conventions. This discomfort is important to the punk identity, and, as we have seen, it even leads punks to be uncomfortable with the very notion of punk itself. Punk seeks to break from categories, conventions, and established visions so as to generate new questions and perspectives. It seeks to foster its own discomfort and to find creative ways of expressing it. Perhaps it is the very convention of the separation of the performer from the audience that is one of the ways that this discomfort is most keenly expressed. This removal of the divide between the punk and the people they hope to communicate with, and the culture they seek to reflect and react to, is something that will no doubt resonate through the following chapters. The question we now turn to in the second part of the book is whether we can productively apply this punk ethos to the craft of sociology.

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Part II
Towards a Punk Sociology

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3

From a Punk Ethos to a Punk Sociology

Abstract: *This brief chapter explores the way in which the punk ethos might be transposed onto sociology. It clarifies the objectives of the book and provides an account of the structure, order, and purpose of the remaining chapters. This chapter begins the movement from the punk ethos to punk sociology.*

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This short chapter acts as a bridge between the prelude of part one and the series of short riffs that make up part two of the book. Part one closed with the suggestion that we use the punk ethos that I outlined and apply this to the sociological craft. The general argument of the opening chapter was that cultural resources might provide us with some inspiration for re-imagining sociology and for opening up new ideas. The sense was that the discipline needs to react to its current pressures and to find ways of being creative and inventive, whilst also returning and to what C. Wright Mills (1959) called the 'promise' of sociology. The question I posed concerned the means by which we might find ways to be creative and imaginative. The conventions that are established in disciplines inevitably shape our perspectives. My suggestion was that outside resources can allow for us to find creative and imaginative ways to develop sociology. Clearly the argument of Chapter 1 went a little further than this, but this brief interlude refocuses the project of this book and sets up the chapters that follow. The suggestion I made was that punk might act as just such a resource. In Chapter 2 we then explored exactly what the key features of a punk ethos might be. Before moving on with this project, which I call punk sociology, I'd like to use this short chapter to clarify the structure and approach of the chapters that make up the second part of this book. The purpose of this chapter is to move the book away from the discussion of punk and begin to move towards the discussion of punk sociology.

Using cultural resources to think through problems, issues, and questions is not uncommon in academic work. It is far from a mainstream approach, but there is a growing body of work that attempts to use literature (Lewis et al., 2008; Carlin, 2010; Taylor, 2008, Daniels et al., 2011), poetry (Abbott, 2007; Brown, 1977; Martin, 2010), film (Diken, 2005; Alsayyad, 2006), TV (Gregg & Wilson, 2010; Penfold-Mounce et al., 2011), music (Beer, 2014), social media (Crampton, 2009), and other types of cultural resources to explore social and cultural phenomena. These works often use such resources to engage the sociological imagination and to think through the analytical issues that are being considered. In these instances fictional and other cultural resources are used to explore actual social and cultural phenomena. This type of work can be seen to be controversial in some respects, but it appears to be the way that cultural forms enable the illumination and reappraisal of established research topics that generates a good deal of enthusiasm amongst researchers. This is perhaps most impressively achieved in Howard Becker's (2007)

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programmatic book *Telling About Society*, to which I referred in the opening chapter. In this text Becker explores how alternative cultural resources perform a similar role to sociology in that they tell about society, they merely use different forms of communication to do so (I discuss this further in Chapter 4). Becker's open approach is suggestive of the value in these resources and that sociology may also use them to explore, communicate, and complement their work. Indeed, we can even return to C. Wright Mills' initial observations about the presence of the sociological imagination outside of the discipline of sociology (for an account see Beer & Burrows, 2010). Indeed, it has even been argued that the presence of sociological commentary outside the discipline creates some serious questions for how we might proceed (Osborne et al., 2008). Where might sociology fit when cultural forms are so densely populated with sociological narratives about the world (Beer & Burrows, 2010)?

Let us put these debates (which I also began to cover in Chapter 1) to one side for the moment, instead let us differentiate the punk sociology project from some of this other work as there are some key variations. Although the punk sociology project might use punk music as a sociological resource for thinking about particular social issues, or it might involve using punk's music, aesthetics, or lyrics to see what they 'tell' about society, the punk sociology project moves beyond this. In many cases the punk sociologist will use different cultural resources in their work, but these will not be restricted to the actual outputs of punk. Rather, what the punk sociology project I am outlining here does is use the punk ethos to re-imagine the way that sociological work is done. It is not about using punk music as a way into particular analytical problems or questions, it is rather to use punk as a resource for thinking about how we do sociology. This is a key difference. A punk sociologist is likely to want to think with and draw upon alternative and outside forms of knowledge – such as film, literature, TV, social media, and the like, as well as materials from across the scientific, computational, political, and journalistic fields – but this is not restricted to the outputs that might be labelled as punk. Rather this is about using punk as a resource for reflecting upon our very craft and the way we go about being sociologists. In this instance, punk is an approach rather than an object of study.

Of course, this comes with its problems. I intend to return to what I will call the pathology of punk in the concluding chapter of the book. We might begin though by thinking about the way the punk sociology project might be channelled, filtered, and directed. We might at this

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point contend that 'rules are for fools' and a punk sociology needs to be anarchic. At which point this book would have to end. Or we might say that punk is about avoiding structures, categories, and labels and so the punk sociologist should not seek to define too clearly what they are about. But this wouldn't get us very far. Instead we are going to have to allow for some tension to emerge. We are going to have to live with the discomfort of having some defining properties that we might then hang punk sociology on. So, in scoping-out the punk sociology project in the next three chapters I'm going to be engaging in something that might seem counterintuitive to the very project that I'm working on. Let us not forget though, as we have seen in Chapter 2, that punk did actually have some order, it did cohere, there are some shared properties, and, as Nick Crossley (2009) has shown, it even had a relatively tight-knit social network at its centre (even if this did then collapse).

With these concerns in mind, but at the same time wanting to put together a coherent book that the reader may actually be able to use, the next three chapters attempt to provide a fairly structured account of how the punk ethos might translate into sociology. As I have indicated, this is not restrictive or prescriptive, but some order does need to be imposed upon such a project. The following chapters become a kind of heuristic framework that the reader may then respond to. In order to provide such a framework I have organized the key features of the punk ethos identified in Chapter 2 into three sections that map onto the discipline of sociology. The first of the three chapters, Chapter 4, focuses upon sociological knowledge and applies the relativism, openness, and eclecticism of the punk ethos. The second of the three chapters, Chapter 5, focuses on the communication of sociology and applies the raw, stripped-back, and fearless properties of the punk ethos. The final of the three chapters, Chapter 6, focuses upon the terrain of sociology and looks to apply the boldness, inventiveness, and DIY ethic of the punk ethos. Together then these form a flexible and mobile framework from which to build punk sociology. The idea being that these open up a series of possibilities for thinking about how punk sociology might be developed and how it might translate directly into sociological knowledge, communication, and the terrain that the discipline covers (as well as the types of questions it might ask). Each is presented as a short and punchy equivalent of a 2–3-minute punk song, stripped-back to the basics and intended to be direct and provocative.

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4

Relativistic, Open, and Eclectic: Sociological Knowledge

Abstract: *Beginning the process of applying the punk ethos to sociology, this chapter focuses on the formation and accumulation of sociological knowledge. It takes three properties from the punk ethos to do this. This chapter explores how sociological knowledge might be developed through the relativistic, open, and eclectic approach of punk.*

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What is better, Shakespeare or The Simpsons? This is not an arbitrary question, but one that I seem to remember being asked. The answer for a punk sociologist is likely to be neither. Both have different types of value and reveal different things. But the punk sociologist would certainly take a stronger position than this might suggest. They are likely to be sensitive to the idea that one is likely to be seen as an acceptable and credible form of knowledge whilst the other is likely to be seen as being lightweight and unimportant – this might lead the punk sociologist to challenge such a hierarchical interpretation of these cultural forms by answering this question provocatively: 'The Simpsons!' In Chapter 2 we saw that the punk ethos was based upon some relativistic tendencies. These tendencies were located in its discomfort with hierarchies, in its general approach towards the empowerment of individuals, and in its treatment of culture in fairly egalitarian terms. For the punk there is value to be found in the types of culture that are often belittled or underestimated. The consequence was a movement that, in idealistic terms, was open to embracing diverse cultural forms and that then became eclectic in its outlook and in the resources it drew upon. We can start with these themes and use them to think about the way that knowledge might form if we were to adopt a punk sociology.

