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## Chapter III

### On the Margins:

#### Bauman at the University of Leeds, 1971-91.

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#### Introduction

For readers of this volume, it might be hard to grasp that Bauman was not always the quintessential ‘public sociologist’. Nevertheless, for almost all of his tenure (1971-91) at the University of Leeds he was a ‘professional sociologist’ (Burawoy, 2021). Bauman published books and articles in this time, though in notably fewer numbers than in his pre-exile and post-retirement phases. But he also taught, took responsibility for departmental administration, supervised PhD students, and experienced the mundane frustration of such endeavors.<sup>1</sup> This changed with the publication of *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Bauman, 1989), which won the Amalfi Prize and established Bauman as a ‘European intellectual’ (see Palmer & Brzeziński, 2022). It is jarring, then, to read Laurie Taylor’s admission in his 1989 review of that book that Bauman was a ‘consistently undervalued sociologist’, who now warranted ‘a place at the *centre* of analytical enquiry’ (Taylor, 1990: 16). Bauman was *marginal* in British sociology (see Jacobsen and Tester, 2006: 263-4), a status compounded by the erasure of his work in Poland where he was a *persona non grata*.

In this chapter, we consider the development of some of Bauman’s rich and still unjustly marginalized works of the Leeds period. Through archival research, we situate these works in

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<sup>1</sup> An example of Bauman’s disdain for university administration is provided by Max Farrar: ‘In 1994 I asked him if he’d supervise the thesis I really would write, now I’d spent 25 years gathering the material I needed. He said “PhDs are a waste of time; don’t bother”. He added that he’d only begun to really think when he retired from university life’ (Farrar, 2018).

Bauman's intellectual networks and in relation to his courses, emphasising Bauman's professional life in Leeds not as ancillary to his theoretical work, but an important factor in its genesis. We suggest that the sociology department in Leeds, marginal in the intellectual life of the UK, provided a setting for the development of his searing theorization of marginality.

### **Bauman and British Sociology: Arrival in Leeds**

How did Bauman become Head of Sociology at Leeds? Departmental lore says Vice-Chancellor Edward Boyle, a British Conservative Party politician, thought the campus too uniform and recruited two Marxists to Social Studies: Ralph Miliband and Bauman. When the incumbent head, Albert Hanson, died suddenly at a Commons select committee, Boyle asked Bauman, about to start in 1971, to take over; soon after, Social Studies split into Politics (Miliband) and Sociology (Bauman). Sociology itself had a marginal position in British intellectual culture upon Bauman's arrival. Although distinctively British traditions of social thought can be traced back to seventeenth century (Scott, 2018), the discipline of sociology did not receive substantial institutional support in Britain until the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The post-war period, with its intensified developmentalist agendas in the British imperial territories, generated a substantial upturn for British sociology (Palmer, forthcoming). The first issue of the *British Journal of Sociology* was published in 1950, and the British Sociological Association was formed the following year (Halsey, 2004: 72).

Professional sociology strengthened, but public sociology stayed nascent, constrained by Britain's hostility to public intellectualism (see Turner, 2006). The contrast with Poland was sharp. C.W. Mills, commenting on Leszek Kołakowski being singled out by Władysław Gomułka in the midst of the 'March events' of 1968 (and by implication this was also a comment on Bauman), noted in amazement: 'What you, intellectuals, do matters' (Mills quoted in Bauman, 1987a: 162). In Britain, as in Mills' post-McCarthyist America, intellectuals – and especially sociologists like Bauman – were largely left alone and paid little attention. This was, for Bauman, both a bane and a privilege:

To say that sociology had a 'bad press' [in Britain] would be to play down that mixture of hostility and ridicule in which it seemed to be held ... Once more, I was shocked: how remarkably prestigious the public position of sociology was by comparison in France, Germany, or indeed my native Poland, where it settled in the public worldview on the tide of the late-nineteenth century rising optimism and self-confidence (Bauman contributing to Halsey, 2004: 207)

