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Hidden Paths in Zygmunt Bauman's Sociology: Editorial Introduction to E-Special Issue.

Theory Culture and Society, December 2017.

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Zygmunt Bauman. What does the name mean to you?

Chances are, if you're taking the time to read these thoughts on the first anniversary of his passing, the name means 'inspiration', 'imagination', perhaps even 'perspiration' if – like us – you've tried to keep up with him in either publication or conversation. If you are from the world of sociology, which he always declared to be his home, then chances are that the name Zygmunt Bauman may also mean 'over-generalisation', perhaps even 'frustration'. Especially in the UK, methodological sensitivities meant that he spent his long academic life held firmly at the threshold for want of a more robust and evidence-based explanation of how he had arrived there. Zygmunt Bauman. A stranger at the door.

From his home in Leeds, where he had lived since the early 1970s, Bauman diagnosed the most pressing concerns of our times, forever inviting us to question the ostensibly unquestionable aspects of our shared lives and to see the world anew. Across more than 60 books, he addressed such timeless aspects of the human condition as freedom and security, power and politics, ethics and morality, identity and community, anxiety and uncertainty, love and evil, hope and nostalgia. From 2000 onwards, Bauman became synonymous with a style of 'metaphorical thinking' in the manner of Hannah Arendt through which the image of 'liquidity' was regularly deployed in order to analyse the increasing absence of solid structures and institutions that once provided the stable foundations for our shared world. This 'liquid modern' world of ours, he argued, was like all liquids: in constant flux, it is unable to stand still and keep its shape for long. Everything within it seems to change – the fashions we follow, the events that catch our attention, the things we dream of and the things we fear.

The theme of a growing polarisation between the elite and the rest, and of our growing tolerance of ever-increasing inequalities, was a constant presence throughout these later writings on 'liquid

modernity'. His emphasis upon the lived experiences of society's outcasts saw him become a major influence on the anti-globalization movement, gathering passionate followers around the world, especially amongst young activists in Spain, Italy and across Latin America. Bauman was always acutely sensitive to the suffering of society's most vulnerable groups. As the giants of the State and the Market battle for supremacy within the dynamic spaces of globalized form of financialized capitalism, we must remain sensitive to the fate of the poor and the marginalised on the ground. As he put it so candidly: '*When elephants fight, pity the grass...*'. Across all of his work, from the early 1960s through to his last book *Retrotopia* (2017b), Bauman invited us to see the world through the eyes of society's weakest members, and then tell anyone honestly that our societies are good, civilized, advanced, free.

From Warsaw to Leeds...

Bauman lived a long life, intimately entwined with many of the world-historical events of the twentieth century. Born on 19th November 1925 in Poznan, Poland, he was first a victim of the Nazis, then the Communists. In 1939, at the outbreak of World War II, he fled along with his family to the Soviet Union, where he would fight for the Red Army against the Nazis. Given Bauman's well-known criticisms of the more positivistic forms of social science, it is interesting to learn that the first academic passion of the adolescent Bauman was for physics, initially enrolling on a two year course: 'I did not think much of sociology then – nor was there much of a sociology to think of – in Stalin's Russia' (Bauman and Tester 2001: 17). World events took over, however, and on his return to Poland suddenly there were other more important matters than physics as the re-creation of a nation devastated by war seemed like a much more exhilarating and rewarding task.

Bauman lectured in sociology at the University of Warsaw in the 1950s and 60s, gaining his first full academic post in 1954. Guided by his teachers Julian Hochfeld and Stanislaw Ossowski, Bauman was introduced to a particular form of sociology that openly embraced philosophy, economics, history, and politics as a 'human science' seeking different ways of understanding the human condition (Satterwhite 1992). Bauman's own work began by espousing a deep concern for a growing conservative inertia amongst Polish youth at that time. Growing injustices and inequities were apparently tolerated because of a perceived minor stake in a corrupt social system that operated only in the interest of elites, with the nightmarish alternative of a life amongst the excluded helping to keep young people in the game (*plus ça change...*). The controversy his work started to cause barely got going before being exiled from his native Poland with his family in 1968, this time as a consequence of an anti-Semitic campaign by the communist regime. It is impossible here to recount this stage of Bauman's life in anything close to the depth and sensitivity that it deserves, and in any case one cannot get a more vividly human account of this period than by reading *A Dream of Belonging: My Years in Post-War Poland* (1988) by Janina Bauman.

Temporary posts followed at universities in Tel Aviv and then more briefly in Haifa, but as Janina explained in a Guardian interview back in 2003, Israel was too nationalistic a country and so was not to prove a congenial place for the family to live; they did not 'want to go from being the victims of one kind of nationalism to being the perpetrators of another' (Bunting 2003). It was a life in which Bauman twice experienced an all too common plight of today's global humanity; that of being forced to migrate and to become a refugee. These experiences stirred a deep moral commitment that was

expressed constantly through his choice to write an explicitly moral sociology, infused with his own biographical experiences of poverty, marginalisation and exile. Indeed, these experiences would seem to have shaped his belief that a 'morally-neutral' form of sociology is an impossibility, as we shall consider later.