I've already mentioned Howard Becker's (2007) book *Telling About Society*. The introduction to this book raises some issues about sociological knowledge that the punk sociologist may wish to give some detailed consideration. Most notably we are confronted by questions about who has the right to do sociology and to make assertions about the social world. Becker (2007: 6) makes the following argument:

> My own professional colleagues – sociologists and other social scientists – like to talk as though they have a monopoly on creating such representations, as though the knowledge of society they produce is the only 'real' knowledge about that subject. That's not true. And they like to make the equally silly claim that the ways they have of telling about society are the best ways to do that job or the only way it can be done properly, or that their ways of doing the job guard against all sorts of terrible mistakes we would otherwise make.

Becker's point is provocative. Sociology needs, according to Becker, to be more open and to accept that it is far from being alone in 'telling about society'. It also needs to avoid making claims that its own versions of the social world are more important or better than these other forms

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of knowledge – it needs to avoid what Becker (2007: 6) calls 'standard professional power grab'. Becker (2007: 6) argues that:

> considering the ways that people who work in other fields – visual artists, novelists, playrights, photographers, and filmmakers – as well as laypeople represent society will show analytical dimensions and possibilities that social science has often ignored that might otherwise be useful.

The message, which extends observations that can be found in C Wright Mills' (1959) classic work, is that these cultural forms do something similar to sociology, it is simply that the forms of knowledge and communication vary. For Becker (2007: xi) these forms of knowledge are of real importance; he adds that he 'found as many good ideas in fiction, drama, film, and photography as [he] did in what [he] was "supposed" to be reading' (and for a more recent account of what this sociological knowledge outside of the discipline might mean for academic sociology see also Osborne et al., 2008; Beer & Burrows, 2010). Perhaps though we need to cast the net even wider and to find sociology in an even broader range of places and maybe in even less predictable forms. The punk sociologist would consider the potential value of all sorts of resources.

A punk sociologist would accept and embrace this broad range of different types of social knowledge. It does not restrict itself by claiming its ultimate authority over the social world, it does not shut out powerful forms of 'telling about society' simply because they arise from non-academic sources. The relativist tendencies of the punk sociologist would lead them to consider all knowledge about the social world to have some potential merit and value, whatever that might turn out to be. This requires the sociologist to be genuinely open in their outlook and in their use of resources. This openness requires two things. First it requires the sociologist to not feel undermined by the mere presence of other forms of knowledge about the social world. We need to work on our sense of self-esteem and not feel threatened by the presence of other forms of social commentary, critique, and analysis, whatever forms these may take. Contemporary culture is often quite densely populated with accounts and commentaries on the social world, from documentaries and authentic drama to realist comedy, social experiment TV, and the various forms of ethnographic interrogation that are typical of social media and social networking sites (for an overview and detailed explanation of the sociological imagination in contemporary culture, see Beer & Burrows, 2010). The punk sociologist would look to draw upon

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such ideas, curate them, reflect on them, learn from them, and critically respond to the way in which they envision and enact the social world.

So, the first step is to not be too nervous about accepting that we, as sociologists, are not the only people with something analytical to say about the social world. Accepting this does not undermine our position, it strengthens it, it opens up new resources for thinking with, it provides new visions of the social world for us to compare and contrast with our own, it provides new means of communication and new audiences. We are more likely to have problems if we try to ignore these other visions and representations of contemporary social and cultural life. The punk sociologist is never defensive, or at least they try not to be, nor are they overtly concerned about the idea that other forms of knowledge may question or undermine their own. Indeed, the internal iconoclast in the punk sociologist welcomes the challenge and enjoys the limitations of their own work being explored and illuminated. They enjoy this type of interaction. And it is much better to have the interactions fostered by the intersection of forms of knowledge about the social world than it is for them to remain separate and discrete. The punk sociologist works to allow parallel ideas to merge and is not too concerned with what this might mean for their own 'standing' or their own 'credibility'. What is likely to happen is that if we take on such an approach, then our openness will be appreciated and the way that sociology is viewed by an outside audience will actually be enhanced.

Second, this acceptance of these other forms of sociological content outside of the academy requires us to develop a sensitivity to its form and what it might have to say. This is not easy. We are generally trained to identify sociological discourse, we are used to the types of questions and insights that sociologists use, we are used to reading articles and books that are often quite obviously sociology or are from a cognate discipline. As with punk itself, which adopted all kinds of aesthetic and sonic properties from elsewhere, most notably in its fashion and in its graphic design, this requires us to develop an appreciation of audio and visual accounts of the social world, and to use texts that do not conform to our expectations of what sociology is (or what sociological data is). In other words, we need to train ourselves to be open and to coach ourselves to see sociology in sources where we may not be expecting to see it.

Along with such a sensitivity comes new responsibilities. Once we have identified these different alternative sociological forms, we will then need to find ways to interrogate them. Whole new possibilities

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will be opened up as we become more eclectic in our scope (although I would add that many sociologists already engage with a broad range of resources in their work, so for many this will not be entirely new). We will then need to adapt to this eclecticism and to find new ways of translating resources into knowledge. There will be a responsibility to work with but also to challenge and critically appraise the accounts of the social world that we locate and identify. Accepting that we are not the only voice, and not even the most important voice, is a step towards the relativism that is central to the punk ethos. This could be transformative for sociology. It will allow us to see and enact the social in new ways, and it will also allow us to see the position of the academic discipline of sociology and, hopefully, what it might offer that will make its value clear. In other words, this type of openness and eclecticism will not only fuel the sociological imagination, it will also allow us to see the context in which sociology is operating and allow us to position ourselves. In many ways, if we overlook these other forms of social insight, we will never be able to understand where we fit in, what we are contributing, or how our ideas compare with others. The argument then is that working towards openness and eclecticism in our resources will not only enrich our sociological knowledge, it will also afford an increased self-awareness about our position within the social milieu and the innumerable competing visions it offers of the social world.

This starting point requires the punk sociologist to be open in their treatment of existing accounts of the social world, which goes beyond mere interdisciplinarity. But what about the punk sociologist's approach towards gathering accounts and answering their research conundrums? In Chapter 2 it was clear that amongst the boundaries that punk attempted to transcend, most notable was that between the performer and the audience. In applying the punk ethos to sociology, we might readily transform this into an attempt to break down the barrier between the researcher and those who they are researching. And we might also extend this to an attempt to break down the boundaries between the sociologist and their audience (as I will discuss in the following chapter). This links us directly into long-running debates on the position of the researcher in their own research. By breaking down the distinction between researcher and researched, the sociologist becomes a more active and present part of the research. On the other hand, the break-down of the barrier between the sociologist and the audience is likely, in turn, to make the sociologist part of that audience. As such, this

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second move draws us towards recent debates on what has been termed 'public sociology' (Clawson et al., 2007) or the 'public face' of sociology (Holmwood & Scott, 2007). It is not appropriate or in keeping with this book to open these complex and detailed debates in this short chapter, but the move to a punk sociology does not come without some baggage. Whatever the various positions taken in these debates, the punk sociologist is likely to be uncomfortable with such pronounced distinctions – between the researcher, the researched, and the audience – and is likely to want to undermine them. We will return to the issue of communication in the following chapter; let us focus now upon what this means for the generation of sociological knowledge, and as such let us focus upon the boundary between the researcher and the researched.

By way of clarification though, let us pick out one recent example that shows what might be meant by breaking down these barriers between the punk sociologist and both those they are researching and those they hope to share knowledge with. In so doing what we quickly see is that sociological knowledge is not the product of isolation, but is a part of the social world it describes (Savage, 2010). If we return to Chapter 2 we might recall that punks 'attempted to break down the standard barriers present in the performer/viewer relationship' (O'Hara, 1999: 33). This, as we have seen, can be applied to communication (I follow this up in Chapter 6). But in the case of the researcher and the researched, this can perhaps be explored through Shamser Sinha and Les Back's (2013: 3) recent piece on making the social sciences more 'sociable'. They argue that we should develop ways of 'working "with" rather than "on" participants'. The argument here is that we need to break down the barriers and to enter into more of a dialogue with those we are researching. This, they argue, affords new 'sociological horizons'. Beyond this we might of course turn to the use of anecdote, observation, and various types of broadly ethnographic work to think about the position of the researcher in the research process. We could literally point to dozens of pieces that consider the role and presence of the researcher in their own research and in their fieldwork. But the punk sociologist would look to sidestep these debates by embracing their part in the research process and by looking to play with distinctions between the researcher and the researched. The punk sociologist, based again upon their relativistic tendencies, is likely to see all knowledge as being subjective or as a means of 'enacting' the social (Law, 2004). As such they are fully implicated in the products of research and are happy therefore to accept their presence and to research 'with' rather than research 'on'.

