

## **Zygmunt Bauman, Culture and Sociology**

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Culture is ubiquitous, and so, it sometimes seems, is cultural studies. The visual turn now replaces the cultural or linguistic turn of the postwar period in western intellectual life. Ours is a visual age, an age, apparently, of image, sign, symbol. The emergence of popular culture as an intellectual concern, posited by Antonio Gramsci, and developed through the work of the Birmingham School has led to a process where textuality rules, whether in written or especially in visual form. Whether or not film or video replaces the book, or essay, these are nevertheless cultural forms which have material frameworks and constraints. Modes of information are still, in some senses, modes of production or creation. Culture needs to be interpreted within and against the framework of social relations which makes it possible, and frames its availability.

If in this context cultural studies is transfixed with representation, ordinary sociology is often so tired as to seem useful without being interesting. There are exceptions; the work of Zygmunt Bauman is one of them. This work is exceptional because it responds to the signs of the times, but mediates this practical level of culture with the theoretical culture we inherit from the classics, not least here Marx, Weber and Freud. Bauman develops some of leading claims and critiques of classical sociology to formulate a critique of modernism, and then to anticipate the postmodern, even as he insists that a sociology of the postmodern may be more powerful or less immanent than a postmodern sociology.

In this paper I offer a reading of Bauman's views on culture back through the work of his classical interlocutors, especially Marx, Weber, and Freud. Returning to his early work, especially *Culture as Praxis* (1973) and *Towards a Critical Sociology*

(1976), my argument is that these initial sensibilities are worked through with passing reference to Foucault and especial reference to Lévi-Strauss and the idea of structuring as an activity. Culture is a structuring activity, sometimes successful and sometimes happy, sometimes significant as creative or ordinary or tragic destruction, sometimes more anthropologically indicative of the incremental repetition and innovation of everyday life. Bauman makes sense of culture by manoeuvring its immediate contents against the larger signs and waves of our times, from capitalism to rationalization. Bauman follows the classical tradition in discerning patterns or trends of culture, mediated by power or domination. Like the process he seeks to interpret, Bauman innovates by mediating between the cultural signs of the times and the sense that there are larger social dynamics or logics behind them. To innovate is to work within and out of tradition. Culture emerges out of traditions, however invented. Bauman's traditions are many, strong and varied, as are his innovations (Beilharz, 2000).

### **Marx's Shadow**

Critical Theory takes its stand against Traditional Theory: both of these traditions had first to be invented. Critical Theory begins with Marx. Bauman is always in Marx's shadow. This is apparent not only in the heavier contours of capitalism, alienation and verification, but also in more suggestive moments or clues, as in the case of the idea of second nature. Marx's lifelong project in the critique of political economy is itself a critique of a culture of production. The great power of capital lies in its protean capacity of creative destruction, and in its ability to naturalise this form of production and the forms of life that correspond with it. Marx's curiosity about ideology persists across his life's work, even if it would be an

exaggeration to say that he develops a robust theory of ideology or culture. Instead we encounter a series of hints from the *German Ideology* through to the image of commodity fetishism in *Capital*. Culture becomes more fully central for Marxism with the emergence of Western Marxism, in response to the cultural specificity of the Russian Revolution, and the Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School, which can be seen as a response to fascism. If the Bolsheviks seek, among other things, to generate a modernist, or Taylorist industrial culture, the Nazi hope of a Thousand Year Reich is also a pre-eminently cultural project. Social engineering is also a cultural project. The signal figure in Western Marxism here becomes Gramsci, whose critical purposes are stretched across these utopias and their specifically Italian variants.

