## Culture in Contemporary Society

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# The Task of the Translator in Times of Dismantling the Social.
# Zygmunt Bauman and Active Utopia

*Abstract:* The author presents the figure of Zygmunt Bauman as a public intellectual and a translator. Following Walter Benjamin and his essay "The Task of the Translator" and Jacques Derrida and his text "What Is a 'Relevant' Translation," the author concludes that a public intellectual as a translator is persistently confronted with the task of translating statements and postulates from the "language of politics" into "language of practice" and "individual experience," from the "language of science" into the "language of collective action," and from the "language of sociology" into the "language of the media." The author claims that the key category in Bauman's thinking was neither "liquidity" nor "modernity," but "socialism as active utopia." For Bauman, socialism is impossible without a socialist culture, but culture is a practice, i.e. it is an attempt to attune our collective goals aimed at improving the social world. This alignment comes without resorting to the idea of a collective conductor (a program), but by means of resorting to the idea of a translator.

*Keywords:* active utopia, culture, individual society, practice, socialism, strangers, translator.

### After Death
### (Towards Life)

After the death of Zygmunt Bauman, which took me by surprise, I did my work of mourning to try answer one simple question: when I think "Zygmunt Bauman" what do I actually think? The following text is a record of this moment of reflection on the meaning and on the stake of Zygmunt Bauman's writing. It is an attempt to conjecture its non-obvious meaning. Perhaps, the benevolence of death in the course of human life is that it gives us time to think over finite time. Time infinite would effectively prevent subjectivity from occurring. Living beyond time constraint is not human. Human dreams of immortality and eternal life are not human dreams and immortality is not a strategy for human life. Only the vision of finite time allows one to "see" human life as a mission and the finitude of the undertaking equips it with important meaning. Therefore, I care to ask: what mission marked the life of Zygmunt Bauman?

Perhaps, Bauman's life compels us to think over life and death, to look for the subjectivity of death and for a new way of thinking about the subjectivity of life. Certainly, Bauman's life compels us to think of death as a once-in-a-lifetime event. Personally, Bauman's life compels me to conceive of a notion of death departing from the two concepts found in culture, i.e., one recognizing in the trivial fact of death the destruction of life, and the second negating the reality of death and seeking escape from death in visions of immortality and

fantasies of the eternal world. For me, Bauman's life teaches "positive finiteness," i.e. it is a lesson in becoming finite without a neurotic fear of perishing or a phantasmatic desire for something more than life itself. Life, in this perspective, is no longer about permanent deferment of one's death, nor it is about an audacious search for it, instead, it is an attempt to give meaning to the finite time of one's own passing. Death always reveals itself as a loss, but it is a loss experienced by the survivors.

What Bauman teaches us is that the fear of death is merely a fear of a righteous life. The banality of life resolves itself claiming that life plays out in being "between" birth and death. The hardship of life is, however, the struggle to constantly undertake the search for new possibilities of existence, for the possibility of being such as one has never been. In this sense, human life is social and always depends on others, both because it never guarantees exclusive "ownership" of one's own life, and because man remains always non self-sufficient. My life is never truly mine, yet mine is always death.

My essay consists of three sections. First, I discuss the language used by the author of *Liquid Modernity*. This is an attempt to identify the set of instruments that allow thinking and the set of tools determining what the subject of thinking should be. In the second part I discuss the social world which preoccupied Bauman and which he was constantly diag- nosing. Here, I am considering the conditions of Bauman's thinking and the environment anchoring it. Finally, in the third part, I reflect on the effect of Bauman's thinking, i.e., I question the following: what is the result of juxtaposing the instruments (vocabulary) and the social conditions (world), the "thinking of Bauman" and "Baumanian thinking"? What picture of Bauman emerges from this juxtaposition and from such an arrangement? Is it not the picture of a much more conflicted a sociologist than we often thought him to be? Was Bauman not—to some degree—a tragic thinker who never reconciled with the world and society which blew hot and cold on his thinking, endorsing it and suppressing it time after time? What, therefore, do I think when I think "Zygmunt Bauman"?