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In terms of sociological knowledge, punk sociology is clearly pointed towards breaking down barriers and questioning established positions – this is not to wish to destroy what is already there, although it might, but it is to have an unbendable desire to see what else is possible. We heard about the aesthetics of punk in the earlier chapter of this book, and we will return to this in the following chapter, but the process of 'deliberate *un*learning' (Savage, 1991: 82, italics in the original) is worth some closing reflection. We might engage in a little deliberate unlearning in sociology. This is not to forget the past, sociology has a short enough memory as it is, and punks often used various historical resources and reference points to open new possibilities. Instead we might attempt to deliberately unlearn the discipline and see what happens. We might unlearn our honed and established ways of working, we might unlearn our established ideas and concepts, and we might unlearn some of the dominant ideas we have about the social world. This would not be to destroy them, but to see what new constellations might be formed if we were to escape from what has become entrenched in sociology. Sociologists could unlearn so as to approach the discipline and social world afresh and see potentially new or mutated ways of doing sociology and being sociologists – which might well even be informed by forgotten or disregarded elements of its past.

The punk ethos requires questions to be asked of conventions, established ideas, norms, and forms of consensus. Like punk itself, punk sociology should seek to open new vistas, new perspectives, new spaces for critical thought, and, most crucially, it should seek to ask new questions and break with established conventions. By breaking with and challenging conventions, consensus, and established categories and ideas we are able to generate new types of questions and to make new inquiries into social and cultural life. The impulse to follow conventions and ask the same type of questions in the same types of ways is actually really strong; it is almost gravitational in its pull. This tractor beam is only likely to become more powerful as systems for measuring value shape research practices and impose themselves on sociological research. Taking risks, as we will discuss in the following two chapters, will be hard to do. The conditions are likely to draw us towards the conventions. The skill of the punk sociologist will be to spot conventions and to question them. Or, perhaps a better way of putting it is to say that punk sociologists will look to get a different point of view when looking at the social world. They will think about the other directions from which the problem

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might be viewed, they will think laterally, they will try to spot the gravity of established ideas and will push against it, they will seek to think in unpredictable and unconventional ways even about some of our oldest sociological topics, but most of all they will look to find the blind-spots that conventions – be they methodological, conceptual, or otherwise – have marked out in the social world. The punk sociologist wonders what it is that sociology is missing and tries to find it. The only way to really do this is to break with patterns, to cross some boundaries, and to play with and sometimes defy conventions.

In general terms we need to reflect upon the types of knowledge that sociology draws upon. There is some value in taking a more relativistic position. This is likely to lead us towards a more open and eclectic engagement with resources. Having a more open view of the value of different forms of knowledge, as has been argued by Howard Becker, means that sociology might see the social world in new ways. Punk sociology opens itself up to new resources (which might actually in some cases be neglected or dusty historical resources) by finding sociology and sociological inspiration in a much wider range of places and forms. Using new types of resources, treating these visions of the social world seriously, is likely to drastically reconfigure our accounts of the social world. It will also lead to new forms of social engagement with new types of audiences. The relativism of punk often took the form of iconoclasm. Punk often looked to actively undermine hierarchies, challenge complacency, and upset received wisdom. This might be a bit extreme for sociology, hopefully not, but perhaps at least a gentle and knowing iconoclasm might still be of value, in that it allows us to avoid a complacent position, it allows us to develop outspoken forms of political engagement, and it prevents us from becoming stuck in a rut. We might not wish to undermine ourselves, but we might wish to adopt some of this iconoclastic sentiment so as to question our practices and the value of the knowledge that we produce. Punk sociologists must be open in their approach, they must adopt and play with a wide range of forms of knowledge, whilst at the same time also interrogating the unique values of their own contribution – as such they will practice, like punk, a kind of inwardly directed iconoclasm.

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5

Raw, Stripped Back, and Fearless: Communicating Sociology

Abstract: *Following from the previous chapter, this chapter continues to apply the punk ethos to sociology. In this instance it focuses upon the way that sociologists communicate their work. It begins with a discussion of the problems facing the communication of sociological ideas, and suggests that it might be productive for sociology to be more fearless in offering stripped-back and raw forms of social insight.*

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As was briefly alluded to in Chapter 2, one of the key defining features of punk was its stance against forms of progressive or 'prog' rock. Similarly, if we are looking to provide points of comparison, then punk sociology might be understood to exist in counter-distinction to 'prog' sociology. This distinction provides a helpful starting place for thinking about the communication of sociological work. Punk sociology stands as the antithesis of what might be thought of as prog sociology. Prog sociology, as the academic adaptation of prog rock, could be understood to be sociology that is indulgent, maybe even self-indulgent, and self-congratulatory. This is sociology that is wrapped up in its own sense of self-importance. As with the prog rocker's foregrounding of virtuosity, the prog sociologist is someone who uses their research to show off their virtuosity in research – the sociological equivalent, we might imagine, of a 10-minute guitar, keyboard, or drum solo. 'Prog' sociology uses research as a vehicle for demonstrating the abilities of the researcher. Its pursuit of legitimacy is bound up in the demonstration of difficult, fiddly, and hard-to-master skills. This is not to diminish these skills, it is instead to point to sociological research that's intent and purpose is to highlight just how good the sociologist is. Thus, what we get are lengthy and ongoing productions of sociological showboating. A sociology that is more interested in technique than it is in ideas (for a discussion of this see Gane, 2012a).

Prog sociology of this type can take many different forms. We have probably all witnessed this type of showboating at some time (in talks, books, articles, and even in referees' reviews of our articles perhaps). In some ways we might return to C. Wright Mills' (1959) distinction between 'grand theory' and 'abstract empiricism'. I don't want to rehearse this argument, or the mid-range theories it might push us towards, but this is helpful in thinking of the way that prog sociology might be understood in practice. These demonstrations of virtuosity can be found in both theoretical and empirical work. Who has the most nuanced understanding of a particular theorist? Who has the best syntactic grasp and turn of phrase? This is not much different from the competitions that take place to be the most rigorous, to have the most sophisticated, in-depth, and unequivocal understanding of an advanced method. Or where research projects are used to refine a method or to show just what a detailed appreciation of the technical aspects of that method the individual has. As Zygmunt Bauman (2011: 160–172) has recently pointed out, sociology can obscure its message through both 'language' and 'number'. So, prog

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sociology need not be restricted to one area within our discipline, it can crop up anywhere. Indeed, C. Wright Mills' (2008a: 79–85) stinging essay 'IBM plus reality plus humanism = Sociology', outlined how the temptation to baffle, and to play it safe, can be found in both the work of sociologists who he refers to as 'The Scientists' and those he refers to as 'Grand Theorists' (an argument he famously went on to develop in *The Sociological Imagination*) – it is worth noting that in this essay Mills (2008a: 85) also tells us to be more 'imaginative'. Mills' (2008b: 67) problem, which is the problem we see in the prog sociologist, as he explains in another essay on the work of Thorstein Veblen, is that 'one of them makes a fetish of "Method" and the other of "Theory". Both, accordingly, lose sight of their proper study'. This is now a fairly well-rehearsed argument, yet it still retains its importance and relevance. The point I want to emphasize here is that the problems of prog sociology are not restricted to particular branches of the discipline.

Prog sociology might be seen as problematic for a number of reasons. The most significant issue is that the ideas, the substance of sociology, get shaped or obscured by the desire to demonstrate virtuosity. The second problem we might point towards is that it is likely to be hard to engage with, for other sociologists, academics in other disciplines, and for a wider audience. Often these audiences have little interest in technique, but they can associate with substantive ideas about the social world. The interests of a prog sociologist are likely to be esoteric and insular, dressed, as they are, in a legitimizing cloak of technical capability that is meant to attract the attention of other prog sociologists – whilst baffling those seen as outsiders or without the requisite abilities to understand what is happening.

I've already indirectly suggested how punk sociology is different to this vision of prog sociology. We can use this as one point of comparison, but this is not to suggest that the distinction between punk and prog sociology is the only thing that defines it. Yet we might instantly assume that punk sociology does not attempt to define itself through its virtuosity, and that it places ideas at the centre of the sociological enterprise. In this brief chapter, I suggest that sociology should be raw, stripped back, and fearless in the forms of communication it takes. It should not be hung up on using technique to find its legitimacy and authenticity, rather it should rely on how engaging and revealing its ideas and findings are, and it should find ways of communicating these in a direct manner. Avoiding foregrounding virtuosity does not mean that sociology lacks

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skill. Sociology can still achieve quality. It is just that our research should never simply be a vehicle for showing off our technical abilities.