Sociology at Leeds was doubly marginal, as a classic ‘redbrick’ civic university lacking in the prestige enjoyed by the ‘Oxbridge’ universities, or the socio-cultural centrality of the LSE. Sociology only existed as a standalone discipline at Leeds from 1945, after Arnold N Shimmin, an industrial sociologist, established a Department of Social Studies (see Shimmin, 1954). The South African émigré John Rex was a PhD student in the early days of Leeds Social Studies. A letter sent to Bauman prior to his arrival notes the existence of a ‘Leeds tradition’ of sociology, reading: ‘there are a number of us who are conscious of the tradition and who have done what we can to keep it alive. I think it really originated in the work and teaching of John Rex’.<sup>2</sup>

What did this tradition inhere in? It consisted in a sociology that was cosmopolitan in orientation and historical in its underpinnings, a spirit that Rex himself articulated when he wrote that ‘no one should pretend to be a sociologist who has not studied and lived spiritually within less than three or four separate cultures widely separated from each other in time and place’ (Rex, 1974: 231-232). Rex’s own work attended to the centrality of racial differencing in the formation of modernity, especially in Southern Africa. Also at Leeds in the pre-Bauman days was Fernando Henriques who focused on the consequences of Atlantic slavery on Jamaican family structure. Roland Robertson, who later coined the term ‘globalisation’, worked with John Peter Nettle to develop a critique of prevailing notions of modernisation on the basis of their Eurocentrism (Nettl & Robertson, 1968: 42-3), and Bryan Wilson established Leeds as a major centre for the sociology of religion with his global-comparative work (Wilson, 1961).

All had departed by the time of Bauman’s arrival. Indeed, part of the case for appointing Bauman and Miliband was a fear that Social Studies was becoming a stepping-stone to senior posts elsewhere. But the cosmopolitan spirit and the encouragement of students to think in global terms of reference was developed by Bauman, as is evident in certain staffing appointments he oversaw, including the Korea expert Aidan Foster Carter and the anthropologist of the Soviet Caucasus, Tamara Dragadze. Sybille van der Sprenkel, from 1972, taught for many years on ‘the social structure of China’ and there was also a course on the sociology of Canadian society. If students wanted to learn like this in the contemporary higher education landscape in Britain, they would likely have to study specialized modules in history or politics departments with relevant area specialisms rather than sociology. Notably, Janet

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<sup>2</sup> Letter from Alan Dawes to Zygmunt Bauman, 7th, January 1971. Papers of Janina and Zygmunt Bauman, MS2067/3/1. Special Collections of the Brotherton Library, University of Leeds.

Wolff and Sarah Fildes introduced a course on ‘sexual divisions and society’ from 1977 and, alongside the appointment of Griselda Pollock in the fine art department in the same year, reflected Leeds’ importance as a site of feminist theorizing. Both Wolff and Pollock are notably credited as early readers of Janina Bauman’s Warsaw Ghetto testimony *Winter in the Morning* (J. Bauman, 1986), and the latter alongside Bryan Chetty in the English department and Max Silverman in French, were important interlocutors of Bauman’s Holocaust sociology and incorporated its transdisciplinary challenge into teaching on an MA in Cultural Studies.

### **Bauman and Sociological Theory**

Courses that were led by Bauman himself are strikingly connected to his central preoccupations of the time. Indeed, considering Bauman’s own teaching in this time suggests that he saw teaching as anything but marginal to research activities. This is apparent in terms of changes that he made to the degree structure in the early years of his tenure.<sup>3</sup> In his first year, he inherited a course called ‘Sociology 1: Central Issues, Theories and Concepts’. Lectures were ‘devoted to systematic discussion of sociological theories’ including ‘social integration, the types of social bonds, the nature of authority and inequality, and the paradigm of stability and change’ (Yearbook 1971-72, E81). From 1972-73, this had been reconfigured and split up. One course Bauman taught was ‘History of Sociology’, amounting to approximately sixty lectures, covering themes such as ‘structures of theoretical thinking, elements of the sociology of sociology, social theory and ideology ... order and integration, inequality, change, unity and diversity’. He also taught ‘Approaches to Sociological Theory’, which considered ‘central propositions about the nature of sociology and society advanced by the major figures in the development of sociological thought from the nineteenth century to the present day’, with particular emphasis on Marx, Weber, Durkheim and Parsons. From 1974-75, he taught ‘contemporary sociological theory’, which covered ‘major departures in sociological theory in the second half of the twentieth century’ (Yearbook 1974-75, E95). Themes included positivism and analytical sociology, the impact of phenomenological, ethnomethodological, hermeneutic and existential approaches, structuralism, the Frankfurt School, Neo-Marxism, and critical sociology.