After a brief stay in Melbourne, it was in 1971 that Bauman and his family accepted an invitation to settle in the UK, where he headed and helped to reshape the Department of Sociology that has existed in various forms at the University of Leeds since its foundation as the Department of Social Studies in 1946. In his inaugural lecture at Leeds, Bauman (1972) began by noting that the most intimate and private biographical details of the professional sociologist cannot help but be entwined with the biography of the discipline itself. Later, in *Hermeneutics and Social Science* (1978), Bauman pondered the importance of the setting within which a text is conceived on both the intentions of the author at the time of writing and the subsequent meaning that the text comes to acquire once it is encountered by its reader. One struggles to think of another contemporary sociologist for whom the link between biography and sociology has stimulated such intense interest, or deemed to have such relevance to their way of 'being a sociologist' as a way of life rather than simply 'doing sociology' by dint of profession (Davis ed. 2013; Jacobsen and Tester 2006).

For Bauman, a day in which he had not written was a day wasted, and his daily routine of beginning to write before sunrise and continuing into the late-afternoon became his *modus vivendi*. Terry Wassall, a student of Bauman's at Leeds during the 1980s, recalled to us trying to clear up at around 4.30am after a typically raucous staff-student party held in the Department, only to see Bauman stride purposefully into the building, straight past the assembled detritus, and into his office to start work. A testing timetable even for a graduate student labouring tirelessly on a thesis, but when it is embraced as a way of being sustained into one's 91st year it may count as proof of a conviction that social change truly can be effected through writing. He cut quite a figure in his later life, his many moments of hearty enthusiasm expressed fully through the movement of both his words and his waves – all long, angular limbs and wisps of wild, white hair. If Quentin Blake drew sociologists.

We are fortunate to have our own personal memories of him. One that we share is taking a train journey between Leeds and Sheffield back in 2012, invited to see together the premier screening of the documentary film about his life and works, *The Trouble With Being Human These Days*. On that short 50 minute journey to Sheffield, we watched as an entire carriage of passengers were held in quiet awe as Bauman delivered an impromptu lecture to anyone who wished to listen on the latest news of the day, namely the UK government's decision effectively to triple overnight the costs of accessing a higher education. His sharp observations and sharper wit just drew people towards him. It is also true that, having graciously accepted the pre-screening dinner and with his obligation to attend satisfied, Zygmunt would sneak away as soon as the lights went down... catching the next train straight back to Leeds in order to carry on writing in the early hours.

European Modernity and the Crisis of Humanity

Whilst today Bauman is perhaps best known for his metaphor of 'liquidity', to an earlier generation of scholars he will forever be identified with the 'modern trilogy' (Smith 1999) of *Legislators and Interpreters* (1987), *Modernity and Ambivalence* (1991), and in-between his 1989 masterpiece,

Modernity and the Holocaust, which rightly saw him established as a giant of sociology and a public intellectual on a global scale. Shaped by the memoir of his deeply-beloved wife Janina, the book gave us a stark warning of the genocidal possibilities latent within every modern bureaucratic society that would privilege process, order and efficiency over morals, responsibility and care for the other. Having endured the lived experience of so many horrors of the twentieth century, it's possible that Bauman felt an obligation to share his thoughts on how these and similar atrocities could be averted.

Always wary of offering any alternative blueprint for the future, Bauman declined to profess any concrete solution to our common plight. Oscillating between moments of pessimism, optimism, and that 'third camp' of hope that he considered so important (Bauman, 2004; Davis, 2011; Dawson, 2012), he retained a passionate commitment to a form of socialism – and also to a form of 'hermeneutic sociology' – that was founded on the principle of being forever counter-cultural, even when an avowed socialist government was moving the levers of power. As Neal Lawson (2017) reminded us in the days immediately following Bauman's death, this sociologist believed that a truly good society was one that could never be satisfied that it was good enough [2]. Today such counter-cultural instincts seem as important as ever. As processes of 'liquid modernity' continue to dissolve collective ideas of citizenship and leave individuals increasingly with only the market to manage their increasingly individualized concerns as consumers, hoping to find solutions to their private troubles by shopping, sociology is crucial to translating apparently private troubles into commonly shared public issues. Without sociology, Bauman (2010) suggests, notions of equality, democracy and self-determination will not survive if society is seen less and less as a product of shared labour and common values and far more as a mere container of goods and services to be grabbed by competing individual hands.

As sharp as ever, in his last year's Bauman analysed the refugee crisis and the rise of right-wing populism across Europe and the United States as a 'crisis of humanity' (Bauman, 2017a). A key feature of Bauman's analysis of 'liquid modernity' is an apparent divorce of power from politics, leading to the evacuation of trust from political leaders of all stripes. With this loss of trust would come a loss of faith and a demand to 'take back control'. From someone who had lived through two forms of totalitarianism, his warning was that – despite our protestations that we have surely learned lessons from the previous century – the change demanded would be authoritarian in character.