Punk's own response was to eschew overt virtuosity and to produce quite raw and stripped-back outputs. There was simply no aspiration to virtuosity. Which, in sociology, might actually help to remove some of the barriers to communication that virtuosity might generate. Beyond this though, Punk's stripped-back outputs were illustrative of a kind of fearlessness. The musicians were not afraid to put their limitations on display. Indeed, the demonstration of these limitations became part of the character and appeal of the music – with some musicians apparently hiding their skills and playing badly to fit with the aesthetic. This chapter does not suggest that we should do this. But it does, however, suggest that this fearlessness might be powerful within sociology. If we remove the fear of demonstrating our limitations, then we will be able to move quickly and respond to the social world – adapting our approaches without fear that the outputs may have our own limitations inscribed upon them. In some instances, and to capture some unfamiliar aspects of the social world, we may need to produce a more stripped-back and raw sociology. This may particularly be the case where we might wish to act quickly so as to be part of the debates around events and other important social phenomena. There is possibility and value in producing a raw and stripped-back sociology that is founded upon a sense fearlessness. In short then, a sociology that is not inhibited by aspirations towards virtuosity or by the fear of undermining its own legitimacy. This is a sociology that doesn't feel the need to reassert its authority over the social world. It is instead a sociology without inhibitions.

This leads us to think about the 'style' of the punk sociologist's writing, language, and other outputs. The obvious suggestion, based on the discussion above and on the punk ethos described in Chapter 2, is for sociology to be quite direct and punchy, to attempt to write and talk in a way that is raw and stripped back rather than overly long, unnecessary, and potentially pretentious. This though is far from easy. We do not want to lose the nuance of what we hope to say, and we don't want to be too reductive in our accounts of the social world. Indeed, punk music often had complexities folded within what, on the surface, appeared to be quite raw and basic music. If we take the combination of styles in the music of The Slits for example, we find a rather raw set of songs that actually belie an attempt to encounter cultural diversity. Similarly, the

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famous stylistic experiments of The Clash offer a direct but playfully complex layering of music and lyrical references. This is something we need to treat with care. We do not want to reduce our sociology to an overly simplistic encounter with the world. But punk is far from being obvious or predictable, and maybe it is in its variety and its creative and variable means of expression that we might find guidance. The punk sociologist's style is not reductive, but it is likely to be direct and unapologetic. It might deal with complex social issues, but in creative and incisive ways. Different topics and issues might call for different types of writing and dissemination. It is hard though to be too explicit in saying what form these writings might take, and there are those who are much better placed than myself to offer guidance on writing style. Again we reach one of those moments where tension emerges between the necessity to leave the punk project open and the desire to create an explicit agenda.

This discussion of raw, fearless, and stripped-back sociology has echoes of some of the guidance offered by Howard Becker (1986) in his *Writing for Social Scientists* (which is a firecracker of a book wrapped up in a misleadingly tame and comforting title). This book offers some mechanical advice that is aimed at helping social scientists to write in a more direct manner and to give them the confidence to take more risks. Becker's book returns to the issues associated with fear and the risks associated with writing. These are very real if we are to try to adopt a more fearless approach. In one chapter, Becker includes a lengthy letter from another sociologist, Pamela Richards, who explains in some detail the types of fears and sense of risk that she associates with writing. In Richards' account, even showing work in progress or writing that is not yet polished to colleagues is seen as a risky business, never mind putting such work on public display. The fears communicated in Richards' letter are likely to chime with those fears many of us have in writing. The concern might be that producing a more stripped-back account will undermine our own standing, both inside and outside of the academy. This is likely to be the fear that punk sociologists will try to overcome, at least they might attempt to overcome it. Taking on such risk is worth the effort as it will open up new means of communication and potentially draw in different audiences and engage students and colleagues in different ways. As I write this chapter it is already becoming obvious that raw and stripped-back blog posts are circulating to significant and varied audiences in a way that more polished journal articles are unable

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to achieve. So the potential is there for a diversity of writing styles to emerge and for sociologists to sometimes be more direct and raw in their response to the social world. The engagement we might potentially have with these germs of ideas are likely to be productive in terms of the sense of value the sociologist has for themselves and the way they are valued by others.

Becker's book argues along similar lines. He points out that hard work is not enough but that 'you must also take some chances, let others see your work, open yourself to criticism. That may be frightening, even painful, in the short run'. (Becker, 1986: 165). For Becker the long-term benefits of taking chances is well worth the risk (in this case he is talking about showing work to colleagues and sending out publications, but we can see how this argument might fit with regard to taking chances with writing and writing styles). We might seek to take risks but, he suggests, 'Social organization may ... keep you from making these (typically) simple and safe experiments' (Becker, 1986: 166). Returning to Chapter 1, we can see how the context in which sociology is performed might be seen to shape its products. This, for Becker, also needs to be resisted. This general sense of fear is summed up in the following excerpt, which we might see as being a variation on Malcolm McLaren's epitaph: 'We write that way because we fear that others will catch us in an obvious error if we do anything else, and laugh at us. Better to say something innocuous but safe than something bold you might not be able to defend against criticism' (Becker, 1986: 9). If we are to try to be more fearless in our communication, then we will no doubt be confronted with such risks and fears. The aim though would be to resist the temptation to stay safe, and to avoid the draw of being innocuous. Punk sociologists are likely to be sticking their necks out quite a bit by making positive statements and making claims that are open to criticism. Indeed, part of being a punk sociologist and avoiding being innocuous, is opening yourself up to criticism. The punk sociologist is likely to be moving into territory that sociologists might have given little attention to in the past (more of this in Chapter 6), so the sense of risk will be more acute.

As I'm writing this chapter, one of the pressing issues in the communication of sociological work concerns the use of social media. The rise of social media, in which anyone can create media content, is currently causing sociologists to ask what is stopping them from communicating with wider audiences. I have argued elsewhere that these social media come with their own 'politics of circulation' (Beer, 2013a), that is to say

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that their material infrastructures shape the flows of data and information. Underlying algorithms and metadata shape the content we encounter in these media and influence the visibility of the content. I have previously discussed the consequences of these developments in social media for sociologists (see Beer, 2012, 2013b, 2013c). Given the way in which punks used fanzines, which relied upon their creative uses of the materials that were available to them (paper, scissors, stencils, pens, photos, copiers), we might intuit that the punk sociologist is likely to do something similar with the new types of media-based materials that are now available.

The punk sociologist tries to develop an awareness of the underlying politics of these media, of their data circulations, and of the networks that form. We cannot imagine that social media are democratic simply because they are decentralized. We would need to be aware of this. We would also need to be aware that the use of social media in developing, communicating, and disseminating our research is likely to expose it to these remediations and their politics of circulation. As such our research findings and ideas will no longer take a comfortable amble towards a potential audience, rather they are likely to be caught in the torrent of data circulations typical of contemporary decentralized media, with unpredictable results. In some instances the research will disappear from view; in other instances it will catch a wave of interest or maybe even 'go viral' or 'trend'. These outcomes will be a product of social media's politics of circulation. Our research, when communicated through social media, is likely to take on its vibrancy and the variability of visibility that it promotes. We have to be prepared for our research taking on a life of its own (Beer, 2013b), particularly as it has energy breathed into it by the lively data circulations that define contemporary media. Part of being fearless is accepting the unpredictability of the circulation of our ideas in this context. Letting ideas go out into the social world in which global dissemination is an ordinary daily practice can be a little unsettling, but it also brings new possibilities and new connections. The debates about 'public sociology' (Clawson et al., 2007) and sociology's 'public face' (Holmwood & Scott, 2007) were formulated before these media developments took hold. As such they need to be re-imagined to tally with the ongoing remediation of everyday life. The punk sociologist would seek to understand and work with this remediation. The dissemination practices of the punk movement – based on hand written, cut-and-pasted, and self-printed fanzines distributed through shops and

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at gigs – might seem small in comparison, but it is the aesthetics of these practices and the creative and unconstrained attempts at novel types of communication that we might borrow from punk. The materials might have changed but we can find inspiration in the sentiment and in the drive to co-opt media and materials in communicating ideas.