Noted here should be the synergies between what Bauman was teaching and what he was publishing at the time. There were standalone essays on the philosophical foundations and

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<sup>3</sup> These changes are observable in the calendar yearbooks of the University of Leeds which can be accessed digitally through the Special Collections of the Brotherton Library, classmark LUA/PUB/003/3.

limitations of emergent trends in social theory (Bauman, 1973a; 1973b). In a critique of ethnomethodology, Bauman appreciated its sensitivity to everyday sense-making but was ultimately wary of how it bracketed out structural, historical, and moral dimensions of social life, and risked treating common sense as both method and object. In his reflections on structuralism, by contrast, Bauman welcomed its potential to overcome relativism and to introduce formal rigor into the study of meaning, but warned against the reduction of culture to a code or grammar (see Brzeziński, 2022). In *Towards a Critical Sociology* (Bauman, 1976a), these tensions are drawn into a broader philosophical project. Here, Bauman brought together neo-Marxism, existentialism, and the critical theory of the Frankfurt School to articulate a sociology not of what is, but of what could be—a ‘sociology of possibility.’ (see Tester, 2004) This critical posture complemented by a sustained engagement with hermeneutics, which he credited to his formative education in Warsaw (See Tabet, 2017). Bauman advanced an interpretive sociology grounded in dialogical understanding, culminating in *Hermeneutics and Social Science* (1978). Rejecting both positivist objectivism and the idealism of classical historicist hermeneutics, Bauman argued that sociological understanding is not about recovering the author’s intentions or reconstructing objective social facts, or about total immersion in the feelings and thoughts of others, but rather consists in ‘sharing in a form of life’ (Bauman, 1978: 217).

The secondary literature covers Bauman’s 1970s–80s concerns and their bearing on his work (see especially Beilharz, 2000; Tester, 2004). Our point is that these concerns gestated in the department in which he was situated; for example, his engagement with hermeneutic dialogue benefited from exchanges with Leeds colleagues. These include figures like Janet Wolff, whose own work on hermeneutics and aesthetics (Wolff, 1975) formed part of a shared Leeds intellectual milieu deeply influenced by continental thought. His PhD students at Leeds also may have played a role in the gestation of his theoretical ideas of the time. They include Richard Kilminster, who became a colleague in the 1970s and whose doctoral work formed the basis of his ‘Praxis and Method’ (Kilminster, 1979). Another was Josef Bleicher, awarded a PhD in 1981 for a project titled ‘The Hermeneutic Imagination’, published the following year (Bleicher, 1982) (awarded in 1981), Robert Tristram’s ‘Critique and/or Science’ (awarded in 1980). Other notable supervisees in British social theory were Roy Boyne, who completed a thesis on ‘Sociology, Poetics and the History of Ideas’ in 1981, and the late Keith Tester, whose first book *Animals and Society* (Tester, 1991) was based on the PhD supervised by Bauman and who in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century became a pioneering figure of Bauman studies, as well as a brilliant moral and cultural sociologist in his own right.

## Bauman and Cultural Marginality

Also particularly notable is that, from early on in his time at Leeds and more-or-less continually until the late 1980s, Bauman taught an optional course on ‘Sociology of Culture’, unfolding over 20 lectures. The early reading list contained Piaget’s *Structuralism*, Manners and Kaplan *Theory in Anthropology* and George Steiner’s *In Bluebeard’s Castle*, the latter, given its important early treatment of the Holocaust and cultural memory, particularly interesting in light of Bauman’s later preoccupations. In the early 1970s, the course covered ‘Hierarchical, discriminatory and generic concepts of culture. Main stages and issues in the development of anthropological theory. Culture and social structure. Semiotic interpretation of culture. Crisis of culture in the modern world’ (Yearbook 1972-73, E85). These themes were carried in exile, so to speak, as central themes of his ‘lost book’, *Sketches in the Theory of Culture* (Bauman, 2018), seized in the tumult of expulsion in 1968, and are also clearly connected to articles dating from this time (see Bauman, 1968).

