

Praxis, time, seeing: thoughts on the relationship between Zygmunt Bauman's sociology and his photography

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Sociologists have produced a great deal of sociological commentary on the discipline, its exemplary figures and its public intellectuals. Typically, when we write commentaries on a social thinker, if they are no longer alive and cannot be consulted themselves, we begin with their already-known ideas as presented in their published works and perhaps, if they are available, lecture transcripts, media appearances and so on. These are then contextualised with reference to the socio-economic, political and cultural processes in which they are embedded and to which they respond. The ideas are often also considered in relation to the specific social position of the thinker in the time and place within which they lived and thought. If we are fortunate, we might be able to draw on a good biography of the thinker for this purpose, perhaps even an autobiography. Luckier still, if we may have access to an archive in which various traces of the imbrications of life and thought are stored for posterity.

We have this archive, in the case of Zygmunt Bauman. I am especially fortunate because I am one of the scholars who helped establish the archive at the University of Leeds. In the process, I have often been struck by the archive's openness to elucidation, even if fragmentarily and elusively, of something that tends to be rarely addressed in sociological commentaries on sociologists, namely the *process of the creation* of knowledge. *How* a particular sociologist worked, as distinct from the 'methods' that they deployed, tends to be neglected completely or to be relegated to the status of biographical detail. Omitted are those everyday *practices* in which intellectuals go about their day-to-day business.¹

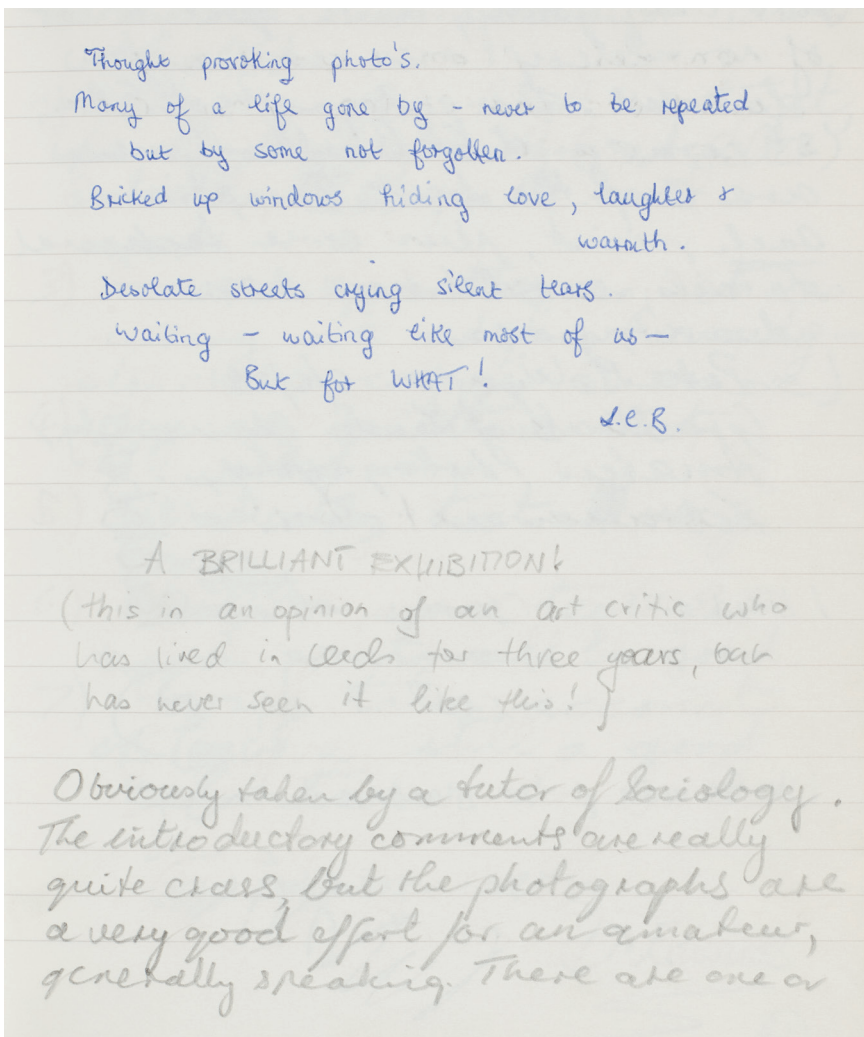
These practices include reading and writing. Zygmunt Bauman's day began at four in the morning, writing beginning after a browse of the morning newspapers, and he tended to read in the afternoons.² Mornings were for

production, afternoons for *investment*, as he put it.³ Among these regular intellectual practices, we might also consider ‘interaction rituals’, in the sense outlined in Randall Collins’s magisterial *Sociology of Philosophies*, proximate gatherings at conferences, lectures, seminars and so on.⁴ We could also consider practices as embedded within the daily life of an academic department, the strategising and jostling for recognition and status among its constituents as addressed by Pierre Bourdieu in *Homo Academicus*.⁵ We might also expand our definition of writing beyond the production of scholarly works so that it incorporates correspondence.⁶ From the archive, we see that he also regularly attended concert halls and theatres, watched significant amounts of film and television, walked in the Yorkshire countryside around Leeds, hosted dinner parties and debated with breakfast guests at his home in Lawnswood Gardens. Overall, we might say that the promise of the archive for the sociologist of intellectuals is less a chest of lost treasure which holds some secret key to the work, than a storehouse of the ‘documents of a life’ which are the mundane ground in which ideas germinate.⁷