The greater thinker of culture, connecting Marx's critique of political economy through to the work of the Frankfurt School, is the Hungarian Georg Lukács. Lukács' *History and Class Consciousness* goes further than any other period text in the direction of problematising the themes of reification, alienation and objectification (Lukács, 1971). Lukács is also the pivotal connection between Marx's critique of culture and Weber's: the idea of the rationalization of the world from this point is equally enmeshed with the problems of commodification and rational calculation. As Karl Löwith was to explain the parallel in his remarkable 1932 study, *Max Weber and Karl Marx*, the two greatest of German sociologists could be best aligned as philosophers of history with an eye to the diagnosis of the situation of the times, characterised in the logic of alienation for Marx and the logic of rationalization for Weber (Löwith, 1982). What Lukács' had accomplished in *History and Class Consciousness* was to fuse the two perspectives. Lukács' emphasis on the more marxian theme, of commodification, nevertheless located this process within the horizon of world rationalization. Lukács reinforced the centrality of capitalism to

modernity at the same time as he expanded the optic of modernity to include capitalism, rather than the other way around. Culture hence rests on reification, or the reenchantment as well as disenchantment of the world. The magic of commodities, for Marx, works like the magic of religion for Feuerbach, with the difference that the god of the commodity is unrelenting; we have no alternative but to work, consume and die.

Yet there are alternatives, and this is one persistent motif across Bauman's work; if we did this, we could still do other. And if we cannot find fulfilment in the public life of capitalism or bureaucracy, we can seek out objectification, or non-alienated relationships at home, or in the private sphere. This is the context in which Bauman picks up the idea of second nature, in *Towards A Critical Sociology* (1976). Hegel suggests the idea, which Marx plays with and implies is a core theme for sociology. To say that we naturalise a commodified world is also to say that we make second nature of it. Capitalism becomes imprinted within our culture and internalized within the psyche, to the extent that we cannot imagine (or we believe we cannot imagine) that there was ever any other way to live. For Bauman, then, both 'nature' and 'culture' are by-products of human practice. Culture is the level of reality between us and nature. The problem in sociology, for Bauman, arrives at the point at which 'culture' or 'society' is turned into a god no less demanding than the magic of commodity fetishism. Durkheim in turn for his part deifies society, confirming the status of sociology as the science of this dubious object. Bauman's scepticism at Durkheim's achievement reaches right through to *Society Under Siege* (2002), where society is viewed as an hypostatisation of a kind which culture can never be. Where the idea of society fetishes, that of culture pluralises. Into the twentieth century, for Bauman, we witness a bifurcation between two streams of scientific and critical

sociology. The stream of critical sociology parallels that of critical theory and Western Marxism.

### **From Freud to Weber**

If Lukacs posited the necessary synthesis of Marx and Weber, it was Critical Theory that turned to Freud. Freud is a significant presence in Bauman's sociology, along with all these others, but at the level of culture rather than subject. This is not only because of the centrality of the psyche, or the unconscious, matters themselves which Bauman does not dwell upon until later, when he turns to the face of the other and the problem of ethics in *Postmodern Ethics* (1992). Bauman's use of Freud takes on the broader, civilizational horizons rather than the more closely psychoanalytical dimensions of his project. Freud's famous book, known to us as *Civilization and its Discontents* originally used the word *Kultur* as its subject, and while there is a long controversy itself cultural over the relationship between the idea of civilization and that of culture, the elision here is significant. Civilization, in Freud's English-language title, could be read as referring to a surplus of culture. Progress rests on the suppression of instincts; human civilization needs a second nature, a new condition which denies animal nature. We are bound to our misery, as moderns. The background images of the Greeks never leave us. In Marx it may be the figure of Prometheus, in Weber Sisyphus, in Freud, Oedipus who stalks us. More generally, our misery will with good fortune be less that of material deprivation, and more that of self-incurred tutelage. Human creatures are equally capable of self-constitution and self-destruction, even if the manifestations of this process or condition vary. Bauman chases this theme into the essays gathered in *Postmodernity and its Discontents*, where the sense is that today we reverse or modify the deal which Freud

observed in 1930 (Bauman, 1997). Bauman's fear is that, where we in the West perhaps traded freedom against security in the years of the postwar welfare state, today's citizens happily trade security (often that of others) against the illusory hope of individual freedom. Ours is the age of the new individualism, which means that ours is a new cultural moment, or else that of the return of an older personal liberalism in newly technologized and valorized forms.