The promise of a socially progressive Europe therefore meant a great deal to him. He believed ardently that the European Union stood as a safeguard for hard-won rights and for shared protection against war and insecurity. In his final lecture at the University of Leeds, on 5th October 2016, he drew subtle but knowing comparisons between his analysis of the Holocaust and the capacity of today's populism to 'other' everyone, without compassion or remorse. [3] He recalled receiving the Theodor W. Adorno Prize in 1998 (one of many honours he received) and the problem he encountered when asked to choose a national anthem to be played at his ceremony. Neither the Polish nor British versions seeming appropriate to him, feeling a stranger in both lands, it was his wife Janina who solved the problem by suggesting *Ode to Joy*, the anthem of Europe.

Zygmunt Bauman passed away on 9th January 2017, aged 91. Reflecting on his work as a whole, we see it as a series of postcards from an inhabitant of the twentieth- to the inhabitants of the twenty-first century. When there seems to be no alternative, as the present is clouded by a creeping moral blindness in the face of multiple crises, his sociology is that Gramscian reminder that the world we inhabit has been made by human hands and so it can be remade by them too. For all his passion and pessimism [4], he wrote in such quantity and with such quality because he believed in the possibility that we could – and should – face that awesome challenge together.

Bauman Before Liquid Modernity?

In the immediate aftermath of his death, a number of excellent articles were written that each provided a different door into the vast room of Bauman's sociology [5]. In the past few years, there have also been a number of books that have set about providing a more 'critical analysis' of his work whilst also considering how sociology might look anew and move creatively 'beyond Bauman' (Blackshaw 2016; Jacobsen ed. 2016; Rattansi 2017). In so doing, these welcome contributions clearly take Bauman's sociological imagination very seriously and provide useful reference points for both scholars and students seeking a more robust examination of Bauman's ideas. Throughout the sections that follow, we hope to make our own contribution to the curious reader's deliberations on these debates by shining a light on those aspects of Bauman's work that may have become somewhat hidden and possibly overlooked in a growing tendency to focus primarily upon his later writings on 'liquid modernity'.

As is known, Bauman has always been an awkward presence in sociology, especially in the UK where he made his home, forever a 'successful outsider' in Dennis Smith's words (Dawes 2011; Smith 1999). Bauman paid a disciplinary price for being concerned with speaking for the whole of humanity and its shared concerns, rather than preoccupying himself with the latest 'isms' of academic twists and turns (Czapnik 2017). For a public intellectual most fêted around the world for emphasising the terror of modernity's 'will-to-order' – understood as that restless desire to put all of life's rich diversity into neatly-labelled little boxes, a place for everything and everything in its place – the irony of never being regarded as 'a proper sociologist' nor 'a true moral philosopher' was never lost on him. Indeed, it is one of the many curiosities of life at the Bauman Institute here in Leeds that the farther away we travel, the less justification we need to provide for why one should "bother with Bauman". To many around the world, both inside and outside the global academy, it is simply self-evident.

For us, it was his passionate moral commitment to the outsiders, the strangers, the downtrodden and excluded, providing a very real and necessary moral check to all the apparent abundance of a globalized financial capitalism, which stood out amongst the available sociological interpretations on offer. And yet, despite the generosity of a life lived in the service of sociology – the frequent books and articles he shared, the constant acceptance of invitations to lecture all over Europe and (when health permitted) the wider world, and the willingness to grant his precious time for numerous interviews – there are those who would always demand still more of him, who would hold him to a still higher standard. Why had he (yet again!) overlooked this topic, that community, this methodological problem? Why had he repeated this observation in this and that book? Why did everything, in the end, always have to be 'liquid'?

Many apparently gave up, seeing only repetition and lack of novelty. Perhaps the consistency of our shared human plight demanded the consistency of his message in more than one place. But perhaps also something else is underway. In the glaring light of all the 'liquid' books, the hidden paths of Zygmunt Bauman's sociology become more obscure and run the risk of being overlooked. We believe that those who would focus only upon Bauman's 'liquid period' from 2000 onwards and who see only omissions and repetitions would benefit from time spent walking those hidden paths, which much like the garden of his long-time home in Leeds have become overgrown with the passing of time and so perhaps too easily and too hastily walked by. That he found himself much better known, and indeed far better read, the further he travelled away from Leeds we take as a further sign of his status as a truly global sociologist.