## Active Utopia
### (Eliminating Unhappiness)

When I think "Zygmunt Bauman," I think above all about „active utopia." It is not a chimera of a search for islands of happiness, of other worlds, or fictitious prosperous societies. Nei- ther it is a project of modernization of traditional society nor it is a rational utopia of En- lightenment. Active utopia is a set of beliefs and postulates that allow for a permanent and endless correction of the social world in which we live. It is for a reason that the opening chapter of Bauman's 1976 book entitled *Socialism: The Active Utopia* begins with juxta- posing "Utopia and Reality." It demonstrates that utopia is above all a vision of the future, and thus it is a vision of the coming present (Bauman 1976). Utopia is not dissimilar to reality; it is merely a correction imposed on reality. As such, utopia allows us to formulate the answer to one of the fundamental questions of Kantian anthropology, that is: what we can hope for (Kant 1781/1998).

In Bauman's opinion, in our over-scientific and reified language, the term "utopia" is too often wrongly narrowed to a plan or project for "good" or even "perfect" society, i.e.,

a rational political whole, anticipating in its existence the rationality of choices made by its members. Such a utopian society would in advance guarantee "good life" and "good actions" of its individual members. Taught by the experience of totalitarianism we began to fear such a "philanthropic utopia"—which is why contemporary literature is much more keen on dystopian than utopian projects. Man today, rather than looking for utopia, is afraid of it.

In the process of writing *Socialism: The Active Utopia* Bauman comes up with a competitive concept of utopia and is close to discovering that "socialist utopia" must be rebuilt as a counter-culture in which one cannot have trust in the prefabrication of the social world. For reasons I elucidate later, one should neither trust the disassembly of the social world. The righteous society, for Bauman, is a society constantly concerned about its infirmities, i.e. whether or not its policies, institutions, offices, principles, rules for the redistribution of goods and liberties, privileges and duties, are all morally justified. Culture is about making the world different than it is — not simply about cultivating the existing rituals or forms of life. Culture is happening, and human social reality is still unfilled and unfulfilled. It is an "active utopia" that instils in Bauman the conviction of infinity and inexhaustible human possibility to "live in yet different way." Socialism, as an active utopia, becomes a doctrine wishing to reach the point of equilibrium, i.e., a situation in which either no one experiences their life as standing out from the fates of other individuals or the point where no one experiences unhappiness designed socially or economically, politically or culturally.

For Bauman, utopia is filled with concrete content. Utopia is a socialist utopia. Bauman writes explicitly: Socialism has emerged in the nineteenth century Europe as a Utopia. It made people think of society not as something to be maintained and preserved, but as something to be ennobled through the establishment of a society of equal and free people. This is only allowed in democracy, which—in philosophical thinking—still functions as a scandal.

Here, democracy is neither understood as a "dictatorship of the people"—a homogeneous community of citizens who safeguard their right to citizenship (or territory), nor as a "procedural democracy"—a collection of rights and powers stronger than the will of the people. Instead, it is conceived as a democracy which is a critical extension of liberal freedoms. Liberalism, in its most refined form, perceives equality as a formal condition of freedom; on the contrary, socialism, recognizes equality to be the way of realizing and establishing society. Hence the slogan: socialism or barbarity.

Socialism is democracy in action. It justifies and allows to understand Bauman's strong interest in British socialism, the subject of his 1959 book *British Socialism: Sources, Philosophy, Political Doctrine* (Bauman 1959). Democracy, not to be merely an emblem, a technique of government, or a procedure for administering the social world must be above all the practice of equality.