He was also, of course, a keen photographer. Since it is axiomatic today to refute the neat separation between life and laboratory even in the natural sciences, I do not think that Bauman’s photography can be cleanly separated from his sociology, as a hobbyist curio. Bauman’s photographic work has some connection to his sociological work. But what is the nature of this connection? I do not want to argue that photography assumed a surrogate role for his sociological concerns, that photography was only sociology by another means. The relationship between photography and sociology in Bauman’s oeuvre is not a simple one. Indeed, at first glance, it is their distinction that is most apparent. At no point does Bauman’s photography cross over into his work. His books and articles are almost completely textual, the only exceptions being those early studies in Poland which contain figures and charts of the likes that he would later come to skewer in his critique of managerial sociology.⁸ Photography is barely discussed in his sociology, in contrast to, say, that of Jean Baudrillard, Howard Becker and Bourdieu, who sought to understand photography as a sociological phenomenon.⁹ The only explicit work to be published on photography in his lifetime – ‘The war against forgetfulness’ (pp. 28–34 above) – was about photographs taken by somebody else, Monika Krajewska.¹⁰

What is more, practically speaking, his sociology and photography circulated and gestated within very different environments. The ideas contained in his scholarly writings up until his period of photography – on socialism, hermeneutics, critical theory, British class history, and politics in Soviet-type societies – were communicated through elite networks in sociology, in esteemed departmental seminars, in letterheaded correspondence with international scholars and in the pages of academic presses and journals. Bauman’s practice as

a photographer unfolded in the stubbornly local environs of the Leeds Camera Club, which he joined in September 1981, in early days referred to in meeting minutes as 'Prof. Bauman'. The group was based in a few dilapidated rooms in Stansfeld Chambers in Leeds City Centre. Stansfeld Chambers, minutes of the club suggest, was often broken into, on several occasions had a leaking roof in its studio and, at one point, was so hazardous that members discussed raising a health and safety complaint with the Department of the Environment.¹¹ And in contrast to the sombre pages of international academic journals, his exhibitions were frequented by a public who entered and left freely and whose responses to his work ranged from highly appreciative to bewildered detachment.



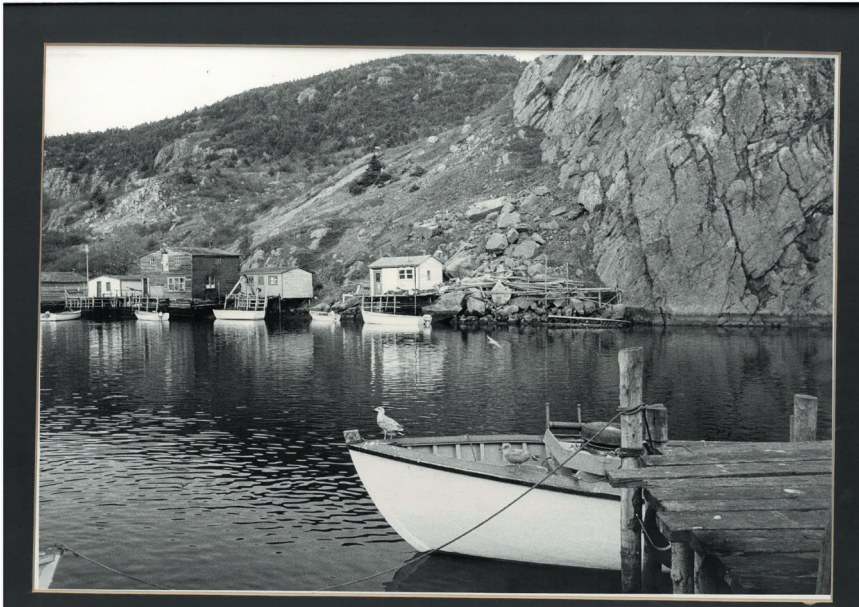
Few academic reviews could match the Leodensian irreverence of the person who wrote in the visitor book (pictured) for his 1986 exhibition ‘Street Messages’ that ‘this was good but it is not brilliant and I have took better photographs at Bridlington’.

Digging below the surface, however, there are some intriguing crossovers between Bauman’s sociology and his photography. Thematically, there are some clear associations between certain strands within his photographs and the themes which found their ways into Bauman’s writing. There are the striking portraits – including those of refugees, such as the parents of John Schwarzmantel, discussed by Janet Wolff (pp. 90–1 below) – that recall both his discussions of the social type of the stranger and his sociologisation of Levinas’s ethics of the face in key works of the 1990s.¹² His street scenes of post-industrial Leeds in exhibitions like ‘Street Messages’ were taken when he was preoccupied with the themes of post-industrial urban decline and the emergence of consumer society, and with it ‘the new poor’.¹³ Just two years after the publication of *Memories of Class*, his first foray into the sociology of postmodernity which would occupy him for over a decade, Bauman provided the photographs for a book written by Alan Wolinski on Osmondthorpe, a deprived inner-city area in East Leeds.¹⁴ As Becker suggested, the photographers’ theory about what they are looking at, their understanding of what they are investigating, influences the images.¹⁵ The position of the photographers orients them towards certain subjects, scenes and objects, and in this sense it seems clear that Bauman’s sociological imagination and photographic imagination intersected at various points. But there is a more complex story than this.