The themes of the course also pertain to the distinctive form of cultural sociology that Bauman promulgated in his inaugural lecture at the University of Leeds. In this important document of his intellectual development, Bauman critiques sociological models that treat culture as either a passive reflection of structures or a closed symbolic code, insisting instead that culture is an open-ended space of moral imagination and purposive activity, a *praxis* in other words, and to study society is always already to engage in this praxis (Bauman, 2021 [1972]). *Culture as Praxis* (Bauman, 1999 [1973]) was published the following year and elaborated on these themes. A particularly prominent role in this work is given to *marginality*, seen by Bauman not as a social defect or anomaly, but as a constitutive feature of cultural systems, a necessary byproduct of any attempt to impose order on the world. Cultural order, once established, inevitably excludes alternative ways of thinking and being, rendering some individuals or groups ‘outsiders’ whose existence exposes its own arbitrariness. But marginality is also a potential source of critical insight and transformation. Marginal figures play a crucial role in cultural praxis: they challenge the taken-for-granted rules, reveal the contingency of social norms, and force society to confront its own moral ambivalence.

Upon receiving a proposal to republish *Culture as Praxis* in the late 1990s, Bauman admitted:

...it all began from here. This was the only place and time when and where I clarified, for my at least satisfaction, the notion of ‘culture’, and the results I applied in all my later work, sticking

by and large to the formulations I have arrived at then and there. Moreover, the book looks in retrospect a pioneering thing - it was published well before the culturalistic fads emerged and well before the discovery of structuration ... you would make me utterly happy if you go ahead with the idea.<sup>4</sup>

We can indeed see its imprint across the work, especially in the ‘modern trilogy’ which bookended his retirement, *Legislators and Interpreters* (1987b), *Modernity and the Holocaust* (1989) and *Modernity and Ambivalence* (1991), carried through into *Liquid Modernity* (2000a) and the plethora of books that follow it. They inform his commitment to the *marginalized*, as well as his extolling of the virtues of the hermeneutic vantage point of marginality. Bauman’s early concern with the marginalised working class expands over time beyond economic marginality (even if, as a committed socialist, economic inequality remained a dominant concern, see Bauman, 2013) into a broader theorisation of marginalization shaped by modernity’s ‘will-to-order’ (Davis, 2008: 54). This is a major factor in Bauman’s ‘Jewish writings’ which begin to be published not long before his retirement and which have been considered in standalone articles (Cheyette, 2020; Dawson, 2020), and in his reflections on the social position of exile and its universalising into a vision of the sociological imagination that entails adopting a vantage point of estrangement so as to ‘defamiliarise the familiar’ (e.g. Bauman, 1990; Bauman, 1996; Bauman, 2000b). The centrality of marginality recurs in his sociological metaphorology of the *vagabond* (Bauman, 1998a) and the *flawed consumer* (Bauman, 1998b), categories which were intended to capture how late-modern societies marginalize those who are cast aside by social, economic, and cultural systems that privilege mobility, productivity, and consumption (Bauman, 2004).

All of the above is exemplary of the normatively-charged, humanistic and writerly sociology for which Bauman became world-renowned, a veritable *public* sociology. But it is important to acknowledge how they were underpinned by theory of culture that was itself embedded in and nourished by a *professional* environment. In the foreword to the aforementioned second edition of *Culture as Praxis*, Bauman reflected that on the difficulties he had in explaining to the Leeds university planning committee the merits of establishing a new inter-departmental Centre of Cultural Studies (Bauman, 1999 [1973]: ix). This centre was established in 1985, with Janet Wolff as its founding director, replaced on her departure from Leeds by Griselda Pollock in 1987. Bauman’s nod to the process of its institutionalisation at

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<sup>4</sup> Letter from Zygmunt Bauman to Chris Rojek, 1<sup>st</sup> March 1996. In Janina and Zygmunt Bauman Archive MS2067/3/6

Leeds is a rare acknowledgement of Randall Collins' argument that intellectual life hinges not so much on the production of texts as on 'interaction rituals' in the form of lectures, debates, and other kinds of structured discussion which are 'chained together' with texts; the texts are situationally embodied in the relational networks in which intellectual life is entangled (Collins, 1998: 26-27). It follows that the ideas that are familiar to readers of Bauman's books did not gestate in the mind of its author sat at his desk, but in dialogic interaction with others, including at the University of Leeds.