Utopia is therefore an active utopia, actively influencing our thinking, conditioning our sensitivity and directing our actions. Utopia is the socialist utopia, because it is socialism that allows us to think of the establishment of a society of equal and free people. What this means, however, is that socialism requires a socialist culture. Socialism is above all "culture as a practice," and therefore it is a struggle against the hegemonic culture. This is the main conclusion that Bauman derives from the reading of Antonio Gramsci's *Letters from Prison*

(Gramsci 1971). In his 1973 book entitled *Culture as Praxis* Bauman openly says that culture is not a system (in polemics with Talcott Parsons) nor a structure (in polemics with Claude Lévi-Strauss) nor even a collection of functions (in polemics with Pierre Bourdieu), but the common practice of values for the establishment of a good society (Bauman 1973). If culture was merely a hegemonic culture, we would have no right to change, we would not have the right to hope.

When Pierre Bourdieu will use the term *habitus*, he will say something extremely complex and subversive. Habituses are persistent dispositions, "structuring structures," "rules for generating and stabilizing practices and images" that despite not being the effect of submission and modelling can be regulated, that despite not being objectives can be aligned with objectives, and that despite not being the result of "organizing actions of the conductor may be collectively orchestrated." For Bourdieu, therefore, destruction of *habitus* would involve the destruction of collective orchestration of social life and the return to the stage of unregulated improvisation (Bourdieu 1998). Although Bauman agrees with this conclusion, he also recognizes that destruction is necessary for the search for new forms of orchestration.

Let me summarize: when I think "Zygmunt Bauman," I think above all active utopia. However, this refers me to socialism understood as a significant correction of liberalism. Socialism is impossible without a socialist culture but culture proves to be a practice that is neither a "practical sense" nor "embodied reason" nor even a "reflective action," nor it is a habitus or a set of habits, but an attempt to attune our collective goals aimed at improving the social world, i.e. a kind of political alignment or political orchestration without referring to the idea of a conductor.

## Modernity and Order
## (Impurities)

This was the reading of texts by Theodor W. Adorno, Max Horkheimer and in particular Michel Foucault that raised Bauman's suspicion towards modernity, which he later judged to be the most frightening form of instrumental rationalization. Bauman in a renowned and widely discussed book *Modernity and the Holocaust* ties a mental knot between the project of Enlightenment and Auschwitz (Bauman 1989). Bauman says—following the path set by Adorno and Foucault—that mass murders were meant to be a surgical procedure opening the way to a perfect, harmonious society. Concentration camps—in the project of social modernization—have therefore played the role of large laboratories, which examined how far one can go in the elimination or re-education of undersized or non-paradigmatic human beings. Extermination camps were not a departure from the principles of social rationalism, on the contrary—they were the consequence of the modern, rationalistic vision of the world.

Extermination camps are therefore an invention of modernity and they continue to be eagerly used as tools, as are electronic weapons, petrol cars, video cameras and tape recorders. Tools—we should add—often used against other inventions of modernity, such as personal inviolability, freedom of speech, parliamentary principles, individual rights and tolerance of diversity. Perfect happiness required perfect order, and this could only be

a work of government. Total happiness required total order, and total order required total control. Bauman says that the horrors of the 20th century were the result of the search for total happiness and order. It was only in Auschwitz—Bauman suggests—where we have come to fully understand what terror of Reason means. Horrors of our age—writes the Polish sociologist—were monstrous, perhaps degenerate but legitimate progeny of the modern romance with man-led, perfect order.

Can anyone imagine a more ironic and perverse attempt to revaluate the ideals of the Enlightenment? Can one imagine a more rudimentary and ruthless accusation of Reason? Foucault in his lecture from the elite series *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values* entitled *Omnes et singulatim*, asks: "Shall we 'try' reason?," and immediately replies: "To my mind, nothing would be more sterile" (Foucault 2000). In essence, the relationship between rationalization and the abuse of political power is so obvious that one needs not see bureaucracies or concentration camps to grasp it. From Foucault's point of view, such a trial would make us take one of the sides, of either rationalism (advocacy) or irrationality (prosecutors). From my point of view, even bringing a case *on* reason—rather than *against* reason—would also be barren because such a 'trial' has already been held. Following the judgement rendered by Bauman one can only expect to hear this or the other incidental defence speech or a witness testimony by diagnosticians or therapists who are in authority to determine the degree to which the subject is susceptible to persuasive therapeutic techniques.