‘Suddenly there is no time’

‘Somewhere in Newfoundland: bare and barren rock, no blade of grass in sight. A neat, carefully painted wooden fence cuts it across. What does it divide, and from what?’ This line appears in an unpublished mosaic essay composed and written during a visiting position at St John’s College, Newfoundland, where Zygmunt and Janina lived for a short time in 1986. Though this is not the precise scene depicted in the adjacent image, it is one of Zygmunt Bauman’s photographs from St John’s, Newfoundland, kindly shared by Irena Bauman. I do not know what this picture will have meant to its taker. To my untrained eye, it is well composed. It could even be a holiday photo, invoking relaxing walks by the sea, rare for a Leeds-dweller, stuck as it is at the centre of England. A longer look gives way to something more melancholic, evoking the images in W.G. Sebald’s *Rings of Saturn*. The harsh cliff-face bears the eons of its formation. Some of it has fallen away, threatening the fragile artifices of the cabins below. The cabins themselves look as if they have been hollowed out. The pier is dilapidated, the

tethered small fishing boats are rudimentary and look disused. As the Baumans may well have been aware, contemplating idle fishing vessels on their walks, this was the scene of a crisis of industry. St John's, nestled on the Newfoundland coast and one of the oldest European colonial settlements in North America, had been proximate to one of the most abundant cod stocks in the world, attracting European fleets from the sixteenth century. By 1992, this stock would be declared collapsed and a moratorium placed upon fishing it; some 25,000 fishers and 10,000 more in fishing-related occupations lost their jobs.¹⁶



The date of this trip to Newfoundland, and the time of this photograph's taking, coincided with a disillusionment with academia and disciplinary sociology. Indeed, Bauman's intense period of photography unfolded over the most fallow period of his writing career, with a single book, *Memories of Class*, published in 1982 between 1978's *Hermeneutics and Social Science* and 1987's *Legislators and Interpreters*, accompanied by only a handful of essays.¹⁷ It was around this time – experienced by many British leftists as one of deep pessimism and depression at Thatcher's assault on British industry and public institutions – that he unsuccessfully pursued the prospect of early retirement. In June 1987 he wrote to Juan Corradi, one of several US-based intellectuals networked around the new left journal, *Telos*:

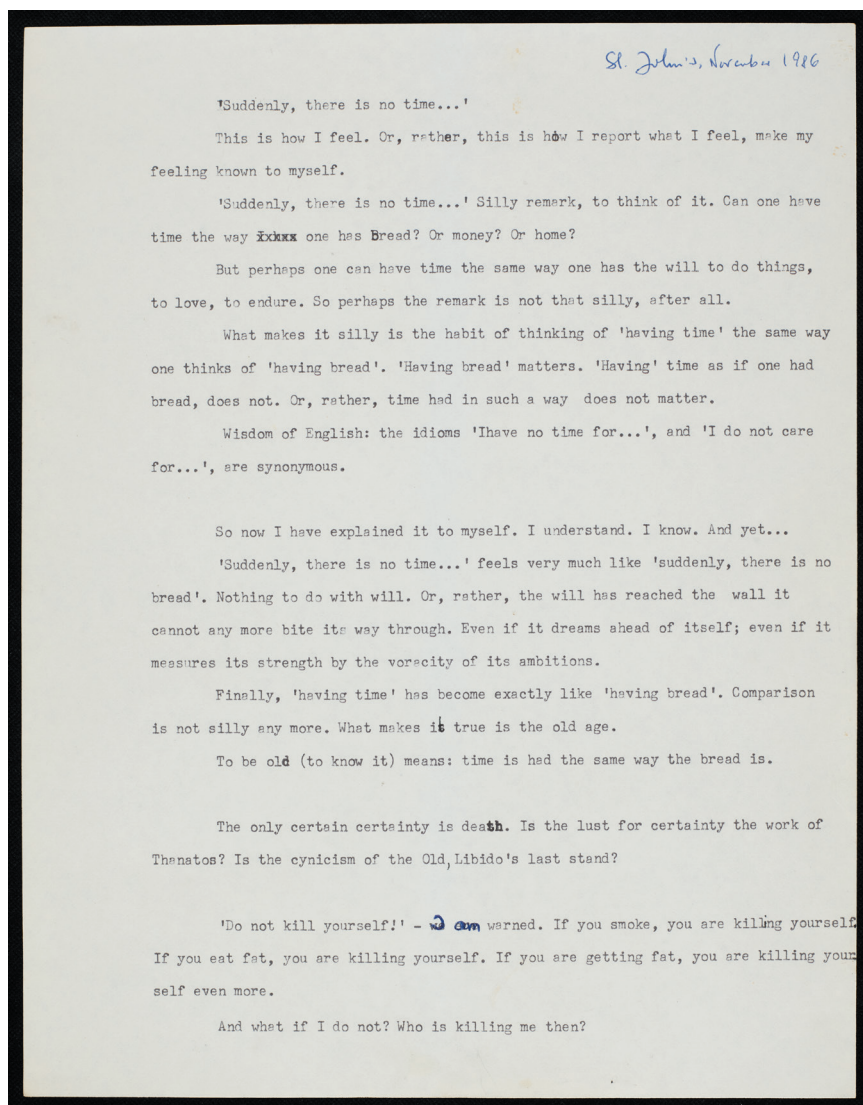
The prospect of five years of the same under Thatcher make one lose interest in the future. The few resistant fighters in the universities throw their hands

up – no hope to stop the rot. Ours is not the University I joined seventeen years ago. I do not understand it, I do not like it, I do not fit it. The ultimate irony, of course, that universities are now measured by their ‘service to’ industry, which – as you know – is in Britain engaged in a disappearing act ... I have quite enough of this – and applied for an early retirement. I do not know whether I’ll get it. If I do get it, I’ll concentrate on writing – and visiting such places as may wish to invite me (if any). This paradise I would not enter before September 1988 anyway.¹⁸