### **Bauman and Communist Modernity**

Patrick Baert implies that major extraneous events that result in displacement paradoxically provides intellectuals greater opportunity than intellectuals who never experience it, because it is the case that 'the more the intellectual is known, the more likely the repositioning will have to be accounted for' (Baert, 2015: 183). This is instructive for thinking about how Bauman, at Leeds, seemed to go out of his way to avoid the label of Sovietologist that had marked his 'Western' reception as a Polish scholar, as a specialist of 'Polish issues' (See Palmer, 2023: 47). As he admitted in an interview, 'I had no intention of living the second half of my life off the first' (Bauman quoted in Tester & Jacobsen, 2005: 44).

It is curious, then, that Bauman also introduced a course on 'Sociology of Communist Societies' from his early tenure at Leeds. It included 'peasants and peasant revolutions. Major social groups of post-revolutionary societies and the changing pattern of social structure. Dimensions of status inequality. The partynomial political system and major political institutions and conflicts. Circulation of elites' (Yearbook 1974-75, E99). Again, each of these are major themes of his sociology of communism of Eastern Europe which continued at Leeds, even if somewhat under the radar. Here, he theorised the communist societies as existing in a post-1968 'system management phase', a moment of stabilisation and normalisation after the failed utopias and barbarisms of earlier stages of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Party, as he wrote in a paper originally written for a Berkeley colloquium on 'the politics of change in the Soviet Union', had become preoccupied less with the final destination of its trajectory than 'to the road itself – becoming less goal-oriented and more means-wise' (Bauman, 1976: 88).

Exile-generated marginality also afforded Bauman a greater capacity to express critical thought than in the stifling environment of actually-existing communism in Poland. In an essay originally presented at the 1973 British Sociological Association conference – and recall here the significance that such conferences possess as 'interaction rituals' in Collins' terms – Bauman sets himself explicitly against the 'Soviet version of official Marxism' with its 'vision

of a tough, inflexible, solid structure’, proposing in its stead an ‘open-endedness and inconclusiveness of human praxis, on which Marx repeatedly insisted throughout his work’ (Bauman, 1974: 132).

Bauman’s teaching and research on communism at Leeds helped shape his broader theorization of modernity. In a 1973 essay, he argued that Eastern European societies should not be seen as underdeveloped versions of Western modernity, but as distinct systems requiring their own analytical frameworks (Bauman, 1973c). His work sought to incorporate Soviet-style socialism into a wider understanding of modernity, emphasizing the dual power structures of class and officialdom (Bauman, 1974). A key influence during this period was Reinhard Bendix, with whom Bauman had a collegial relationship. Bauman was asked to facilitate the translation of Bendix’s work into Polish and oversaw the awarding of an honorary doctorate to him at Leeds in 1976, likely a strategic move to raise the department’s profile.<sup>5</sup> Bauman also engaged critically with Weber’s theory of bureaucracy, arguing that communist parties, unlike their Western counterparts, fused legitimacy, command, and direction within a single institutional structure (Bauman, 1976c). This critique informed his later reflections on the dangers of bureaucratic rationality in *Modernity and the Holocaust*, which some, like Paul du Gay (1999), saw as a misreading of Weber. Yet Bauman’s interpretation was shaped by his East European experience, where legitimacy was rooted in a future-oriented socialist vision rather than tradition or charisma.