Never shy, especially in his later writing, of blending sociological reflection with biographical experience (see the opening entry to his 2012 book, *This is Not A Diary*, where he writes directly to Janina only days after her passing), it is odd that at a time where the 'authenticity of lived experience' is so fervently privileged by sociologists, Bauman's own insights can often appear to be so hastily disregarded. A victim of the Nazis; then the Communists. A refugee. A migrant. A socialist. Bauman *lived* the twentieth-century. Would his testimony not provide the most fascinating interview transcript? That transcript exists, of course, but it is laid out across nearly seven decades of writing and requires the reader to dedicate some time to all of it before pronouncing on the final value of his insights.

In the sections below, we seek to help the reader to navigate his voluminous work – evidenced by the number of articles collected together in this E-Special – by shining a torch beneath the surface and onto the roots of Bauman's thinking. We suggest that in order to grasp fully the meaning of Bauman's writing in the more popular post-2000 phase, it is vital that one understands these foundations of his thought. In this way, we hope that we may go some way to rebalancing the concerns of some contemporary critics. This would seem to be the best place to do this, since much of Bauman's foundational thinking on culture, civilization and hermeneutic sociology was worked out in the pages of *Theory, Culture and Society*, a journal for which he held great affection.

The Familiar Bauman: Industrialism, Consumerism, and Power

Although Bauman contributes a book review on Sennett's *Authority* (1982a: 128-130) in the second ever issue of TCS, the first full article that he published in *Theory, Culture & Society* was 'Industrialism, Consumerism and Power' (Bauman, 1983). Its significance lay in establishing the key themes of freedom and surveillance in consumer societies that would come to characterise much of his writing in later years.

Bauman highlights a shared affinity between Weber and Freud, in the sense that they share a common root in the seventeenth century articulation of dichotomy: the basic conflict between passion and reason, ultimately between the natural and the social. This is the self-understanding of modernity – as expressed in the work of Weber and Freud – as being constituted by dichotomous 'characters' with attitudes, motives, beliefs and expectations. Bauman notes a tendency to use dichotomous social positions, rendered as 'ideal-types', along an imaginary spectrum in order to

reveal something about the contemporary social world that would otherwise be hidden. This 'will to dualism' (Davis 2008) returns across Bauman's own writing on consumer society, a world he sees variously as inhabited by tourists and vagabonds; the seduced and the repressed; the free and the flawed consumers.

Interestingly, the opening paragraphs see Bauman adopting the language and terminology of an almost functionalist paradigm. There is talk of norms and values, internalisation of beliefs, maintenance of the social order, consensus, social integration, the imposition of 'a new motivational structure' (1983: 33) as the basis of integration, reproduction, legitimation of the social order, and so on. Bauman is not positioning himself as a functionalist, of course, but rather laying out this particular sociological 'way of seeing' in order to set up his own argument. After lamenting the fact that 'there was no room for the body in social science', seen too often as the 'barely spoken of fourth side of Parsons' square; the suppressed and incapacitated half of Durkheim's homo duplex', Bauman (1983: 34) celebrates the work of both Norbert Elias and Michel Foucault as having successfully integrated the human body into their sociological theorising.

What follows is one of the most explicit engagements with Foucault ever written by Bauman, testing his theory of power (this line of thinking will later inform his important 1988 book, *Freedom*). Bauman muses whether it can be known for certain that, long before the dawn of modernity, the same techniques of power described by Foucault were also the principal techniques of social control: does Foucault describe 'modern power', or power itself?

Demographic expansion that could not be absorbed by the existing modes of production saw the emergence of an economically redundant population – unattached, belonging nowhere, mobile, and so supervised by the norms, values and controlling mechanisms of no local community – that were quickly stigmatised as the 'dangerous classes' who were 'dangerous because they were the first to live under conditions where probability of 'being seen' was low' (1983: 35). In short, the need for constant surveillance arises – a theme that will recur in Bauman's analysis of the consumer society, not least in his deployment of Thomas Mathiesen's concept of 'synopticon' (Bauman 1999; Bauman and Lyon, 2012): 'Universality of surveillance was reflected in the universality of enforced uniformity' (1983: 34). Contra Foucault, Bauman suggests that the seventeenth-century was not the birth of disciplinary power, but rather the 'problematization of power' itself (cf: Gane 2012).

There follows a concise but perfectly formed articulation of Bauman's later work on the 'gardening state' and the relationship between modernity and order. He states: 'What used to be accomplished matter-of-factly without ever surfacing at the level of conscious political practice had now become a matter of conscious design, planning, and legislation. In its institutional re-deployment, the state had to play the decisive role (1983: 35). The reproduction of the social order at the grass-roots level from the seventeenth-century onwards becomes the concern of the dominant classes. 'Being human', Bauman says, 'became now a skill to be learned' and so what was understood by 'human' was a form of life and being that ensured the continuation of the existing hierarchy and so preserved the interests of the dominant class. This idea will dominate the 'modern trilogy' (Bauman 1987; 1989; 1991) and later establish his understanding of 'solid' as opposed to 'liquid' modernity.