This context places the Newfoundland document around November 1986. Part mosaic essay, part collection of aphorisms, it is an extraordinary document. Its form renders it unlike anything else, published or otherwise, in the Bauman canon. It also reveals Newfoundland 1986 as an extremely consequential place and time. Within its pages he writes, among other things, of his responses to Lanzmann’s film *Shoah* (which he and Janina would have seen a year earlier) and its message of the ‘rationality of evil’. He also reflects on what it means to be an intellectual in exile. There are philosophical musings on death and mortality. It is as if all of the books which appeared in that prolific spurt following the publication of *Legislators and Interpreters* are being set within it. Into the late 1980s and 1990s, publishing works like *Modernity and the Holocaust* and travelling for international speaking engagements as his profile increased (freed up by retirement, in 1991), he appears to have left Leeds Camera Club. Its membership had been declining since Bauman joined, by which time he was recorded in the minutes simply as ‘Sigi’. Mirroring trends at clubs across the country, its decline reflected the emergence of trade processing of colour photographs and the popularity of the disposable camera.¹⁹ Leeds Camera Club disbanded in 1994, after reaching its centenary in the previous year.

The Newfoundland essay also reveals that Zygmunt was preoccupied with time and its passing. When I found a copy of the first page of the document on an Amstrad file (both Janina and Zygmunt used an Amstrad machine in the 1980s), it bore the title ‘Before it is too late’. The first line of the manuscript (pictured) is ‘suddenly, there is no time’. It was written in November, the month of his birthday and in which he often penned his most personal offerings. I am told by Anna Sfarid that November was a time of ‘stocktaking’ – the idea of *This Is Not a Diary* was conceived in November, and his memoir *The Poles, the Jews and I* was also started in November. Its year is 1986, meaning it would have been written around his sixty-first birthday, an age at which, according to the aforementioned Sebald, many exiles become preoccupied with their own past – although for Bauman, as for Sebald, the confrontation with the past did not and could not salve the condition of exile of its liminality.²⁰

His photography was also motivated in some part by this preoccupation with time. As is documented in ‘Thinking Photographically’, a short piece



on photography which I edited and gathered from the fragments contained within the archive, in various letters to photographic journals and exhibition catalogues, he saw photography as 'a technique of cleansing experience from the decomposing solvent of time', which 'may freeze and thus make available to our reflection the apparently trivial happenings, too brief to be noticed as they occur – often even by the actors themselves'.²¹ In 'The War against Forgetfulness', photographs are characterised as 'paper-thin, fragile defences of memory against the winds of time'.²² The Newfoundland photograph is a

curious artefact, then. It preserves in the flux of time a happy and intellectually stimulating time with Janina on another continent, but it also precipitates the most productive and significant period of his sociology and heralds, therefore, a departure from photography itself.

‘Always a window, never an eye’

Anna Zeidler-Janiszewska, who died in the same year as Zygmunt Bauman, coaxed out of him one of the very few public discussions of his photography in their dialogue book, *Życie w kontekstach (Life in Contexts)*.²³ It was in these pages in 2007 that he revealed a certain practical appeal in photography:

In photography, I was fascinated by the magic of a darkroom. I discovered the relativity of an image, relativity of representation, relativity of interpretation – by obtaining several distinct images with diverse themes, diverse ‘built in’ interpretation – from one single negative, and such difference was triggered by sheer movement of the palm between the lens and the photo paper, by framing, by changing the chemical composition of developers and fixers.²⁴

His passion for photography had long cooled before the dawn of the digital age, which with its central motif, disposability, must have seemed distasteful to somebody whose biggest gripe with consumer society was its waste (of human lives, of consumer products, of planetary resources).²⁵ In one of his attendances at the annual general meeting of the Leeds Camera Club, he also lamented the emergence of trade processing of colour photographs, noted to have commented that ‘photography was a craft hobby and that work produced should be the photographer’s own from start to finish’.²⁶

To Zeidler-Janiszewska he also admitted that ‘I think that I searched for answers to my questions in photography, in the same way as in my academic work, being unable to express in words what can be expressed by images’.²⁷ I am intrigued by this evocation of the relationship between words and images. But I am less interested by the boundaries between them in Bauman’s work, where words fail and images take over and vice versa, than in their interrelations. I have suggested that Bauman’s sociological imagination had a sensitising effect on his photographic practice. A more complicated case can be made, I suggest, for a feedback effect, his photographic practice in turn informing a particular expression of his sociological imagination.