The idea of ‘perfect planning’ (Bauman, 1966) is central here, constituting ‘the major instrument of such a teleological determination. One speaks of the *emergence* of capitalism, but of the *construction* of socialism; the advent of a socialist or communist society can only come about through a conscious and persistent effort of planning and the implementation of plans’ (Bauman, 1974: 138). The institutional expression of this specific form of authority characteristic of communist societies is *partymonialism*, power derived not from a supreme leader but from the Party understood as a ‘vanguard, to whom the road ahead is visible in contrast to the masses who must be led’ (Bauman, 1974: 136). It is reasonably clear to see how these more specific reflections on the specifically Soviet future-orientation as rational mastery feeds into his reflections on utopia. In *Socialism: The Active Utopia* (Bauman, 1976b) which appeared in a series edited by Tom Bottomore, there is a sustained engagement with existing socialism in the Soviet Union which, Bauman argues, deigned to institutionalise socialism in

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<sup>5</sup> See, for example, a letter detailing the Polish translation of *Max Weber: An Intellectual Portrait* from Reinhard Bendix to Zygmunt Bauman, 24 May 1971, JZB, MS2067/3/1.

the absence of the material conditions necessary for its emergence. Against this depiction of socialism as an end state propelled by an orientation that aims at rational mastery of the future, Bauman theorised utopia as a guiding orientation responsive to the open-ended dynamism of social conditions.

This informs another of Bauman's marginal essays of the Leeds period which constitutes an early treatment of how the pursuit of utopia via blueprints in the 20<sup>th</sup> century's catastrophes, namely 'Stalin and the Peasant Revolution: A Case Study in the Dialectics of Master and Slave' (Bauman, 1977). Originally published in Polish, in *Aneks* journal, a publication that a small group of post-1968 émigrés, mostly Polish Jews, created in exile, it appeared in English in 1985, in the obscure location of the *Leeds Occasional Papers in Sociology*. The piece again discusses the particular form of modernisation taken in the Soviet Union and Russia in particular. The Bolshevik revolution, Bauman holds, was not a workers revolution but the peasants revolution. They were the initial driving force of the revolution and then became its victims, when the forces of modernization were set in motion by the new people in power, among them intellectuals. Much of this work, then, seems also to anticipate the critique of 'legislative reason' and the danger of social engineering guided by the design of blueprints that define *Legislators and Interpreters* (1987b). As much was intimated by Peter Beilharz who declared *Legislators* could be consider a *samizdat* text of Bauman, nominally taking *les philosophes* as its point of departure but which is also, perhaps especially, about the Bolsheviks.

Several important points follow from this, the most obvious being that Keith Tester was correct in positing that Bauman's continuation of his work on communism post-exile constitutes 'the hinge between his particular Polish studies and the more general sociological inquiries for which he became known in the late 1980s and 1990s' (Tester, 2004: 82). It was, however, in no small part the relatively marginal position of Leeds, distant in both psychic and geographical terms from Warsaw, that enabled this development. It may well also be the case that the global orientation that characterised the Leeds curriculum ensured that teaching could serve as a vehicle for an ongoing intellectual attempt to theorise communism as modernity on his own terms.

### **Towards Public Sociology: De-industrialising Leeds and the Neoliberal University**

Peter Beilharz also noted that the presence of Leeds is detectable in *Memories of Class* (Bauman, 1982), a book which delved back into his longstanding interest in the UK labour movement and looks forward to the development of his sociology of postmodernity (see

Bauman and Beilharz, 2001: 336). This book was written in witness to the Thatcherite programme of neoliberalism, felt intensely at the university itself. As Bauman wrote to Miliband, ‘bit by bit, the flesh is cut away, and people clearly grow used to it.’<sup>6</sup> Some thirty years later, in an essay on the crisis of universities that reads as if it could have been about UK universities today, Bauman reflected that:

Once evident functions of the universities are ... far from obvious today. The principles which in the past seemed to legitimize beyond doubt the centrality of the universities are no more universally accepted, if not dismissed as obsolete or even retrospectively condemned. One is tempted to surmise that it is this ever more visible absence of *institutional* anchorage that is reflected in the widely noted, and mostly bewailed, transformation of the intellectual atmosphere characteristic of academic work — and particularly in the striking lack of intellectual self confidence and trust in *philosophical* foundations of academic work (Bauman, 1996: 49)