Following a more conventional summary of Foucault's (1975) work in *Discipline and Punish* – in which he notes affinities with his own (then recently published) book *Memories of Class* (1982) in identifying factories as a contemporary variety of the work-house – Bauman draws a sharp distinction between the fates of unskilled and skilled workers when crowded together into large mills and subject to the same pernicky rules and disciplining techniques across the working day. A different level of income was not the most salient feature of the tension between them; rather, it was the *relative freedom* from intrusive and invasive surveillance and disciplinary procedures that set one group apart from another (1983: 38).

In a fascinating section, Bauman lays bare a process that he calls the 'economisation of power conflict' – and is one of the only places Bauman speaks explicitly on money. Although his explanation is a little convoluted, the basic idea seems to be that the asymmetry of power relations within the factory setting – between unskilled and skilled workers, floor managers, and factory bosses – is accepted as part of the process of production, with conflict transferred outside of the factory setting and into the marketplace. This is where different groups reinterpret this conflict over production as the effort to satisfy consumer needs in the world of commodities. 'Money becomes a makeshift power substituted for the one surrendered in the sphere of production; while the experience of unfreedom generated by the conditions in the workplace is re-projected upon the universe of commodities' (1983: 38). Bauman states that, because what we might now call 'consumer freedom' is only a surrogate form of power, a substitute for the emancipatory urge triggered by the conflicts generated by the factory setting, not only do ever greater rates of consumption fail to alleviate the stress of working life, but also cannot target the real source of our dissatisfaction, namely the power asymmetry of the capitalist mode of production. Bauman calls this work-induced stress 'a virtual time-bomb lodged in industrial society from its very inception' (1983: 39).

The third and final part of the article opens with a move into political economy and a more explicit focus on the familiar tropes of Bauman's analysis of consumerism. Interestingly, he states none of the great modern minds of economics ever considered 'economic growth' amongst the favourable attributes of an industrial society, but only the ability of capitalism to improve the 'general welfare of society' (1983: 39). Without this – and in focusing upon the stimulation of surplus-production rather than its distribution – the state faces an on-going 'legitimation crisis' (Habermas 1973). In shifting power struggles to the sphere of consumption and away from asymmetries in the production process, the state becomes more concerned with the economy ('growth') than with society ('welfare'). Put another way, the State pledges its loyalty to capitalism rather than to democracy. And as a consequence, the ambitions of life are also redirected away from the state and towards the market, now assumed (quite wrongly?) to be the best mechanism for securing liberation from domination.

The conclusion to Bauman's first full article in TCS is also worth highlighting. Here, Bauman notes that more and more people are being produced in the role of consumers whilst being denied the (economic) access to the producer role – they are required to perform as consumers, but deprived of the means to do so. And then it comes: 'Against this background, the 1981 British inner city riots could be seen as the modern equivalent of the machine-breaking of the early industrial era. The desperate adolescent unemployed played the role of the Luddites of consumer society. Their rage was turned against consumerist instruments of oppression: the goodies displayed in the windows of

the inner-city department stores' (1983: 41). This is a pretty striking reflection of his view of the 2011 riots exactly thirty years later (Bauman 2011 [6]), and provide further reason to explore this article in depth as a foundational piece containing many of salient themes that would dominate his more familiar writing on freedom and consumerism.

Defamiliarizing the Familiar Bauman

As with this first article, some of the paths that Bauman paved through his contributions to TCS are very familiar. The one most trodden by commentators leads quite directly to the 'modern trilogy' (Smith, 1999), namely the speech Bauman gave after receiving the Amalfi European Prize for *Modernity and the Holocaust* is published in 1991 as 'The Social Manipulation of Morality: Moralizing Actors, Adiaphorizing Action'. A circumscribed presentation of *Modernity and Ambivalence* appears as an article with the same title in 1990. A series of articles on ethics, morality and postmodernity (Bauman 1988b, 1994, 1998) relate directly to the seminal books of the 1990s, in which Bauman mapped out a sociology of postmodernity. TCS was clearly something of a testing ground for these ideas.

In some of his shorter pieces published TCS, and in the review essays and book reviews he contributed, however, it is also possible to observe Bauman's thought travelling on paths less well-trodden. To evoke his favourite Jorge Luis Borges (1941) story *The Garden of Forking Paths*, in the pages of TCS these familiar and unfamiliar paths diverge and converge, approach each other, fork and break off at distinct points. One of the most interesting of these 'forking paths', especially in the light of criticisms of Bauman's 'Eurocentrism', pertains to the fate of the concept of civilisation.

This is engaged directly in the short essay entitled 'On the Origins of Civilisation' (Bauman, 1985) and, less directly, in his review essay 'The Philosopher in the Age of Noise: a Reading of Richard J. Bernstein's Philosophical Profiles' (Bauman, 1987a). In the former, across just seven pages, he discusses the emergence of the concept of civilisation and the verb, *civiliser*, in French, its educative role in the formation of a people, and the fragmentation of the concept in our contemporary 'polyversal' world. In terms that foreground some of his arguments in *Legislators and Interpreters* (1987a), he discusses the emergence and proliferation of ethnographic knowledge of specifically non-western cultures in the times of *les lumières* and *les philosophes*. The knowledge of these cultures was exemplary of the 'variety of human folly and superstition' rather than the plurality of ways of being in the world. There is no variety, it was assumed, in the moral commandments and indictments of reason which were 'the same for mankind as a whole' (1985:8).