Bauman's twist on Freud, here on the themes of changing forms of humanly-created discontents, is less imposing than his dialogue with the ghost of Freud in *Mortality, Immortality and Other Life Strategies* (1993). Now culture figures, as in Freud, as a prosthetic against death. Death is the vital, absent presence in sociology; it is the very reason for being of culture. We create in the face of death; it is the prospect of death which motivates us to seek immortality, to build, to create and procreate, to preserve and extend the traditions which we inherit. Culture begins as survival, and becomes a process of constitution. As Bauman puts it:

Human culture is, on the one hand, a gigantic (and spectacularly successful) ongoing effort to give meaning to human life; on the other hand, it is an obstinate (and somewhat less successful) effort to suppress the awareness of the irreparably surrogate, and brittle character of such meaning (Bauman, 1993: 8).

If our image of classical culture is shadowed by the figures of Sisyphus, Prometheus and Oedipus, modern Western culture's striking figures are the images of Faust, and Frankenstein. Humanism's desperate attempt to make gods of men stumbles at the very point of mortality; gods do not die. Nationalism becomes the ersatz solution, offering group immortality where there is no immortality for individuals.

Some nationalisms may be less poisonous than others; radicals for long have liked to think that the nationalism of the oppressed is more legitimate than the nationalisms of the victors. In Bauman's way of thinking, this kind of distinction is

difficult to sustain, for the first turns too easily into the second. The revolutionary mentality seeks to reverse the dialectic of master and slave rather than to transcend it. All forms of nationalism, progressive or not, rest on the postulation of an other, an enemy to be destroyed. History here is less immediately the history of class struggles, and more directly the ongoing overthrow and renewal of masters and slaves. Certainly this is the image of history we associate with Max Weber: domination will never end; politics, ethics and aesthetics increasingly become marginal to the instrumental rationalities of markets and states. Bauman shares Weber's diagnosis, but not necessarily his prognosis. Bauman retains an anthropological optimism within a historical pessimism regarding the human condition in modern times. Second nature never seeps entirely into the fibres of our souls. What we know about modernity seems even more acutely evident in postmodern times. Things, people, relationships and institutions change, contingency rules, all that is solid melts into air. Yet Bauman's elective affinity with Weber is clear, especially in the project of *Modernity and the Holocaust* (1989). This is, essentially, a Weberian argument or an argument of Weberian sympathy. For here, to extend Lukacs, capitalism may be one formal precondition of fascism, but it is the logic of rational calculation rather than commodification that holds up the operations of Auschwitz.

Bauman's analysis of the Holocaust is necessarily multicausal. The general controversy around *Modernity and the Holocaust* concerns Bauman's insistence that the Holocaust was only possible as a modern phenomenon (see Beilharz, ed, 2002). Industrial killing on a mass scale was dependent on modern technology and bureaucracy, though Bauman nowhere identifies modernity and fascism. The point, rather, is that modernity is a necessary if insufficient context for the Holocaust. Modern bureaucracy itself did not cause the Holocaust, either; yet alongside the

murderous ideology of the Final Solution, the bureaucratic mentality was vital to its application. Bauman's sociology still travels with the spirit of Weberian sociology, for its curiosity here is in character, or personality structure. Weber's famous interest in Puritanism in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* is primarily in its culture, only secondarily in its institutional forms. Weber's sociology here again coincides with Marx's, for their combined curiosity is in what Bauman follows under the category second nature. The curiosity we have in capitalism or bureaucracy is in what kinds of creatures these make us – specialists without spirit, hedonists without heart, individual consumers rather than collective producers, or in extreme circumstances followers of rules who are oblivious to the face of the other.

Bauman's interest in personality-types reflects his enthusiasm for Simmel as well as his connection to Weber. Simmel most famously suggested the stranger as a modern character-type – she who comes and goes and stays, who may be offered the provisional or probationary belonging of assimilation, as were the Jews in Germany before 1933, that kind of belonging at the behest of the host which is always tentative, always open to suspension at the will of the host. Bauman's response to the image of the stranger is indeed to continue the period identification of the stranger and the Jew, not least in his masterwork, *Modernity and Ambivalence* (1993). But Bauman's gift lies in his capacity to connect the diagnosis of the present with the heritage of critical sociology, so that he proceeds to invent names for new character-types, most notably the dyad of tourist and vagabond, a new type of relationship in the image of master and slave, now with mobility rather than capital or even cultural capital as the source of domination's divide.