Is not the contemporary return of new realists, accusing postmodernists of epistemological populism and engagement in empty discourse, not a sign that former defendants have become prosecutors today? Neorealists claim that without the notion of truth, reality ruled by unconditioned laws and without critical reason, there is no emancipation, no real democracy and no science, and all hopes for better tomorrow are mired in conformism and blurring of relativism in the media buzz, which make from even fairy tales some version of the truth. Maurizio Ferraris, the author of the *Manifesto of New Realism*, writes explicitly: critique is imbedded in realism just as submission is imbedded in irreality. Constructivism and discursivism are fairy tales for children to fall asleep. For new Realists, the rejection of Enlightenment in the name of philosophical postmodernism, hermeneutic communism, or political populism means taking the alternative route proposed by the Great Inquisitor: the way of miracles, secrets, and authorities. The New Realism is the defence of ontology against the aspirations of constructivist epistemology, the critique against radical hermeneutics and Enlightenment, that is: science against politics and rhetoric (Ferraris et al. 2014).

Postmodern wisdom, however, does not seem to be a correction of modern wisdom, but rather its extension and intensification. This wisdom recognizes only one planning, namely: "family planning." The name for this process has been selected as if in parodying Orwellian newspeak—not to inform but to confuse; for the essence of "family planning" is to prevent the family, i.e. to prevent conception, to control outgrowth, to decouple actions from their consequences. What remains then? Where should the work of reason, in particular critical reason, stand in this world?

The thought of Bauman is as follows: thanks to the critics of the Enlightenment we are facing the question of what kind of faith in the Enlightenment deserves to be saved today. The criticism, therefore, had similar cleansing power as the criticism of religious schemata by nineteenth-century philosophers, with the difference that it was primarily concerned

with scientific reason and not the sphere of religious rites. Thanks to them, we can transform the Enlightenment project in such a way that it ceases to be a terror of reason, a new dogmatism, and instead it becomes a reflection on the limits of reason. In this sense, it also becomes a natural consequence of the thinking initiated by the three *Critics* of Kant and continued among others by Wittgenstein.

### An Intellectual as a Translator
### (The Tower of Babel)

The conductor got replaced by a public intellectual who is a translator, not a sage or expert. When I think "Zygmunt Bauman," I think of the figure of a translator and his task, which is the task of continual translation from the language of politics into the language of practice and individual experience, from the language of science into the language of collective action, from the language of sociology to the language of the media. In contemporary theory of culture, the translation became a metaphor for social utopia (Benjamin 1923/1996), impossibility of communication (Derrida 2001), colonial policy and emancipation (Spivak 1999) or modernity (Welsch 1994). The translator therefore becomes an impure creature, a problematic species, and his language is composed of translated languages found in the world. Walter Benjamin in 1923 in a classic essay titled *The Translator's Task* wrote that a real translation is transparent; it does not cover the original, does not black its light, but allows the pure language, as though reinforced by its own medium to shine upon the original (Benjamin 1923/1996). Bauman was such a reinforcing medium. Yet, the translator's work does not end here.

In two essays dedicated to the question of translation, *Des tours de Babel*, in which he closely reads Benjamin's *The Task of the Translator*, and *What Is a 'Relevant' Translation*, following Shakespeare's play *The Merchant of Venice*, Jacques Derrida presents two notions of translation (Derrida 1985; Derrida 2001). The first points at literal translation, such as Benjamin searched after, namely a translation which stays close to the source's pound of flesh, while the second notion refers to a conceptual translation that strives to find a semantic equivalent in the target language through a dialectic reappropriation which Derrida, himself translating from Hegel, calls "relevantization."