The punk ethos in sociology would mean that the sociologist is not restricted in the means of communication that they use; they are more likely to try different types of writing and different styles, exploring different topics, and reacting to what matters – although of course the use of alternative forms of communication has a long history amongst sociologists, with many adopting journalistic arms to their work and being involved in activist networks, and so on. One day the punk sociologist is writing a blog post, the next they are working on an audio podcast, the next they are creating posters, the next they are making short films, the next they are curating content. They gather, uncover, and generate insights through their sociologically sensitive trawling of the social world, using the things they find to illustrate and enliven sociological topics (using anything from art, to film, to advertising, to photography, to web visualizations, to flyers they get through their front door, to guidebooks – the options are limitless). Books and journal articles will still matter; they are still likely to be the bedrock of academic communication. But the punk sociologist looks to use these traditional forms of communication in unusual and maybe even subversive ways, and then looks to build on this work through other forms of communication and through other media. The debates on open-access publication, escaping the paywalls that limit communication, create new questions for academic publishing and communication, the punk sociologist is likely to be working around the edges of what is possible and exploring the reach of their means of communication anyway. Similarly, the punk sociologist might be interested in the debates on 'public sociology', but, as we have seen in Chapter 4, the boundaries between the sociologist and their audiences are much less pronounced for punk sociologists already.

In terms of communication, perhaps more than anything, sociologists should never be bored, or appear to be bored, with their own work. Boredom, be it genuine or feigned to suggest seriousness or the fatigue of rigour, suggests that sociologists are hesitant to move with their enthusiasms. This hesitancy may have come about from a fear of leaving an analytical comfort zone, or a fear of moving on from an area that has been kind to a researcher. The punk sociologist is not afraid to

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move on, particularly if they feel their enthusiasm is ebbing away. This is more difficult than it sounds, and it requires the researcher to reassert the fearlessness of punk. A punk sociologist is mobile, and this helps them to communicate their ideas. Enthusiasm and excitement for fresh ideas, questions, and issues helps to energize communication. Mobility is important in the life cycle of the individual sociologist. Even if we move into territory we know little about, we can still use this fearlessness to produce stripped-back yet vital accounts of the social world that various types of audiences will want to engage with. Sometimes this will be raw. On occasions this might mean that in communicating our ideas we will be vulnerable or exposed. But the ideas will still be there, in their early form, for others to react to. People can often engage with these raw ideas; statements that are not definitive give others space and an invitation to respond. Also, I've found that sociologists tend to enjoy this type of interaction around raw and emergent ideas. The roughness around the edges gives others some purchase to respond and encourages them to enter into a dialogue about the limitations and inadequacies of the proposal. This is engagement nonetheless, and we should embrace it rather than fear that it might undermine our legitimacy as researchers. The result is far more likely to be positive, with there being a sense of excitement around these new ideas. If we engage in such a challenge together there is also likely then to be a growing empathy for such a raw engagement with the changing world, there will be a growing empathy for sociologists who are trying to react to it. This type of sociological communication is crucial in the maintenance of the discipline and in enabling us to speak across disciplinary, social, and geographical boundaries.

The punk sociologist looks to communicate widely, with various audiences, and the work they produce is direct and incisive, whilst still being lively, nuanced, and layered. The stripped-back nature of the punk sociologist's work means that there are few barriers to communication with audiences inside and outside of academia. Indeed, its instant form is likely to attract audiences. Different types of writings might be used and different forms of communication will enable this to occur. Sometimes these will be short and punchy, the equivalent of the single in music, on other occasions they will be album-length book works that are built out of collections of punchy chapters and phrases, they might even take the form of sociological gigs with lively talks and audio-visual stimulus. The punk sociologist does not need a list of possibilities because they will look to exploit the opportunities for communication that are available

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and will respond to these opportunities. They will find ways around the restrictions and limitations that are there, using the means and potentials that the remediation of everyday life might bring. The punk sociologist adapts their means of communication to suit the changing mediascape and materials with which they are faced.

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6

Bold, Inventive, and the Do-It-Yourself Ethic: The Sociological Terrain

Abstract: *This chapter continues to apply the punk ethos to sociology. In this instance it focuses upon what might be understood as the sociological terrain. These are the spaces in which sociological research is conducted and devised. This chapter argues that sociology needs to be bold and inventive. It then shows how we might apply the do-it-yourself ethic of the punk movement to sociological work.*

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Building upon the suggestions about knowledge formation and the communication of ideas outlined in the previous two chapters, in this chapter we can reflect upon what might be thought of as the sociological terrain. This is the space in which we think, research, and act. In Chapter 1 we discussed the impulse to *play it safe*, in this chapter I'd like to address this issue directly, by suggesting that we should aim to operate against such impulses by seeking to be bold in our engagements with the social world. We need to take risks and to be outspoken on issues, both as they happen and after periods of reflection and consideration. This is not just because we want sociology to get some attention. The punk sociologist is not really interested in sociology as a brand – or in using social issues to promote that brand. It is rather because the punk sociologist wants to communicate and wants to make bold statements about their ideas and about the changes and continuities that they are observing. This is going to provide two types of inventiveness. First, the punk sociologist will need to be inventive in the type of sociology that they are doing, the type of questions they are asking, and the type of ideas they wish to communicate. Second, the punk sociologist is going to need to be inventive in responding to their conditions, in working around the limitations of the austere neoliberal structures in which they are operating, and in finding opportunities that counteract the limitations of funding and powerful constraining norms and conventions. One way forward is to reflect on the boldness and inventiveness of punk, but more specifically we might look to take on the Do-It-Yourself ethic of the punk movement.

Being bold though, in many respects, is to go against our training as sociologists. Sociologists are often trained to be neutral and passive. We are trained to work in sedentary ways. We are trained to make sociological wallpaper. We are trained to find ways to blend ourselves into existing established debates – be they in substantive topics, methods, theoretical schools, and so on. We are trained to find a pigeonhole or hook for our work, and to stick with it. The problem is that the better we are at being trained and giving the training, the more we blend in together. This might create some nice pockets of coherence within the discipline – even if it actually fragments the discipline into incompatible groupings (Abbot, 2001) – but it actually draws us into the background of the social world. I can see this in my own work, and I'm happy to suggest it as an example. When writing I tend to try to be considered and reflective in my tone. I follow the dictum, which I assume is a product of

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the attempt to draw on an objectivist and scientific approach in order to legitimize the discipline, 'be more neutral'.

In the past I have accepted the comment given to me by the reviewer of an article that I should make my writing less conversational. I had a go. It occurred to me that this sort of statement is a mechanism for attempting to make articles look the same, to make them look like they belong together. So, in many ways we are having any boldness we might possess trained out of us in the early stages of our careers; this is a pressure that then continues even when a sociologist might be established in the discipline. I've tried to encourage my students to be bold. But they already see it as risky, even in their undergraduate studies. They worry about grades and the potential negative outcomes of being unconventional – which is understandable given the pressures that they are often under. They ask, 'Are we allowed an opinion?' I say, 'Of course you are, just make sure you explain how you've arrived at it, show your working'. Or I might explain the difference between having an opinion and being opinionated. Even here I'm actually being complicit in training the boldness and inventiveness out of these students. The message is actually loud and clear to sociologists at any stage of their career, be neutral and mimic. This is not damaging in itself. But doesn't sociology need to be aware of its own norms and regulative expectations? Part of being a punk sociologist would be to spot such norms and to challenge and question them, to play with them, and to subvert them. We can see instantly that this is likely to evoke a good deal of fear, it is, after all, likely to be seen as very risky. Alongside this it goes against our training, so we are neither used to being bold nor have we been developing it as one of our skills. It is not even a desired skill as things stand. There are of course some very outspoken and bold sociologists and social scientists. I'm not trying to generalize too much here, I'm actually over-exaggerating in the hope of provoking a response (a tactic often used by punks). Perhaps we can try to spot these bold and daring voices and learn from them.

The general problem is that if sociology is not bold and inventive, and it does become the wallpaper of the social world, then who is going to pay it any attention? How will it regenerate and renew itself? How will it draw in students? The questions continue. The pursuit of boldness needs to start with us acknowledging the unwritten rules of sociology and then with us trying to play with them or work against them. We might work on sidelining some of these expectations so that we can make bold statements about our ideas. Although it seems risky, being bold and inventive

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in our work is actually likely to be productive and positive. It will make a sociological way of doing things into something that is relevant, edgy, and exciting. This can only improve our position and help to circulate our ideas.