## Enter Foucault

The broad sympathy of Bauman's sociology is German, but with this twist: his is a specific, East European Critical Theory. It is Germanic, but it is neither parochial nor nationalist. It crosses borders, as does world history. Its broad orientation is European, this more than British or American. And it is open to the French, not least in Sociology and Anthropology. Here there are two striking presences – those of Michel Foucault and Claude-Lévi-Strauss, the second even more powerful than the first. Foucault's significance in recent intellectual history remains open to debate. Foucault's project is both brilliant and fascinating, yet its reception is often acontextual, minimising the significance of other key French thinkers from the Annales School to Canguilhem who were crucial to his cultural formation and to that of modern French critique. Its reception also avoids Foucault's debt to the Frankfurt School and to Weber, the logic whose work his own project follows and extends. In its Anglo reception, especially, and given the extraordinary influence of Althusserian Structuralist Marxism into the eighties, Foucault often became viewed as the new Marx. Whether this enthusiastic reception reflects the precise nature of Foucault's contribution remains to be established. What is clear is the extent to which, having spurned Weber and Lukács, those parts of the Left intelligentsia who became Foucault's champions often responded to the kindred themes of power and rationality in his work. Foucault was available to those moving out of Althusser in ways that Weber, Gramsci and Lukács were not. Bauman was not part of this Anglo trend; the ethics of his Marxism were humanist, rather than structuralist or scientific in their claims. The Renaissance Marxism of Czech, Hungarian and Polish intellectuals in the sixties connected to the early Marx, to the *Paris Manuscripts* rather than to the claims of *Capital*. Bauman's employment to Foucault, then, is more selective, even if

powerful. The key text here is *Memories of Class*, its title as evocative of Freud, again, as of Marx.

*Memories of Class* marks the beginning of Bauman's adieu to Marx, at least in the formal sense, for otherwise the broader motif for radical intellectuals would be once a Marxist, always a postmarxist (Bauman, 1982). The use of the idea of memory to distance the concept of class cuts both ways. The centrality of class, not least for culture, is something Bauman wants to take our distance from. In the British tradition, especially, class has always been caught up with status; thus the centrality of T.H. Marshall's conjunction of citizenship and class. *Memories of Class* indicates both their pertinence or presence, and the sense that these are memories that weigh on us, like the past. Bauman remains much taken by this sense, which we associate with Marx's historical writing, that we are ghosted by the past. Indeed, these ghosts also hold up our culture, whether they call us back to the foundational class struggles of the nineteenth century or the life of the Holocaust as a ghost. The more general issue is the anthropological sense that we are creatures who work out of memory, out of culture, out of the invention of tradition. This means that we engage in different patterns of recognition and misrecognition. The particular connection with Foucault here is in Bauman's use of *Discipline and Punish* as a way to think not about institutions of incarceration but the factory, which is indeed from one perspective an institution of confinement and discipline itself. The result, in Bauman's hands, is so to say a Foucaultian curiosity with a Marxian inflection, for this approach takes us back to Marx's *Capital* as a sociology of the factory and its discipline of the proletarian subject, body and soul. The object of capitalist culture is to generate output, results, by the routinization of labour, the body and its skills and the internalization of this process as second nature.

This is why the most intriguing of interim categories in this field remains the idea not of capital, on the most abstract level, or labour-process, on the most concrete, but of Fordism, which connects us back to Gramsci. Fordism is the culture of modernizing capitalism, par excellence, precisely because it combines a culture of production with a culture of capacity to consume, both of which depend on the naturalization of this way of being in the world. The limit of Fordism is its national frame, in its presupposition that the local producers are also the consumers of the goods that they produce, though Fordism of course also always had a global reach, not least through South America. In the period of postwar boom, however, the point is that class struggle becomes internalized by the distributive logic of capitalism itself. Labour is integrated into the capitalist system, and becomes legitimate as a systemic actor. This does not, however, make a proletariat of happy results, as C. Wright Mills sarcastically suggested. In Bauman's view, we could neither be happy – for we are bound by our discontents – nor robotic, as we could at most mimic the motions of obedience, while our minds wander off elsewhere. Nevertheless, the point remains that the modernist factory, like the institutions of schooling or incarceration, relied on strategies like those anticipated in Bentham's imaginary Panopticon, and while post Fordist production might rely more on flexibility and the cultivation of some working autonomy, the possibilities of electronic surveillance say in telephone call centers are expanding. While there may be an apparent shift of the dominant form of culture from the Voice to the Eye, older patterns of domination persist, not least across the global system. Bauman connects these images back again to the dialectics of master and slave and to the centrality of movement; his most powerful critique of the process we call globalization is less to do with the fear of cultural homogenisation than with the ethics of asymmetrical distribution of life-chances. As Bauman puts it,