Bauman, as I have said, never literally mixed his sociology and his photography. He cannot therefore be assimilated into the canon of ‘visual sociology’, be placed alongside practitioners of the ‘photo-essay’, and it does not seem that (as with Sebald, for example) there was a symbiotic relationship between specific photographs and pieces of writing, the photographs thus forming an intrinsic

part of the writing process. That said, one can delineate a *visual turn* in Bauman's sociology that is coeval with his turn to photography in the late 1970s. He himself came to recognise, in an interview in 2011, that 'the visual does seem to be the most thoroughly grasped and recorded among my impressions and "seeing" supplies the key metaphors for reporting the perception'.²⁸ But it was not always the case. To put it physically, the sense organ at the forefront of his works of the 1970s in the Leeds period might be said to be the ear and its corollary, the larynx, with its capacity to produce the sensation of spoken sound, the basis of human communication.²⁹

Something changes into the better-known work of the 1980s. He becomes interested in the social and moral aspects of seeing – the sight of the face of the Other in their proximity, or the visibility of suffering and the varied social mechanisms which render it invisible. Visuality also permeates his analyses of political modernity, such as in *Memories of Class*, published a year after he joined Leeds Camera Club. The modern state, he argued, rendered populations visible through statistical counting and demographic mapping for the purposes of intervention and order-building, with Bentham's panopticon – that invention for seeing-all – as the paradigm. It warrants a mention that Bauman wrote an endorsement for the cover of Yale anthropologist James C. Scott's *Seeing Like a State*.³⁰ Later, in *Legislators and Interpreters*, there is the 'gardening state' which embodies the tendency to see the social world as a potential wilderness in need of taming.

It is at this point that metaphor permeates his writings, which in his sociology is an appeal to visuality, to seeing things differently or in a new light. Metaphors play a dual role in Bauman's sociology. Firstly, he elucidates how solidified or familiarised concepts – that of 'assimilation', for example, in *Modernity and Ambivalence*, 'culture' in *Legislators and Interpreters* and 'class' in *Memories of Class* – have their provenance in metaphor, and how their appropriation reveals the working of power-laden social processes. He names this task *defamiliarisation*, an attempt to unravel what Hans Blumenberg termed the 'complex field of transitions from metaphors to concepts', wherein the metaphor is 'absorbed by the word'.³¹ The second role of metaphor is to provide a more adequate language for capturing societal shifts, *familiarising* them. Hannah Arendt is also an important source of inspiration for Bauman at this point. What she termed 'metaphorical thinking' was a practice of *seeing similars in dissimilars*.³² Her discussions of metaphor in her unfinished *Life of the Mind* are shot through with appeals to visuality and sight. The metaphor consists in 'bridging the abyss between inward and *invisible* mental activities and the world of *appearances*'. Metaphors 'serve as models to give us our bearings *lest we stagger blindly among experiences* that our bodily senses with their relative certainty of knowledge cannot guide us through'.³³

These sorts of connections between the thinker and the public in the ‘space of appearances’ can be made in Bauman’s short and fragmented, though extremely rich, reflections on photography. Photography, he reflected, ‘may only hope to be a window; never an eye’.³⁴ In other words, photography should not proscribe but opens up a world to its viewer, an invitation to explore it. Here, the reader must be reminded of how the Holocaust, as he encountered it as a reader of Janina’s *Winter in the Morning*, famously became a *window* for Bauman, displacing the image of a sealed and neatly delineated picture-frame. As a window, it points beyond itself, opening out on to the dark potential of modernity. It is also striking that we find that Bauman understood photography in terms that recall his well-known dictum that sociology ought to aspire towards ‘defamiliarizing the familiar’:

In our daily bustle, we rarely have time, or strength, or will to stop, to look around, to think. We pass by things giving them no chance to puzzle, baffle or just amuse. Photography may make up for our daily neglect. It may sharpen our eyesight, bring into focus things previously unnoticed, transform our experiences into knowledge.³⁵

Thinking Sociologically (2001), likewise, is effectively tantamount to the adoption of an unfamiliar way of seeing as well as a distantiating from inherited, ‘common-sense’ imaginative frameworks:

One could say that the main service the art of thinking sociologically may render to each and every one of us is to make us more *sensitive*; it may sharpen up our senses, open our eyes wider so that we can explore human conditions which thus far had remained all but invisible.³⁶

‘Tell me what is your praxis, and I’ll tell you what your world is’

A clue to understanding the kind of symbiosis between sociology and photography that I’m trying to make a case for here can be found in Bauman’s own cultural sociology. *Sketches in the Theory of Culture*, Bauman’s ‘lost book’, seized upon exile in 1968, begins with a reference to the ‘eternal praxeomorphism of the human way of seeing the world’, praxeomorphism defined as the way in which ‘people imagine the world in the way they’ve learned to model it’.³⁷ This curious concept – his own coinage – evokes *Culture as Praxis*, where he elaborated on the notion that culture consists of a permanent, processual practice of human *ordering* of the world, the continual attempt at generating solidity and certainty in a fundamentally uncertain environment. ‘Praxeomorphism’ returns in later discussion of Jean Baudrillard, himself a photographer who wrote at length on photography. As he put it: ‘it has been said that our perception of the world is incurably anthropomorphic. Wrong. It is *praxeomorphic*.’ He continues:

We know of the world in as far as we act upon it. The knowable world is what we do something about. And the knowledge of the world is the knowledge of what can be done, of what we are capable of doing. We make sense of the world in terms of our sensible (because purposeful) practices. In the age of mechanics, the nervous system appeared to Descartes or La Mettrie as a neat contraption of valves, gears, strings and fluids. This vision was later replaced by one of an electrical grid and transmission of impulses. Later still, in the age of the radar, intelligence was deciphered as the scanning of the space of possibilities. Now we see the brain as a computer, and what we see follows faithfully the capacities of successive computer generations. *Tell me what is your praxis, and I'll tell you what your world is.*³⁸