Here, it becomes clear that Bauman’s view that real intellectual work begins in retirement had structural underpinnings and was not just derived from a personal aversion to university administration. As he put it in starker terms to another correspondent on the eve of the end of his time at Leeds: ‘The university is not the University I joined seventeen years ago’; it is evaluated by its ‘service to industry’ at a time when industry ‘is in Britain engaged in a disappearing act’.<sup>7</sup> This disappearing act was a focus of the final chapter of *Memories of Class* which has a premonitory character in terms of the direction of Bauman’s thought. He argues that the great majority of the population in countries like the UK have been ‘effectively deprived ... the role of homo faber’ and thus ‘the profit-operated industry must do its best to train them in the role of consumers; in practice, this amounts to the continuous channelling of all and any social grievance and disaffection into the demands for a greater share in some or other consumer goods’ (Bauman, 1982: 124).

The largest city in West Yorkshire, Leeds sat within the former heartlands of textiles production and close to the front-line of the miners strike which took place a couple of years following the publication of *Memories of Class*. But it is surely significant that it became, in the time which it was his home, a quintessential *postmodern* city. Between 1980 and 2008 Leeds underwent an extensive transformation, driven by an urban strategy that inhered in transforming the coal-blackened, decaying Victorian built environment of industrial Leeds into

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<sup>6</sup> Letter from Zygmunt Bauman to Ralph Miliband, 26 January 1981, Ralph Miliband Papers, Special Collections of the Brotherton Library, University of Leeds, MS1712, CO16.

<sup>7</sup> Letter from Zygmunt Bauman to Juan Corradi, 29 June 1987, JZB, MS 2067/B/5/2

a significant node of the service sector, predominantly financial and legal services, and as a centre for shopping (Douglas, 2009).

Bauman of course documented these transformations and the forces of global capitalism that were driving them in generalising terms in his social thought, particularly in its 'liquid modern' period and his writings on consumerism, as is very well established. It is interesting to note, however, that these processes and their specific effects on the urban landscape of Leeds featured in his photographic work. A Leeds exhibition of his photographs entitled 'Street Messages' depicted the city's transformation and its side-effects of urban blight and the emergence of the 'new poor' (Bauman, 1998b). Here, a hobby explored in the margins of his working life takes on a sensitizing role in the development of his social thought (on the relationship between Bauman's photography and sociology, see Palmer, 2022).

### **Conclusion**

Surveying Bauman's time as a professional sociologist at the University of Leeds, before his elevation to public sociologist in the wake of the publication of *Modernity and the Holocaust*, adds lesser-known themes to our understanding of his oeuvre and deepens more familiar ones. The courses he taught, the way he reformed the curriculum, the ambiance of the department he led, his work with PhD students, and the activities he pursued outside of the workplace help us grasp the professional materiality within which his now-famous theoretical work took shape. These are, we claim, of genuine significance to the understanding of Bauman's thought and the reckoning with his intellectual legacy. In historicising and contextualising Bauman's oeuvre by attending to important dimensions of his intellectual practice, persistently overlooked in spite of the now-voluminous secondary literature on his published work, we contribute not simply some biographical colour but situate Bauman's intellectual work in the institutional, pedagogical, and professional conditions of its time.

Beyond Bauman, this approach also raises a challenge to how we think about the *practice* of social theory, and more specifically the tendency to marginalize, or even neglect completely, the significance of teaching in exegetical work on social theorists. This may well have to do with the contemporary devaluation of the teaching of social theory, which is particularly pronounced in the British universities, whose 'vocationalisation' has intensified at great pace since Bauman retired. Our contention is that this structural devaluation of teaching social theory undoubtedly has repercussions in terms of the production of theoretical work itself. Despite his proclivity to bewail the administrative functions of his position at Leeds, this role clearly had a sensitising and facilitative role in the development of the thought for which

he has become so well known. What we have sketched here, vis-à-vis Bauman, is proposed as a plea for a sociology of sociology, not as the provision of historical curios for anoraks of the discipline, but as a vital part of disciplinary self-understanding and actualisation in acutely challenging times for UK universities and the position of sociology within them.

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