glocalization involves globalization for some people, localization for some others. The participants in this dyad, still, are held together not only by difference but more directly by dependence and exploitation.

### **The Structuralist Promise**

Structuralism was, and remains an extraordinary phenomenon in recent intellectual history. Its influence was compulsive for twenty years; and now its presence is an absence. Louis Althusser, the most famous of Marxist structuralists, insisted that he was never a structuralist. The three kings of Structuralism were thought to be Foucault in history of the sciences, Jacques Lacan in psychoanalysis and Claude Lévi-Strauss in anthropology. Althusser's credentials, in comparison to these thinkers, were always Marxist. Bauman's opening to Structuralism, however, was cultural rather than political. Where Althusser and his followers claimed that capitalism was maintained by a determinate mode of production and its cultural, ideological and political superstructure, Lévi-Strauss sought other to ponder the possibility that all humans were combined by a universal mental structure which meant that they all told similar stories in different ways. Culture-making was universal, but the creation of cultures was relative.

The idea of structure was a familiar one, back through Freud to Marx. If for the followers of Freud the unconscious was structured like a language, *langue* behind *parole*, for the followers of Marx the capitalist structure of wage-labour relations held up the phenomenal world of commodities which presented itself to us in everyday life as prior. Bauman's attraction, here, was more to the idea of structuring as an activity. Structuralism, for Bauman, was an interesting if unconvincing project. For meaning was contextual, rather than semantic; think only of a word like 'fuck', whose meaning

might vary from ecstatic to insulting, depending entirely on context. Humans have great potential, for Bauman, even when they create sameness, conformism, boredom or cruelty. But meaning is ambivalent; ambivalence becomes a motif of our times, and is characteristic of our meaning-giving capacities. The issue, for Bauman even in 1973, is that the empirical reality of each culture can be said to be full of ‘floating’ signs (Bauman, 1999: 75). The idea of communication presumes stability or order, which is one thing we do not find here. The purpose of culture, therefore, is less communication than ‘ordering’; only ordering is highly variable and fraught. Just as the pursuit of recognition generates misrecognition, so does the ordering activity fail, generate disorder, even chaos.

There is no such thing as order, only orders, resulting from different kinds of will-to-order. Order is a graded notion; the level of orderliness is measured by the degree of predictability. Ordering reduces chaos, but does not dispel it (Bauman, 1999: 79). Here it is system, not language (as the structuralist followers of Saussure would insist) which is conceptually prior, with the proviso that ‘system’ represents the will-to-system. Language, in any case, cannot be the master metaphor for social sciences. Social structure, contingent in turn, needs then to be understood as activity, as the result of human praxis. Bauman retains the animating interest of the young Marx in the idea that humans are sensual, suffering creatures whose understanding is best to be located in the pattern of their activities, whether good, evil or just pedestrian. Bauman’s interest here is persistently anthropological, and it is this which in turn connects him to Lévi-Strauss. For he maintains the Marxian focus on anthropology in its dual sense – in the cultural anthropology of how humans manifest their spirit through creation and destruction (and in modernity, in creative

destruction), as well as in the philosophical anthropology which seeks to puzzle over human capacity, character, autonomy and dependence.

This old word, praxis, is now as rarely encountered as its Marxian mate, dialectic. If the second was misused as a kind of interpretative magic, the first, praxis, had its own halo in the sixties, and it was this which the scientific socialism of Althusser sought to dispel. For Althusserians it was structure, or the level of truth behind practical experience, which offered real insight. Bauman's historic connection to humanist Marxism suggested otherwise; at least, it insisted that one important purpose of a critical sociology is to observe and interpret the manifest contents of common behaviour, in ritual, routine or in innovative form. This brings us to Bauman's major work in the field, *Culture as Praxis*.