Alongside boldness, we can see that the punk ethos promotes inventiveness. I've combined inventiveness in this chapter with the Do-It-Yourself ethic, which is the proactive and improvisational tendency in the punk sensibility. The punk's means of inventiveness was to react against dominant ideas about music, art, and social conduct. The inventiveness of punk, if we are to use that as a model to help us to be more inventive, came as a product of stripping things back, crossing boundaries, and exploring forms and styles that they were not comfortable or familiar with.

Given what I have said so far, it is probably not surprising if I conclude that punk sociologists seek to adapt to a changing terrain and a changing social world. This is not just to adapt what it is that they are saying and the findings they are generating (i.e., telling stories about a changing world), although this would ensure its ongoing relevance. It is also to change and adapt some of their own practices in response to that changing world, to keep their practices fresh, and to ensure that their own approach is appropriate for seeing the terrain that they are attempting to study and understand. It is not just the sociologist's ideas that change in response to the social world, the way that they do sociology should also adapt. Part of developing an inventiveness in sociological work, and building upon the inventive work that is already there, is to find new ways of generating insights into the social world based upon the way that social connections, senses of difference, interactions, organizational structures, and identities operate. One recent example of this is sometimes referred to as 'digital sociology' (Orton-Johnson & Prior, 2013; Lupton, 2012). Digital sociology is a useful example because it not only attempts to research the changing media infrastructures, media formats, and technological re-working of everyday life, but also attempts to use these changes to develop new insights, new methods, to work with new types of data sources, and to take advantage of the new types of questions that can be asked. Those interested in what is described as digital sociology are also tending to use DIY means of communication, with social media outlets such as Twitter and blogs being used to publish and disseminate ideas in various stages of development. We perhaps have something here that is suggestive of how this inventiveness and DIY ethic might be deployed.

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The DIY ethic in punk sociology is about finding ways to use the opportunities that are out there to create insights (the new data that is being captured through changing media – for example, see Beer, 2013a), to ask new questions, and to find new means of communication. The punk fanzines mentioned in Chapters 2 and 5 can be seen as the epitome of the do-it-yourself approach of punk, which we can imagine easily translates into the use of social media. I've discussed this a little already, but creative DIY outlets might be forged out of new forms of decentralized social media. We can work with individual or collectively authored blogs, we can use outlets for publishing audio and video content (see Chapter 5), and so on. In these media we can see how the terrain develops and how our ideas circulate and become part of the terrain we are analysing – ideas, like other data, are much easier to track through digital media. We can also think about how the digital by-product data produced by these media might then create opportunities for sociological insight and new types of methods.

I spoke a little about the changing university and the implications of neoliberal austerity and measurement for academic practice in Chapter 1. It is worth returning to this briefly to think about how this wider terrain impacts upon the practice of the punk sociologist. We can start by suggesting that the punk sociologist refuses to be held back by austerity, although of course in reality this might be hard, particularly if jobs are under threat. The punk sociologist uses the limitations of austerity to find creativity, to motivate their nothing-to-lose attitude, and to embed resistance and edginess in their outlook. They bounce off the restrictions and respond with creative means. Sometimes these restrictions are based upon a lack of funding or resources. Sometimes other material boundaries that are part of austerity measures, such as systems of measurement and audit, will come into play. Punk sociologists use this to fire their radical edginess and as a challenge to make things work. Bold inventiveness is not just about how we conduct sociological investigation, it is also about the way we develop the structure of the discipline against the economic and social restrictions that might be placed upon us. We still need to argue our case and to make claims for the increased funding of sociology, but at the same time we need to find ways to make sociology work in whatever conditions we find ourselves in. This is tricky, and the answers will vary depending on the institutional and geographical context in which we are operating.

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New media forms provide some opportunities for connecting and finding new terrains to study, but we might also look back and think about how old materials like paper and postal services might actually attract attention to our work in an age of digital saturation. We might find and create new ways of publishing or develop new types of events, we might foster departmental and university-level initiatives that help us to explore social questions in collaborative ways. The punk sociologist might use some tried and tested formulas for doing these things, but we might also try to develop some of our own. The punk sociologist might co-opt unusual spaces and put on impromptu gigs or happenings, which are publicized using whatever means of communication they think will work best (letters, postcards, social media, posters, megaphones). We might have a series of events around places of sociological interest. Or we might adapt our university spaces to make them work for us, redecorating them with artworks, and giving them soundtracks. Breaking with conventional delivery patterns and scheduling and seeing what happens. The punk sociologist is unlikely to be too comfortable with the conveyor belt of papers at academic conferences. A punk sociology event is more likely to have increased space for collaborative discussion and critique, to remove the barriers between speaker and audience, to be more improvisational in nature, to use cultural forms to open discussion, to be more about the collective than the individual. We may even be uncomfortable, as punks would be, with the superstar status that is sometimes conferred on academics (the equivalent perhaps of the stadium rock star). Again though we hit the barrier of the punk sensibility. We shouldn't be too prescriptive in imagining where this might lead. Indeed, the punk sociologist may wish to organize a seemingly conventional conference that they then use to subvert mainstream ideas and to bring together and expose clichés and provoke the tensions and clashes that reside at the heart of the discipline. It is important that the punk sociologist is left to imagine their own events and to design their terrain as they wish and in response to the particular restrictions and limitations that they face.

This chapter follows on directly from the discussions of the previous two chapters; it aimed to further cement the terrain in which we conduct and configure sociology. It picks up on the issues relating to an openness towards knowledge and the stripping back of forms of sociological communication. These culminate in a call for a bold and inventive encounter with the social world. This chapter suggests that sociologists need to be bold, to be outspoken and daring, to take risks, and to, on occasion,

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be audacious. The problem, as Steve Fuller (2009: 143) observes, is that 'improvisation is a skill that goes unrewarded, if not actively despised in academia'. Improvisation is not necessarily the same as inventiveness, but we can see how they might be correlate skills. Punk would often look to improvise around formulas and patterns, so as to challenge them; this was part of its inventiveness. So, as Fuller argues, perhaps one way of honing inventiveness is to look to improvise and see what the products are. They are likely to be inventive and experimental, and to have the raw, stripped-back, and bold qualities of punk.

Being bold, though, does not mean adopting a reactionary approach when responding to the social world – although it might require us to be more responsive. Rather, it is about having a sense of confidence in our work that allows us to engage and speak out. Beyond this, though, it is also a part of how sociology is performed. A key aspect of the boldness and inventiveness of punk, as has been developed in Chapters 2 and 4, is an eagerness to cross boundaries and to overcome conventional cultural barriers. It is about trying new things. It is about exploring new questions and new possibilities. It is about digging up aspects of the social world that get little attention (even when they are sometimes in the mainstream). In short, punk was founded upon a bold approach towards engaging in practices that the protagonists sometimes had restricted or little knowledge of. It was about having a go. It was about taking on issues or opportunities because they mattered or because they seemed to be of value. This chapter calls for sociologists to follow this lead and to *have a go*. It calls for sociologists to, on occasion, break with conventions and to move into unfamiliar analytical territory. This will keep the discipline vibrant and relevant. Sociology then, if sociologists are happy to cross boundaries and analyse bits of the social world that they know little about, will respond to a greater variety of aspects of *the social*. Punk sociology is keen to explore new things, even those things that sociologists themselves might know little about.

The outcome of punk sociology's bold, stripped-back approach is that sociology will seem accessible and closer to the social world. It will erode the distance that sociologists sometimes get as a consequence of both their own self-exile and the limited media exposure that they often have. We want sociology and its ideas to be at the forefront of debates on the social world, and we want potential students and future academics to be drawn in by sociology's responsiveness and excitement. In short, boldness, inventiveness, and the DIY ethic will give the sense that sociology is

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not an exclusive club, but it is instead a space in which different types of people might speak in sociological terms about the world they encounter. Anyone can be a DIY sociologist. This is not something we should be afraid of – in fact if we look at popular culture there are already lots of DIY sociologists out there (Beer & Burrows, 2010) – it does not undermine our position. Rather, this tacit and widespread interest in vernacular sociology (Beer & Burrows, 2007, 2010) is a positive thing; it shows a widespread sociological tendency, a broad interest in sociological issues, and therefore it demonstrates that sociology is of interest to people. We can join in and be part of this, but only if we do not feel threatened by this observation or scared of the way it might erode or own jurisdiction. In fact this is already happening, lots of people are talking about the social world, if we ignore this then we might have a problem. The better option would be to understand what is being said and to join in. This is to open up the sociological terrain and to enter into critical and reflective dialogue with these visions of the social world. Opening up the sociological terrain in this way, making it seem closer to the social world, engaging with DIY sociologists, and being bold, and doing some DIY ourselves will create a sense of possible involvement that is likely to lead to a wider engagement with sociology and its ideas. Adopting the boldness, inventiveness, and DIY ethic of punk will not only expand sociology's repertoire and terrain, it will also, as a by-product, make the discipline seem more approachable and enticing to those who are currently understood to be outsiders.