He then moves on to a critique of the universal validity of the civilising ideal, on the basis that it was 'intimately connected to the intellectualist bid for power' (1985:13). The 'Western tip of the European peninsula' (1987a:159) defines its purported universal civilizational superiority against the difference it conquers militarily. At this time Bauman was also preoccupied with questions of mortality and immortality, questions that are explicitly foregrounded in this journal in his 'Survival as a Social Construct' (1992a). His most elaborated treatise on these themes appeared in his *Mortality, Immortality and Other Life Strategies* (1992), a book that he would often have to explain 'has nothing to do with death' and which he saw as being one of his most significant contributions (and all the more curious for being little read in comparison with his other books).

In this book, Bauman revisits the conceptual history of civilisation. Civilisation is a word that is fundamentally connected with the idea of immortality, a march in historical time towards an eternal, perfect order. As he put it there: 'a most prominent feature of the West-European-born modern civilization was temporalization of cultural difference ... The different stood for the transient; the superior civilization, from which it differed, stood by the same token for all that is durable and potentially timeless' (1992:124). The self-understanding of Western European civilisations, Bauman recognised, was based on a 'denial of coevalness' (Fabian, 1983) with its external Others. But – he states in a powerful section – if the West had won 'the right to tell history' as a movement away from the barbarism, it had confused the 'superior killing potential of guns' with 'the superiority of Western reason and form of life'.

Bauman and Eurocentrism

It is clear, from reviewing his contributions to TCS, one of the 'deaths' that Bauman associated with postmodernity was the death of any kind of philosophical legitimation for this universal civilising mission conducted at gunpoint. Though it is not explicitly confronted, it is also clear that the greatest expression of this death was the period of decolonisation inaugurated after the Second World War. In his discussion of Bernstein – which, like the other review essays and book reviews that he contributed to TCS, is *far more* than just a learned summary – Bauman discusses the effect on philosophy of the world ceasing, to be as it was a hundred years before, 'Europe's playground' (1987a:159).

As Europe's military and political power were significantly challenged by anti-colonial movements, the assumed 'superiority', universality and singularity of the European philosophical tradition became less and less tenable. The single voice of universal civilisation, shouted over gunfire, would gradually come to be replaced by polyvocality in an *age of noise*. This was, Bauman claims, appreciated by thinkers of the late twentieth century, like Rorty, Gadamer and Habermas. Their challenges to the 'unquestioned certainties about the mission of philosophy' did not result from them being wiser than earlier philosophers. Neither were they simply following 'philosophical changes of fashion'. It was instead simply 'because the world in which philosophy operates has changed' (1987a:161). As he argued powerfully in *Legislators and Interpreters* (1987), and revisited more recently in TCS (Dawes 2011; Tabet 2017), the role of the intellectual thus undergoes a transformation. The intellectual no longer 'legislates' in an uneasy alliance with the educative, order-building rationality of the state. The intellectual in the polycentric social situation of postmodernity *interprets*, their role now consisting in interpreting and translating across these *civilisations*.

There may well be a lack of a sustained historical sociology of colonial-imperialism in Bauman's analysis, and it would certainly be a stretch to place him amongst the company of postcolonial theorists. Nevertheless, in tracking the historical movement *from civilisation to civilisations*, Bauman is seemingly a long way away from the narrow Eurocentrism that he has recently been charged with (Rattansi, 2017; Mayblin, 2017 [7]). And beyond this, he was from a very early stage wary of the dangerous possibility that the reflexive awareness of polyversalism might lead to an unassailable relativism or a 'clash' of incommensurable civilisations. Bauman argued that sociologists should never lose sight of the task of interpreting 'action in terms of systems, or meanings in terms of social

structures' (1985:14). Turning away from these perennial concerns of sociologists 'does not serve well the cause of individual autonomy' (1985:14). Instead, it allies with the commodification of 'authentic' individuality, a systemic manipulation of genuine autonomy. The legislative, universalising metanarratives of progress and civilisation are revealed as products of power struggles, but he refuses to fall into the trap of relativism, one that is very easily packaged and sold in commercial form. Herein lies the depth of Bauman's attempt to grasp the condition of postmodernity.

From Sociological Enlightenment...

It is crucial to remember, as he says in one of his last interviews published in TCS, that his was a 'sociology of postmodernity' and not a 'postmodern sociology' (Tabet, 2017:122). This distinction has often been overlooked. Bauman argued that sociology possessed (and still possesses) the analytical and conceptual tools to understand 'postmodernity' and did not (and does not) need fundamentally to reconstitute itself at the postmodern moment. This ought to be situated within a consistent thread of Bauman's sociology: his reflections on the nature and purpose of the discipline itself.