Bauman begins from the premise that while there have been endless attempts either to catalogue definitions of culture, or else to bring down new and final definitions, what is really necessary here is typology. Bauman indicates three main fields of discourse on culture. Bauman's first field of discourse concerning culture is the hierarchical: some people have more culture than others. Culture in this sense is aligned to its oldest meaning, of cultivation, as in agriculture. The value conferred upon cultivation, here, itself introduces the idea of value; some cultures are worth more than others. This is the idea of culture as civilization, where as in *Civilization and its Discontents* culture can also cut both ways. But this realm of culture can also be viewed as a matter of personal development, self-cultivation or *Bildung*, developing endowments into talents, so that it also has a more democratic, or distinct note; we cannot develop endowments that we do not have. The second field is anthropological, or historical – it pluralizes cultures, as travel or movement indicates is necessary. The travelling idea of culture is classical: it opens with Herodotus, and

the observation of human difference. This field of usage may still be hierarchical, in the way that it values, for here the silent ground of judging difference is the sense of 'different to us'. Bauman's third proposed field of culture is generic. Rather than observing difference, as in the second approach, the generic way of thinking presents the reality of culture as its unity. We all do the same things – we are born, love, procreate, eat, shit and die – only the way we carry out these cultural practices is different. One way of thinking this difference in unity is via the work of Clifford Geertz, though Bauman's stronger attraction here is to the work of Lévi-Strauss. Culture, however, is for Bauman a process, rather than a result. As he puts it here, 'Structure... is a less probable state than disorder' (Bauman, 1973a: 54). Culture is what Bauman calls the structuring activity; it represents the tension or struggle between freedom and dependence.

### **The Structuring Activity**

*Culture as Praxis* is an interesting book to return to, three decades after its first appearance. It is the only one of Bauman's early English-language books to be republished, in which Bauman revisits the field he himself tilled earlier. Bauman's Introduction to the Second Edition (1999) dusts off its references and authorities; some cultural markers lose their significance over time. The nature of Bauman's self-reflexivity, however, is such as to make him wonder what is living and what is dead in these pages. For culture is also defined by the fact that it recycles. *Culture as Praxis* is itself part of our intellectual culture. Culture relies also on habit, or habitus; so that what is innovative in one moment looks repetitive or merely habitual later. Yet culture, as Bauman argues here, is often associated with the realm of freedom, as is nature with the realm of necessity. The ambivalence of creativity is apparent. It is a

prejudice of Enlightenment that the world is an essentially human creation; modernity is by definition future-oriented, henceforth it is no longer good enough to be creatures of habit (Bauman, 1999: xi). Henceforth, culture, or consciousness, must be consciously formed. The central distinction in thinking about culture here, in Bauman's thirty year revisitation, is twofold. We use culture to refer to creativity or innovation, but also to normative regulation, or social reproduction. Rather than the sense that culture is threefold, hierarchical/differential/generic as in the earlier typology of *Culture as Praxis*, this dual distinction evokes rather the logic of *Towards a Critical Sociology*, where the significant distinction is that between system-maintenance (and conformism) and critique (or creativity). The Parsons-view of structure is as system, not tradition, habitus or muddling through. Systems are based on boundaries; their purpose is to assimilate difference, even if they ultimately cannot do so.

At this point of his revisitation Bauman turns frontally to Lévi-Strauss, for his own sense in retrospect is that it is the work of Lévi-Strauss which made *Culture as Praxis* possible, or called it out. Thus Bauman, in 1999:

The first insight into the futility of the 'systemic' conception of culture was the formidable work of Claude Lévi-Strauss, whose work inspired most of this book's arguments. Rather than as an inventory of a finite number of values overseeing the whole field of interaction or a stable code of closely related and complementary behavioural precepts, Lévi-Strauss portrayed culture as a structure of choices – a matrix of possible, finite in number yet practically unaccountable permutations (Bauman, 1999: xxvii).