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Conclusion: The Limits of Punk Sociology and a Glimpse into Its Future

Abstract: *This closing chapter returns to the problems faced by sociology today. It argues that it is crucial that sociologists do not opt to play it safe. Instead it argues that we need to find ways to revitalize the discipline and to make it both exciting and vibrant. The chapter provides an overview of the punk sociology project and also develops some of the limitations, pathologies, and problems that punk sociology might face.*

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Perhaps the overriding message of this book, even though it may have remained fairly implicit within the previous chapters, is that sociology cannot afford to be reserved, conservative, or timid. We need to retain our modesty and grounding, yet we should also aim to be outspoken, provocative, and confident. As I described in the opening chapter, it looks like sociology will increasingly be operating in the marketized economies of neoliberalism – this is actually already an ongoing process in most places. We can't dwell around bemoaning our luck. We need to respond. More than this, we need to respond on our own terms. The context in which sociology is being performed is likely to draw us towards forms of sociology that *play it safe*. If we are not careful we might start trying to do sociology to suit the systems of measurement that are already an established part of the university data assemblage (see Burrows, 2012). The problem is that *playing it safe* will actually lead us to the opposite of its intentions. If we are not careful then the growing impulse to play it safe will become pathological and destructive. Sociology will become timid and irrelevant, it won't capture the attention and imagination of prospective students – nor will it attract public interest and reaction. This, ultimately, will not be good for sociology. My suggestion is that we fight the impulse to play it safe and instead we take the challenge head on. The way to ensure that the strength of sociology is maintained and maybe even honed is to manufacture a sense of confidence and assertiveness. My suggestion here is that we turn to the punk ethos to do this. But this is only the start. It represents one strand of a larger project: the project of re-imagining sociology. The combination of a sense of uncertainty – and even perpetual crisis – in the discipline of sociology with a changing social, organizational, and economic climate is sure to raise some serious difficulties. We need to react and we need to find a way to sustain sociology through such difficulties. One way to do this, maybe the only way, is to try to make sociology as engaging, invigorating, and lively as possible.

In the opening chapter of this book I offered some reflections on recent work that attempts to project us into the future of sociology. In this opening chapter I showed how there was a growing sense that sociology needed to return to the 'promise' and 'craft' of sociology. The sense was that what is needed is an attempt to cultivate a sense of 'inventiveness', 'liveliness', 'creativity', and 'imagination' in sociology. The problem, I suggested, is how we might do this. How can we be creative and imaginative? Where might we get the inspiration for rethinking our craft? The answer

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I have given here is that we might look outside sociology and maybe even outside of academic forms of knowledge. The suggestion has been that we might turn to cultural resources to rethink the communicative, conceptual, and methodological repertoire of sociology (and the social sciences). Clearly, in this instance the resources have been very specific. I have attempted to use such an approach to develop a punk sociology. We need not stop here. Punk sociology is a strong contender for a re-imagined sociology, at least in my view, but there are many others.

I'd like to conclude with some closing thoughts on punk sociology and by providing a small glimpse into its potential futures. The chapters themselves have mapped this out in a bit more detail, but let me offer two things in this conclusion. First, I will reflect on some of the features of punk sociology (perhaps we can call it Punk Soc) and provide some closing tangents on where this might lead. Then, second, I'd like to provide some thoughts on the potential pathology of the punk ethos and the possible pitfalls and dangers that we might want to take into consideration should the reader wish to be a punk sociologist.

Punk sociology and its possible futures

In some ways it is not really appropriate to imagine what the future of punk sociology might be. The idea is that it requires an active and lively sociologist who finds ways of making the most of the opportunities provided by the context and environment in which they are working. As such, and in keeping with the punk ethos, it was always the intention to leave the future of punk sociology open to the reader. Again, I'm returned to the tensions that are created as I try to balance the punk's discomfort with labels and the need for some clarity over the project. Hopefully the chapters in the second half of this book provide enough guidance to instigate the beginnings of a punk sociology, but I hope that they are not restrictive in their suggestions. In imagining the future of sociology, as the author of a book who is trying to endorse the approach, I'm inevitably going to envision a set of utopian outcomes. I think though that the core issue pertains, sociology needs to avoid playing it safe, even if it is being encouraged to do so by the structures in which it is working. The way forward is not to quietly wither on the vine, but to resist this temptation and to adopt the kind of sensibility of the punk. This will seem like a risk, but will actually prove to be a step towards a

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vibrant future for sociology. If we try to play it safe and we try to adhere to systems of measurement and the like, we will actually be undermining our own position. It will feel like we are doing the right thing, but it will actually cause sociology to slowly ebb away. Playing it safe will be counter-productive. We need a bold response that belies our sense of uncertainty. A sense of self-awareness is a good thing, and is necessary if the punk sociologist aims to question the constraining norms within the discipline, but it is important that it does not become inhibitive. As *The Smiths* once sang, shyness and coyness are good, but they can stop you from doing the things you want to.

In thinking about developing the future of punk sociology, and thinking about how it might fit into the discipline more broadly, we can reflect back upon the key features raised in the previous chapters. I don't really want to spend too much time reiterating these points in this conclusion; I'm hoping they are laid out concisely enough in the previous chapters for this not to be necessary. The previous chapters provided some thoughts on how sociology's knowledge, communication, and terrain may be re-worked in order to align it with a punk ethos. Of course, the punk ethos itself is based around a contested set of characteristics, yet the core features tend to repeat themselves. It was these core features that we focused on; I suspect though that there is likely to be further value in mining some of the nuances of punk and using some of the more obscure and contested features of the movement, but we can leave that for future consideration.

In reframing sociological knowledge, communication, and terrain, we found a series of issues that might provide the hooks for such a project. Underpinning these lurks the sense that punk is about playing with and questioning received and established versions and accounts of the world, that it likes to challenge and transcend barriers and boundaries, and that it relishes a critical engagement with any fixed and intransigent ideological or material obstacles. Alongside this we saw the need to undermine and subvert hierarchies and cultural orderings and an attempt to find ways of contravening norms and conventions. This was not necessarily just for the fun that comes with iconoclasm and being awkward, the suggestion was that this approach also allowed new types of questions and new ideas to emerge, once such constraints and barriers had been removed. The chapters attempted to show how this works across a range of registers, which in turn aimed to show that the punk sociology project is about not just the topics we explore, but also how

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we go about researching, writing, disseminating, and sharing our ideas. The idea of punk sociology is that it seeps into all aspects of the practice of sociology. As I have described in this book, the punk sociologist is relativistic, open, and eclectic in their formation and use of knowledge and resources. The way the punk sociologist communicates their ideas is raw, stripped back, and fearless. The punk sociologist is keen to find new avenues of communication and to use them to experiment and try out new ideas. And, finally, the punk sociologist is keen to expand and adapt the terrain that they study. The punk sociologist is bold and inventive in thinking of the terrain they cover and they deploy a Do-It-Yourself ethic to tear open the possibilities and potentials in that terrain. Together these provide some structure for punk sociology without limiting, constraining, or restricting its future. This book is intended as an ethos or sensibility of punk sociology rather than a schema or set of rules (which would go against the objectives of the project itself). The way that the features of a punk sociology will play out in the coming years is, of course, up to the reader.

The pathology of the punk ethos … a warning to potential punk sociologists

If you have read this far you may have spotted something of an irony at the heart of this book. Given that the original punk movement was so short-lived and so self-destructive, the suggestion here that a punk ethos might lead to a vibrant and sustainable future for sociology might be seen to be a bit of a strange claim. Indeed, it is. Yet, the point this book makes is not about the punk movement itself but about its ethos. It is reasonable to conclude that the punk ethos has had much greater cultural reach that the original music scene. The original scene expanded rapidly and died quite quickly. As has been shown by Nick Crossley (2009), the social network that represented the punk movement was originally very dense, with lots of social connections. As such it was coherent and the ideas central to the emergent punk ethos could easily pass between a small group of defining actors. As the network expanded, it became more unwieldy and the coherence lagged. We could easily disregard this as being a problem of ego, the usurping of cultural trends, or maybe even the classic catch-all complaint of 'musical differences'. Nevertheless, this apparent ephemerality is a problem that needs some consideration.