In the interview with Tabet, Bauman recalls how he was introduced by Julian Hochfeld and Stanislaw Ossowski to sociology as a human science, the elaboration of all the social sciences and humanities. He refused to see sociology as the immature younger brothers and sisters of the 'better equipped' and 'better established' natural sciences. Instead, he insists, they are an entirely different activity altogether. Bluntly, the humanities will *never* be 'like the natural sciences' unless they do so by virtue of succumbing to the will of totalitarian states, whereby the voice of the story-telling human subject has been all but eliminated. Drawing upon all of his biographical and sociological experience, he reminds us that in such societies there is often seen to be little need for human sciences in the first place.

In 'Sociological Enlightenment – For Whom? About What?' (2000), Bauman presents one of the most forthright defences of the need for polyvocality and differences of dialogue. Sociology, he suggests, has throughout its history mistakenly sought to deny or to eliminate the diversity of voices telling stories in order to produce the one single story that cancels out all the rest. Sociology, that thoroughly modern discipline, opted to make the study and promotion of order, regularity and predictability the horizon of its ambition. But in a democratic society, it is precisely those wills and feelings that rebel against the 'grand design' that must be acknowledged and honoured. If despotism is imposition of will 'from the top', Bauman states, then democracy is the imposition of will 'from below'. Bauman is clear: Any sociology worthy of our intellect, wit and energy, must be in the service of democracy. It must respect the wishes of those freely choosing individuals, and ought to be judged by the degree to which it can enhance and reinforce a genuine freedom of choice, in the pursuit of fairness, justice, and rationality (2000:81).

Bauman is often rather lazily labelled as a pessimist, offering only bleak and dark forebodings of the life we have created for ourselves, and providing no solutions to our enduring troubles. We do not recognise this description of Bauman. Somewhat glibly, would a pessimist write so much for, speak at length with, and willingly listen to a world they had concluded beyond salvation? More

analytically, we know from Bauman's writing on modernity of the dangers of any 'blueprint' for society that promises quick and simple solutions from charismatic leaders of their times – from Nazi Germany through to the re-emergence of right-wing authoritarian characters on today's political landscape. Bauman states here clearly that a truly democratic society – informed by Castoriadis' vision of an 'autonomous society' – is a 'chaos seeking form' (2000: 80). It is precisely the absence of absolute truths, guaranteed meanings, clear rules of action and consequence that he believes are the conditions *sine qua non* of the truly autonomous individual and the truly democratic society.

The human condition which sociology needs to serve, Bauman states, is marked not by the absence of values and valid norms, but precisely by its opposite – by the plurality of norms and values and awareness that this plurality is an indispensable condition of autonomous society and free individuality (2000: 80) Bauman says the point is that without taking the risk which polyvocality necessarily entails, without allowing for freedom of choice which always includes the possibility of wrong and damaging ones, there will be no chance at all for democracy and freedom (2000:81).

... to Sociology in the Age of Noise

In other words, the idea of some moral progress for humanity does not dissipate. It is instead reconfigured to mean 'mutually enriching 'cultural exchange' (1985:14). Progress is a product of 'cross-cultural hermeneutics' (1985:14). This unfamiliar path, then, stretches back to some of Bauman's vital, formative reflections on sociological method. As he put it in *Hermeneutics and Social Science*: 'one can achieve understanding of alien forms of life not by immersing oneself in their specific uniqueness or re-living them as if 'from inside', but by following an exactly opposite strategy: by spotting the general in the particular, by enlarging both the alien and one's own experience so as to construct a larger system in which each 'makes sense' to the other' (Bauman, 1978: 218).

Cross-cultural hermeneutics, Bauman suggests, offers 'the best chance of survival' in a polycentric world (1985:14). It is a supremely difficult, though most important, task because we live in what he called an 'age of noise'. Ours is 'a world overflowed with messages, messages with meanings which are in no way clear and carry no evidently preferable interpretation ... In a world of noise communication is the main problem' (1987a: 163).

These themes are elaborated in a short review of some books by Jean Baudrillard titled 'The Second Disenchantment' (1988a). This is a fascinating piece of writing for two reasons. Firstly, Bauman explicitly opposes the 'despondent' pessimism of Baudrillard and as such pre-emptively responds to some later criticisms of his own pessimism. Secondly, in just the opening few lines Bauman makes one of the most forceful epistemological declarations of his career: 'It has been said that our perception of the world is incurably anthropomorphic. Wrong. It is *praxeomorphic*. It has been said that our perception of the world is adamantly ethnocentric. Wrong again. It is *intellectual-centred*' (1988a:738). Scarcely has Bauman elaborated the epistemological position underlying his work in such technical terms. Perhaps this is because the cross-cultural hermeneutics, which for Bauman will underlie a sociology fit for the polyvocal age of noise, takes Baudrillard as its counter-image.