Lévi-Strauss' sense of culture crosses all three of the broader fields indicated by Bauman, if especially the second, differential and third, generic, for the diversity of permutations goes together with a comparability of purpose; and the sense of choice, or a repertoire of choices remains central. It is because Lévi-Strauss sees structuring as an activity that he can push the image of structure from a cage to a catapult; from a

trimming/truncating/cramping/fettering device to a determinant of freedom; from a weapon of uniformity into the tool of variety; from a protective shield of stability into the engine of never-ending and forever incomplete change (1999: xxvii). Notwithstanding Lévi-Strauss' elevation of the value of synchrony over diachrony or history, his effect on Bauman was libratory. Thus Bauman chooses, from his own later intellectual repertoire, to align Lévi-Strauss and Castoriadis. The parallel is already suggested in the cage to catapult story, for catapults also destroy, and as Castoriadis insisted, there is nothing irredeemably good or positive about creativity; the Holocaust and the Gulag were also the results of creativity. Culture is creation, as well as reproduction; but this claim of itself tells us nothing of the content or value of culture. Cultures are open to criticism, but in the plural. Cultures travel, or are constituted in the movement or traffic which is so central to the present.

So distinct a figure is Lévi-Strauss in Bauman's repertoire that he is the only thinker about whom Bauman writes a vignette, in the form of an entry in a social theory text. In his entry on 'Claude Levi-Strauss' Bauman presents Lévi-Strauss' work as an essential step away from the ethnographic obsession with the idea that the anthropologist can become immersed in the culture of the other. From here it is but a short step to the idea articulated by Joel Kahn, that the project before us is an anthropology of modernity: in the dual sense, that our others are also modern, and that we stand to learn a great deal from seeking to take an anthropological distance from our own modernities, to treat them as though they were, are, also exotic (Bauman, 2001; Kahn, 2001). The foreign becomes familiar at the same time as the familiar is made foreign; or that, at least, is the orienting purpose of our activity. All cultures are mythological; myths are good to think with, or at least some myths are enabling while others are disabling.

In a tellingly cultural confession, Lévi-Strauss informs us that he had ‘Three Mistresses’ – Marxism, psychoanalysis and geology. These are not each irredeemably structuralist, but they are all structural, indicating the difficult yet apparently unavoidable spatial images of critique: ‘surface’ and ‘depth’ (Bauman, 2001: 201). Bauman’s point of insistence is to maintain the duality of focus, to succumb neither to surface image or representation, nor only to summon up the hidden depths behind them. The practice of sociology, in this way of thinking, is to mediate between the two levels of reality, analysis and activity. The strength of a cultural sociology, unlike some work in cultural studies, is to insist on the reality beyond the text as well as the reality in the text.

### **A Little Glass of Rum**

The point of cultural sociology, to put it differently, is to seek to hold together culture and power, image or symbol and relationship. Bauman’s attraction to Marx, Weber, Freud and Foucault can be best seen in this light. Bauman takes his distance from the redemptive, or Faustian stream in Marx; he is more highly animated by the problems of the time than by the obsession of Freud’s followers with the unconscious or with language. With Weber, and later Foucault, both under the sign of Nietzsche, Bauman worries the dark side of modernity. With Lévi-Strauss, he negotiates the ambivalence of our worlds. This is nowhere more apparent than in the way in which Bauman connects the figure of the stranger, from Simmel, to the hints offered by Lévi-Strauss on assimilation and expulsion in *Tristes Tropiques*, veritably a desert-island book, arguably for us, certainly for Bauman. Here Lévi-Strauss speculates, in closing his book over a little glass of rum, that if

we studied societies from the outside, it would be tempting to distinguish two contrasting types: those which practise cannibalism – that is, which regard the absorption of certain individuals possessing dangerous powers as the only means of neutralizing those powers and even of turning them to advantage – and those which, like our own society, adopt what might be called the practice of *anthropemy* (from the Greek, *emein*, to vomit); faced with the same problem, the latter type of society has chosen the opposite solution, which consists in ejecting dangerous individuals from the social body and keeping them temporarily or permanently in isolation away from all contact with their fellows, in establishments specially intended for this purpose. Most of the societies which we call primitive would regard this custom with profound horror; it would make us in their eyes, guilty of that same barbarity of which we are inclined to accuse them because of their symmetrically opposite behaviour (Lévi-Strauss, 1955: 508).