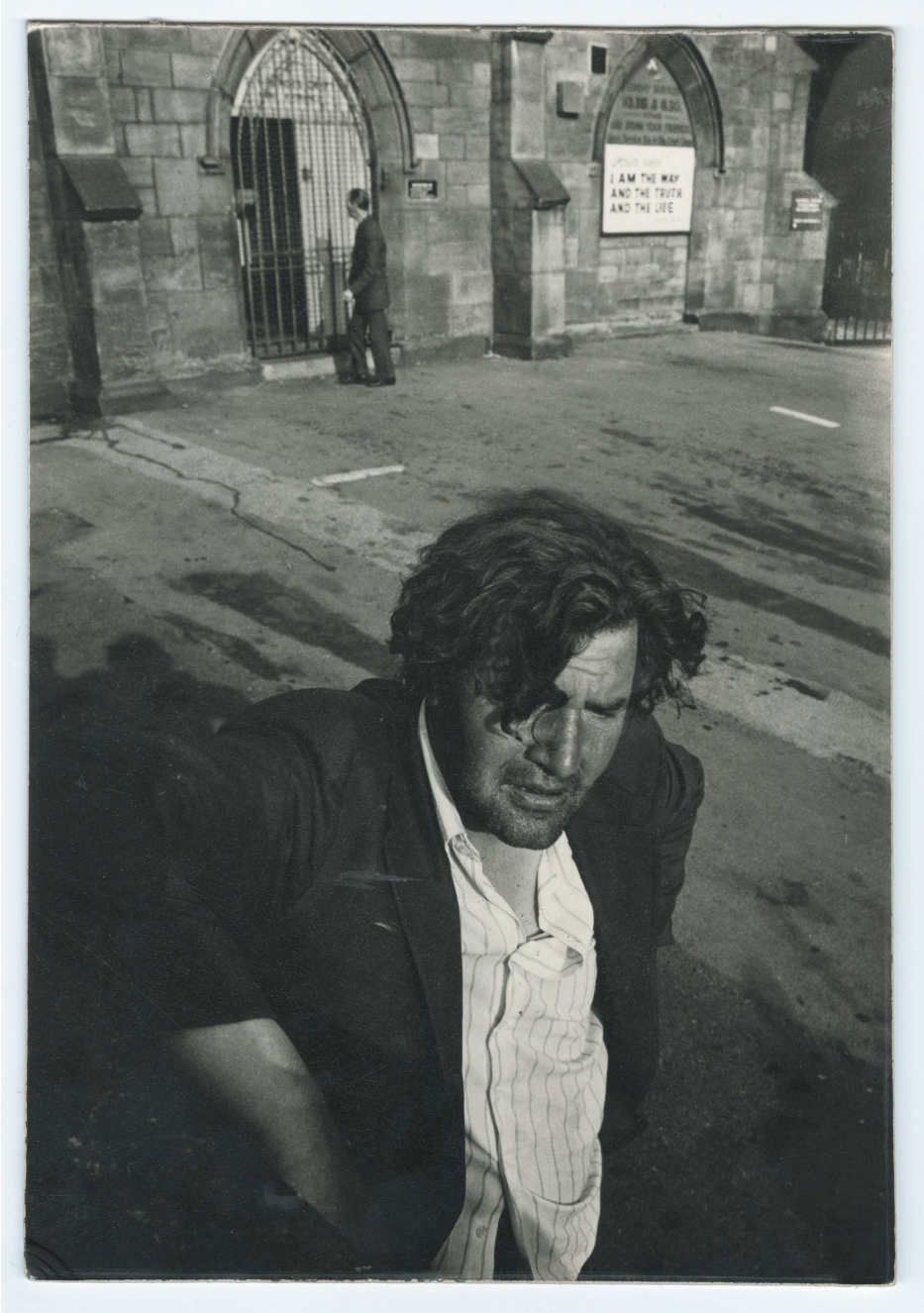
Is it so surprising, then, that his *praxis* as a photographer – honed in the Leeds Camera Club and moulded into a way of seeing in the world, defamiliarising everyday existence through the camera lens and freezing in form those transient moments in the liquidity of time – crossed over in the various ways that I have depicted into the *world* that he depicted in his sociology?

Notes

- 1 Charles Camic, Neil Gross and Michelle Lamont, 'Introduction: The Study of Social Knowledge Making', in *Social Knowledge in the Making* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 1–40.
- 2 Aleksandra Kania, 'Living with Zygmunt Bauman, Before and After', *Thesis Eleven*, 149.1 (2018), 88.
- 3 Zygmunt Bauman, *Making the Familiar Unfamiliar: Conversations with Peter Haffner* (Cambridge: Polity, 2020), 42.
- 4 Randall Collins, *The Sociology of Philosophies: A Global History of Intellectual Change* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998).
- 5 Pierre Bourdieu, *Homo Academicus* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988).
- 6 Peter Beilharz, *Intimacy in Postmodern Times: A Friendship with Zygmunt Bauman* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020).
- 7 Ken Plummer, *Documents of Life 2: An Invitation to Critical Humanism* (London: Sage, 2001).
- 8 See, for example, Zygmunt Bauman, 'Social Structure of the Party Organization in Industrial Works'. *Polish Sociological Bulletin*, 3–4 (1962), 50–64.
- 9 Jean Baudrillard, *Car l'illusion ne s'oppose pas à la réalité: Photographies* (Paris: Descartes, 1998); Howard Becker, 'Photography and Sociology', *Studies in Visual Communication*, 1.1 (1974), 3–26; Pierre Bourdieu, *Photography: A Middlebrow Art*, trans. Shaun Whiteside (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990 [1965]).
- 10 Zygmunt Bauman, 'The War against Forgetfulness', *Jewish Quarterly*, 36.1 (1989), 44–7. Reprinted pp. 28–34 above.
- 11 In 1987 minutes of Annual General Meeting. Leeds Camera Club records, West Yorkshire Archive Service, Leeds, WYL1612/1/13. The building, Grade II listed