The praxis from which Baudrillard's sociology draws 'its tropes and imagery is one of yesterday's and today's television news'. It is a sociology 'made to the measure of television' (1988a:740). A

connection is made between Francois Rabelais' vision of the Abbey of Thélème and Baudrillard's vision of the 'obscene' televised society. In Thélème, residents were required to uphold a single law: 'to listen carefully to the desires of their bodies, and to act upon them' (1988a:743). Suffering is outlawed. Rabelais saw the construction of the walls of Thélème in his lifetime and thus remembered the world outside. Baudrillard's vision of 'the brave new world of consumer bliss' (1988a:743) was elaborated firmly inside the walls. His is a despondent analysis that follows from the lack of desire amongst the inhabitants of Thélème for leaders or prophets, social roles that Bauman suggests Baudrillard desires for himself in the consumer society.

The safe sanitized world of the contemporary, screen-mediated Thelemian society is for Bauman just a small portion of the world that humanity shares. The rest of this shared world is, he argues, very often only encountered through two types of screens: our TV screens and the window screens of our air-conditioned cars. Today we would no doubt add the multitude of screens that we carry in our pockets, bags and briefcases, those of smartphones, tablets and personal computers. But, Bauman reminds us, we do not have to remain enraptured or embittered within this 'ecstasy of communication' (Baudrillard, 1983). We have a *choice* to walk outside of the walls of Thélème, to experience and engage with the wider world. Doing so requires us to leave our car in Thélème and to '*re-learn* how to use our legs' (1988a:743). The forking paths that Bauman illuminated, the counter-cultural and the cross-cultural, could perhaps enable us to travel out of our contemporary, screen-realised Thélème and engage in the difficult task of encountering the Other in all their difference and – shock, horror – speaking with, listening to, learning from them. Sociology, he argues, has to engage in a continuous dialogue with human experience in its plurality of forms.

Concluding Remarks

Given all of this, it is unremarkable that many of Bauman's latest publications tended to take the form of dialogue. It was, had always been, his preferred sociological method. Fittingly, some of his final contributions to TCS also take this form, including enlightening conversations with Simon Dawes (2011), Slawomir Czapnik (2017) and Simon Tabet (2017). To read them now is to be reminded precisely of his 'dialogical' approach to sociology, and in more ways than one. They are marked by generosity, as well as insight. Entailed in the 'art of dialogue' is the need 'to jointly pursue understanding instead of aiming at the others' defeat' and 'by the wish to keep the conversation going, rather than by the desire to grind it to a halt' (2011: 143). Bauman never engaged in the kind of macho 'monological' posturing – i.e. my theory and my method as the one and only true path to follow – that aims at the destruction of the arguments and credibility of adversaries, which tries to reduce the capacity of the adversary to engage in the conversation. As he discusses with Czapnik (2017), his approach was also marked by the avoidance of 'isms' and was antithetical to the tendency to create disciplinary 'enclaves with tightly barricaded doors' (2017: 199). Bauman's work brings diverse strands into dialogue with one another, an idea central to his conception of sociological hermeneutics.

These interview pieces also showcase another aspect of Bauman's character and work that is also often overlooked, especially in those charges of pessimism: his impish wit. In his conversation with Simon Dawes, Bauman is invited to explain why he left his role as a much valued referee for articles submitted to TCS. On the one hand, he fears that peer-review has negative implications for the

'daring of thought' (2011: 147). On the other, that the 'peer-review system carries a good part of blame for the fact that something like 60 percent or more of journal articles are never quoted', and furthermore that – with notable exception for a small number of examples like TCS – the 'learned journals... ooze monumental boredom' (2011:147). Apparently with his 'tongue in one cheek only', he suggests that 'were our Palaeolithic ancestors to discover the peer-review dredger, we would still be sitting in caves...' (2011:147).

Zygmunt Bauman. What does the name mean to you?

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Notes

[1] <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2003/apr/05/society>

[2] <https://www.socialeurope.eu/2017/01/zygmunt-bauman-beacon-hope-darkness/>

[3] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DXEAqcXZiUc>

[4] <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2003/apr/05/society>

[5] In particular, see the special pieces commissioned by The Sociological Review and Manchester University Press: https://www.thesociologicalreview.com/news_stories/tagged/bauman; <http://www.manchesteruniversitypress.co.uk/remembering-bauman/>. Bauman's passing was also a global news event. Many of these articles, along with some more personal reflections, are collected together on the Bauman Institute's website: <https://baumaninstitute.leeds.ac.uk/this-is-not-an-obituary/>.

[6] <https://www.socialeurope.eu/the-london-riots-on-consumerism-coming-home-to-roost>

[7] <https://www.thesociologicalreview.com/blog/soil-blood-and-identity.html>