Such institutions of separation might be called concentration camps, more specifically death camps (in Nazi Germany) or detention centres (in contemporary Australia).

Bauman's variation on this critical theme is to view order-building as a war of attrition against strangers and the strange. As he elaborates:

In this war (to borrow Lévi-Strauss's concepts) two alternative, but also complementary strategies were intermittently deployed. One was *anthropophagic*, annihilating the strangers by *devouring* them and then metabolically transforming into a tissue indistinguishable from one's own. This was the strategy of *assimilation*: making the different similar; smothering of cultural or linguistic distinctions; forbidding all traditions and loyalties except those meant to feed the conformity to the new and all-embracing order; promoting and enforcing one and only one measure of conformity. The other strategy was *anthropoemic*, *vomiting* the strangers, banishing them from the limits of the orderly world and barring them from all communication with those inside. This was the strategy of *exclusion* – confining the strangers within the visible walls of the ghettos or behind the invisible, yet no less tangible, prohibitions of *commensality*, *connubium* and *commercium*; 'cleansing' – expelling the strangers beyond the frontiers of the managed and manageable territory; or, when neither of the two measures was feasible – destroying the strangers physically (Bauman 1997: 16).

Anthropophagic strategies follow the logic of assimilation, always a superior strategy to exclusion, except within its own limits: assimilation is an attack on difference or ambivalence, and its tolerance is volatile, depends on political and nationalist senses of limits. Liberal tolerance is always preferable to exclusion, but its availability is

dependent on the will of the host. Anthropoemic strategies follow the logic of expulsion, discipline and punish along ethnic or racial lines. The modernist state strategy is precisely, for Bauman, one which acts out the dynamic of creative destruction. Except that the logic even of totalitarian power is never complete, and the residual humanity left both in matters and slaves never subsides. Culture persists, even in the face of power.

### **Conclusions**

Bauman's encounter with Lévi-Strauss is suggestive, though it is by no means singular; his interlocutors are many and various, and this is one reason why his work is interesting. Bauman's more recent elucidation of this especial enthusiasm within his repertoire is by no means novel, however; culture recycles as well as innovates, rediscovers as well as inventing.

If it is intellectually fruitful here to cast back onto Bauman's earlier English-language work, it is also culturally advantageous, in order to contemplate his own means of creation and repetition or revisiting. For Bauman flags the significance of these ideas as far back as his Leeds Inaugural Lecture of 1972. There Bauman indicated project, rather than prospectus:

Lévi-Strauss himself acknowledged his intellectual debt to Marx: 'The famous statement by Marx, "men make their own history, but they do not know how they are making it" justifies, first, history and, second, anthropology.' Structuralism is designed to provide precisely the 'how' answer. There are limits to both human freedom of manoeuvre and society's freedom to choose the patterns it imposes on its members.

Being determined and being creative are not two diametrically opposed modes of existence; they are, in fact, two in one, the double face of the same human condition. Science and art finally meet again after many decades of schism. If they did not meet so far, it was because no relevant meeting ground had been found. Now it can be provided by

the study of the universal structure of human culture, in which two capacities of humans – objective and subjective – fuse into one (Bauman, 1972: 197-8).

This is not the language that Bauman would employ today, but the ideas are roughly continuous. Neither sign nor language, but repertoire rules.

Zygmunt Bauman's work begins with culture, travels through socialism and ends with the critique of modernity as order, which generates excess. We suffer our excess of material life or things – we in the west inhabit a world infinitely more reified than Lukács' Budapest – but we also suffer moral excess, the inability to know limits, to know when to desist. The excess results in waste, in human waste, wasted lives, in a culture of extremes. Ordering can be as benign and contingent or conditional as it can be triumphalist, progressive or destructive. In *Legislators and Interpreters* Bauman juxtaposes what he calls the gardening strategic of modernism with the gamekeeping ethic which precedes it. Bauman had his turn at gardening, or at least at attempting to help rebuild, reorder a local, Polish world in ruins after World War Two. Today Bauman is a gamekeeper; this is his personal ethic, a way of thinking where nature and culture are not too far separated, where creative destruction might also be distanced, as in an anthropology of modernity.

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