- since 1976, now houses the Carriageworks Theatre and lucrative retail space, its transformation mirroring Leeds's consumerist boom.
- 12 See *Modernity and Ambivalence* (Cambridge: Polity, 1991) and *Postmodern Ethics* (Oxford: Blackwell).
 - 13 See *Memories of Class: The Prehistory and Afterlife of Class* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982) and *Work, Consumerism and the New Poor* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1998).
 - 14 Alan Wolinski, *Osmondthorpe: The Area that Time Forgot. A Study of Community Work on an Inter-war Council Estate* (Hertford: Dr Barnardo's, 1984).
 - 15 Becker, 'Photography and Sociology', 11.
 - 16 David Ralph Matthews, 'Commons versus Open Access: The Collapse of Canada's East Coast Fishery', *The Ecologist*, 25.2–3 (1995), 86.
 - 17 For a more-or-less complete record of Bauman's publications, see the 'living bibliography' on the Bauman Institute website, which I have helped to collate: <https://baumaninstitute.leeds.ac.uk/bauman-archive/living-bibliography/>.
 - 18 Letter from Zygmunt Bauman to Juan Corradi, 29 June 1987. In Papers of Janina and Zygmunt Bauman, MS 2067/B/5/2.
 - 19 Fujifilm developed and released the currently familiar form of disposable camera in 1986.
 - 20 As Sebald said of the central character in *Austerlitz*: 'Austerlitz himself, as an adult, then conspired, as it were against his own will, in this erasing of his own identity and constructed in his mind a system of avoidance which allowed him to ignore that which constantly troubled him. But as he drew towards retirement age, as so often happens, he felt obliged to confront this problem, and he goes in search, as someone aged around 60, of his own identity.' Quoted in Richard Sheppard, 'Three Encounters with W.G. Sebald (February 1992 – July 2013)', *Journal of European Studies*, 44.4 (2014), 394.
 - 21 Zygmunt Bauman, 'Thinking Photographically', in *Culture and Art: Selected Writings, Volume 1*, ed. Dariusz Brzeziński, Mark Davis, Jack Palmer and Thomas Campbell (Cambridge: Polity, 2021 [1983–1985]), 106.
 - 22 Bauman, 'The War against Forgetfulness', 45 (p. 30 above).
 - 23 Also with R. Kubicki, *Życie w kontekstach. Rozmowy o tym, co za nami i o tym, co przed nami* (*Life in Contexts: Conversations about What Lies Behind Us and What Lies Ahead of Us*) (Warsaw: WAiP, 2007).
 - 24 Quoted from Anna Zeidler-Janiszewska, 'Zygmunt Bauman's Images'. In Papers of Janina and Zygmunt Bauman, digital file, USB 17, 'AZJ_Zygmunt_Bauman'.
 - 25 See Zygmunt Bauman, *Wasted Lives: Modernity and Its Outcasts* (Cambridge: Polity, 2004).
 - 26 Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of the Leeds Camera Club, 25 February 1986. In records of Leeds Camera Club, WYL1612/1/13.
 - 27 Quoted in Anna Zeidler-Janiszewska, 'Zygmunt Bauman's Images'.
 - 28 Simon Dawes, 'The Role of the Intellectual in Liquid Modernity: An Interview with Zygmunt Bauman', *Theory, Culture & Society*, 28.3 (2011), 131.

- 29 See, for example, Habermas-influenced discussions *Towards a Critical Sociology: An Essay on Commonsense and Emancipation* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1976) and *Hermeneutics and Social Science: Approaches to Understanding* (London: Hutchinson and Co., 1978).
- 30 James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).
- 31 Hans Blumenberg, *Paradigms for a Metaphorology*, trans. R. Savage (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010), 81.
- 32 Bryan Cheyette, *Diasporas of the Mind: Jewish and Postcolonial Writing and the Nightmare of History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 8.
- 33 Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), vol. 1, 104, 109.
- 34 Bauman, 'Thinking Photographically', 111.
- 35 Bauman, 'Thinking Photographically', 106.
- 36 Zygmunt Bauman, *Thinking Sociologically* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 16.
- 37 Zygmunt Bauman, *Sketches in the Theory of Culture* (Cambridge: Polity, 2018 [1968]), 7.
- 38 Zygmunt Bauman, 'The Second Disenchantment'. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 4 (1988), 738 (my emphasis).



Who is this guy? A man to be afraid of, or one who has been wronged? Victim or perpetrator, or both? Angry, or lost, in despair? A lost soul in the churchyard, or caught by it, frozen in a moment of time?

He does not seem to be homeless; or, at least, he is well dressed. Hair styled? A touch of suave? Shirt tails out, three-day growth, dishevelled, coming off a bender? Jacket sleeve elevated, as was the fashion then, in the 1980s. Remember *Miami Vice*? Not so slick, no pastels, no Don Johnson this. Sick? Alienated? Exasperated? Manic depression, that frustrating mess?