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Indeed, in considering the problems that punk has faced, we might be able to refine its ethos so as to enable punk sociology to avoid some of these pitfalls.

In some ways the punk ethos might be seen to be pathological. The presence of iconoclasm raises one such set of concerns. Iconoclasm is usually pointed outwards, towards dominant voices and people. However, it rests as a benign presence waiting to turn inwards. As the profile of certain punks increases, so they are opened up to the iconoclasm of the punk ethos. In some ways this is healthy, but it is a pathological tendency within the punk ethos that the punk sociologist may wish to consider. Similarly the eclecticism of punk can become a problem. How can the punk ethos be coherent if those living by it are drawing from so many different cultural resources? The problem here is that punk can mean so many different things as a direct product of its desire to avoid labels and to be unpredictable in its reference points. Can we really have a coherent punk sociology movement? Do we really want one? The punk sociologist will celebrate diversity in the discipline – diversity allows different questions and different answers – and so the aim is not to create a coherent unified discipline. Punk sociologists might use the punk ethos but take it in almost unrecognizable directions. If we go back to the music, then we might say that although the punk movement or scene itself only lasted for months, the splintering of the ethos into post-punk and beyond has lasted for decades. As such, punk sociology is not tied to the pathology of the early punk scene, but is free to use the punk ethos to re-invent and re-imagine itself continually. Whilst writing this I'm imagining some readers may already be moving on with thoughts of a post-punk sociology, a new-wave sociology, a pop-punk sociology, a grunge sociology, a cyberpunk sociology, and so on. The derivations are likely to be innumerable.

Finally, perhaps the key pathological aspect of the punk ethos that sociologists may be most concerned about relates to the vulnerability it exposes in the protagonist. Being bold and fearless can come at a cost. Reacting to the world and being mobile in the forms of analysis we offer, as I have suggested in this book, comes with many difficulties. It might expose the shortcomings of sociology, it might put on display the things that we as individuals and as a group of researchers may not know very much about. A punk sociology would not shy away from such questions simply because it feels a little exposed. The problem is that this might actually generate questions about our value, worth, and credibility. Risk

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taking is a key component of the more pathological aspects of the punk ethos. Again though, as I have outlined at the beginning of this chapter, it is important for sociology to take some risks and to be provocative. The fear of taking risks leads us back to the impulse to play it safe, which I have already suggested is actually counter-productive. The desire to stay safe actually has the potential to undermine the discipline in the long run. In the large part our audiences will appreciate us taking a risk in order to keep up with the social world, to remain relevant, and to be responsive. The authenticity and credibility of sociology should be a concern, but if these come to inhibit the research we do then it might again have the opposite effect. Clearly though, this is a feature of the punk ethos that we might want to be wary of. The objective of punk sociology is not to undermine sociology itself, or to erode is legitimacy or credibility. Its aims need not clash with a desire to be credible, it's just that it doesn't foreground or give much thought to such concerns. Again though, the punk sociologist will need to consider this possibility without letting it dominate their creative edge.

A final note relating to this is that punk sociology should not be read as a need to simply speed up and be more responsive. In some cases this may be necessary, but we also need to protect long-term, careful, and meticulous work (such as editing, translation, longitudinal studies, reflective pieces of synthesis, retrospective books, historical and documentary studies, secondary analysis, contextual readings of conceptual ideas, reviewing, and the like). In fact, this type of work is more likely to be defended if we are to take on a more punk sensibility. This type of work is increasingly likely to be tantamount to an act of resistance or rebellion that goes against the grain of the systems of measurement of academic worth or value. Punk sociologists, by not playing it safe and by not being dominated by such systems, are likely to actually maintain the diversity of approaches in the discipline and to add new avenues and perspectives to supplement them.

I've only just begun to touch the surface of the pathological aspects of the punk ethos. We might only begin to see these features play out as we start to negotiate the punk sociology project. The punk ethos, in many ways like punk itself, will need to be reflexive and self-aware. This book is not an attempt to say that we should all become punk sociologists without pausing for second thought. Rather the punk sociology project sits in these pages as a resource for readers to call upon and respond to. The suggestion here is that there are some aspects of punk that we need

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to be wary of, and that punk sociology needs to be cautious in limiting some of the more pathological aspects of the punk ethos.

Closing thoughts

This book should not really be read as a blueprint for a punk sociology. It is not a 'how to' guide for the punk sociologist. Rather, this book is an attempt to respond to calls for a re-imagined and re-invigorated sociology that faces up to its contemporary challenges. It is not about nostalgia for a punk era. This is a book about the future of sociology and what that future might hold. If we want to be creative and imaginative then we might need some help, we might need some resources that will suggest to us how to be creative and imaginative. The vision of punk sociology I have outlined here is intended to provide one account of a potential sociology, a sociology that hopefully has some promise. I expect though that this is a vision that the reader may not wish to wholly adopt. It may be that the reader wishes to adopt only some aspects of the punk ethos. It may be that the reader wishes to create an assemblage of different resources to re-imagine sociology. Perhaps the reader even wishes to react against the idea of a punk sociology or reject it altogether. As such the book is not intended to be prescriptive. It is not a prescription for an ailing sociologist. This book is something for the reader to bounce against, to use as a resource. It is more of a provocation than a guide or set of rules.

The real question this book is asking concerns what we want sociology to be. What type of sociology do we want to do? Where can sociology go and how might it develop? And, perhaps most crucially, how can sociology respond to a changing world and the particular analytical and structural challenges it brings? The intention was simply to offer a starting point for addressing these questions through a reconsideration of the ethos that drives the discipline. In the same way that I have used punk music, this book is a resource to think with rather than a set of answers. However, in keeping with my attempt to use this book to demonstrate as well as describe a punk sociology, let me say that the route to a successful future for sociology is in a fostering a vibrant and vital discipline that opens up and illuminates the social world. Sociology is exciting. It needs to make sure that it finds ways of cultivating and communicating its vibrancy so that the value of the discipline is clear to everyone. Sociology

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needs to capture people's imaginations; punk sociology, I suggest, would do just that.

I'm sure that many readers will already be engaging in some of the activities and approaches I have placed under the punk sociology umbrella. I hope this book provides a focal point and a source of encouragement for the continuation and expansion of such activities. Perhaps the book will offer some new perspectives on these existing approaches – maybe if this book speaks to the way you do sociology then you are already a punk sociologist. I hope though that in the large part this book will be provocative and will help us to collectively reflect on the future of sociology and the possibilities we may uncover. My hope is that it will spark some debate and disagreement. A punk sociologist would not expect everyone to agree with their vision; they are more likely to try to divide opinion. In fact, in many ways my attempt to describe punk sociology goes against the very ethos of a punk sociologist. It was felt that some solid foundation was needed for people to react against, to reshape, to adopt, and to resist. I also suspect that readers will see new ways to apply the punk ethos to sociology, many of which I may have missed or overlooked in the second half of this book. My aim was to strip back the discussion of punk sociology and, as such, I'm sure that there are additional applications and inspirations that a sociologist might take from punk. This short book is an opening, a beginning for using this particular cultural resource in re-imagining sociology, it is not meant to be a definitive or all-encompassing statement on what punk sociology might mean. In keeping with punk itself, there is plenty of scope for individuals to develop their own interpretations and applications of the punk sociology project.

Overall, my suggestion here has been that punk sociology might answer the calls for a renewed engagement with Mills' 'promise' of sociology. Punk sociology presents us with new opportunities for developing a successful future for the discipline. Not all sociology should be punk, instead we might aim for diversity in the discipline and we might conjure up a series of imagined futures. We might develop different types of sociologies that work together, that contrast and that might feed into one another in their competing visions of the social world. Perhaps the key question this book suggests concerns what it will mean to pursue a punk sociology within the context of neoliberalism and the other contemporary circumstances in which we find ourselves. My argument here is that such a bold and positive move is needed to protect sociology, and

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to maintain the discipline as a critical space for thinking about the social world. It is crucial to cultivate the vibrancy of sociology and to make its ideas and approaches attractive to future generations and to diverse audiences. Punk sociology, it is suggested, provides one opportunity for developing a response in a time of uncertainty.

A very short postscript ...

During the writing of this book I've been asked a few times for some examples of sociologists who might be considered to be punk sociologists. I've shied away from answering this question. I decided quite early on in the writing process that I didn't want to provide a direct answer to this question. I decided that the best thing to do, the most punk sociology thing to do, is to leave it to the reader to decide on an answer. As such, I'll leave it to the reader to think about who might already be a punk sociologist. I'll also leave it to you to consider the possibility of becoming one yourself.

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