Our photographer employs the period critical device of irony, or juxtaposition. The church's weekly banner announces imminent salvation. Could he be the unwanted arrival, the next preacher? The message is clear: I Am The Way, I Am The Light etc. But salvation is off-centre, too far away. The dominant figure is balanced by another, a turnkey, or minder, who goes about his business, the business of minding rather than salvation. The church is closed. The light is bright; our subject blinks, or his eyes are hooded in reaction. The asphalt is moist. The angle of the camera seems somehow to be elevated.

It's a close-up, staged and framed by its moment. How did Bauman capture this image? Close-up may also mean danger, or at least mutual vulnerability. The photographer violates the space of the subject, risks his humiliation in capturing him down and out, inelegant, indisposed, out of control even if just for the moment. They dance, or perhaps they spin like boxers, for that moment, held together, but wary of the glancing blow or knockout. Street photographers need to know how to run.

The gift of the study is in its sense of the uncanny, its indeterminacy. There is something going on here, but we have no clear idea of what it is. This photograph is not posed, or composed. It carries the atmosphere of the 1980s, early Thatcher, and it conveys some sense of anxiety, of uncertainty. It conveys a mood, but not a message. Its purpose is not enlightenment, so much as to hang an imaginary question mark over the image and the world it emerges out of. This was, after all, Bauman's purpose in photography, as in sociology – not to answer questions, but to help pose them. Like a child looking into a kaleidoscope for the first time, the result is intriguing and disorienting at the same time. Such was his purpose, as best we know: to affirm humanity, to contemplate, or to look into the abyss, and to wonder if we might be capable of better looking after each other.

Peter Beilharz





When I was about twelve, we came from Israel to Leeds, to visit *Saba* and *Sabta*, my grandparents. I spent much of the visit alone, wandering around their dim mysterious home, with wild vegetation covering its windows. Piles upon piles of books filled the rooms and heaps of interesting artefacts were scattered all over the place. *Saba's* photographs accompanied you up the stairs and *Sabta's* beautiful ceramic pots were scattered on the shelves.

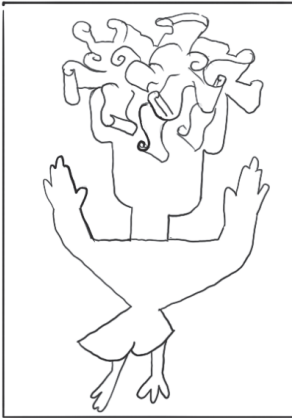


On one of my research trips around the house I came across a framed postcard that hung in the hallway near *Saba's* study. It was Dali's painting of Jesus on a cross. As I examined the intriguing scene in front of me, I heard *Saba* behind me.

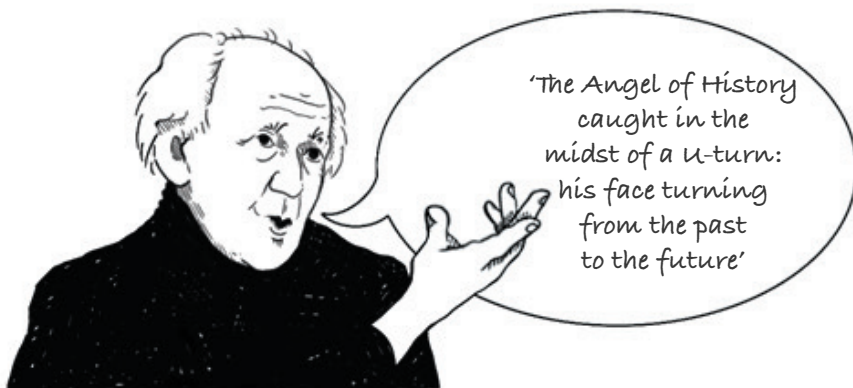


It was then that I became aware of the artists' presence in their own work. Ever since that event, whenever I inspect an artwork sharing the artist's point of view, I make sure to look also at the artist herself.

And thus, when I stood in my grandparents' kitchen in front of this portrait, I saw *Saba* watching *Sabta* staring at the unknown. This reminded me of two paintings: Paul Klee's *Angel of History* (1920) and René Magritte's *Not to Be Reproduced* (1937).



Paraphrasing Walter Benjamin, *Saba* wrote in his last book, *Retrotopia*, that the angel is actually changing his point of view from the past to the future, and is thus caught in limbo between the past and the future. In *Saba's* photograph, *Sabta* is with her back to us, her pensive gaze directed out of the frame. What is she thinking about? The past or the future? *Saba* depicted her well. In life, just as in the photo, *Sabta's* thoughts are outside the frame. And so were *Saba's*. What they thought could only be found in the books they wrote. If at all.





Magritte often dealt with concealment. He believed that the things we see hide the thing that, in fact, we want to see. There is a much concealment in the portrait. The curtain fills more than half the composition; one can hardly see *Sabta's* face. The movement of *Sabta's* hand appears staged, but I may be perceiving it in this way because I remember being directed by *Saba* when I modelled for him. There is something romantic about

Saba peeking over *Sabta's* shoulder. I look at her together with him and wonder what he thinks of her. Does he see her as a reflection of himself? In many ways I did see them as one unit.

Maybe *Saba* wouldn't have agreed with my analysis of the photo. But hey, truth is in the eye of the beholder.

Emi Sfard