On the basis of *The Merchant of Venice*, both notions are translated into the language of the Judeo-Christian conflict between Shylock and what one owes to Shylock, "the insolvable itself" on the one hand, and Antonio, Portia, and, by extension, Venice, who demand from Shylock conversion-translation without residue, on the other. Derrida, while addressing a public of translators ("those men and women who, to my mind, are the only ones who know how to read and write") and incorporating into his discourse Shylock's figure and speech, wonders to what extent the translator, anyone, Jew as well as non-Jew, does not wish after all to consume the idiomatic body of the other in a cannibalistic, regressive gesture—in order to translate, or better, in order to be.

To paraphrase Derrida, one could say that Bauman, by referring to the public also translates the speech of "the infamous Shylock"—the same person who, in Shakespeare's play, was prepared to take a pound of flesh from his debtor after his failure to repay the loan on

time—in order to explain to the public (audience) why the language of business is so difficult to translate into the language of values and vice versa. Bauman presents us with another alternative: it is either translation or barbarity. We need a nonliteral translation where translation of a pound of flesh does necessitate the formulation of a direct equivalent. We need a conceptual translation resorting to inventiveness, i.e. one that does not seek to find the semantic equivalent of the translated term in the target language, but one that through many associations tries to rediscover this concept in a new language. I think Bauman made such new discoveries, and I think that Bauman's life reinforced the need for such discoveries.

Active utopia, socialism, culture as a practice, translation—this is the conceptual corpus and set of conditions for social life in the thought of Zygmunt Bauman and in my thoughts when I call his name. However, in what world does Bauman think? In a world full of ambivalence, i.e., arrhythmic life and opaque world of what is social, i.e. the world incapable of undertaking action for the establishment of socialism. Bauman writes in the world where what is social and what is common was pulled into pieces. The concept of community has been abducted by infinitely divisive imaginary communities—national, ethnic, sports, health (of those with bulimia or those with Alzheimer's), artistic, housing, culinary, etc. In turn, the concept of freedom has been abducted by the language of ultra-liberalism, which speaks only of freedom understood as the absence of obstacles to further flows and freedom focussed on the individual.

I claim that for Bauman, the central concept in the description of the social world was not at all the category of "ambivalence" as in *Modernity and Ambivalence* from 1991—in Polish language edition functioning as "polysemy" (as in literal translation: *Modern Polysemy, Polysemous Modernity*), nor it was "postmodernity" as in *Postmodernity and its Discontents,* nor even the famous "liquidity" (Bauman 1991; Bauman 1997). Instead, I claim that the dearest to Bauman was the notion of a "society of individuals" which Bauman borrowed from the Norbert Elias vocabulary (Elias 2010). In the world of ambivalence and liquidity we can be who we want, we have the ostensible freedom of choice in terms of symbolic identity, but to establish oneself in such a world one has to choose one identity that always somehow betrays one and which, even though never fully adequate, is necessary to establish oneself in this world.

The world of ambivalence only offers, but does not coerce to, permanent symbolic identification; but as I give up and reset the legal-political identity of myself, existing through a specific place in the socio-symbolic structure, I must have a certain identity (icon) to enter this network at all, or, in other words, to register in it. Liquidity of the world leads to the concentration of individuals and places the focus on individuals.

## The Failure of the Translator
### (Utopia of Language)

Once again, let us question the task of the translator (*Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers*)? Is the translator's mission his curse and the anticipation of defeat or even surrender, or is it a symptom of his political and social calling in the world, which is the world of the Tower of Babel, which in turn means that without the translator this world would fall into a multitude

of untranslatable discourses? German expression *die Aufgabe*, which we find in the title of
the famous text of Benjamin, can mean both—a task and a mission, but also—abandon-
ment, resignation, capitulation (De Man 1985). It is more than intriguing that Bauman, in
his afterword to the Polish translation of Benjamin's *Passagenwerk*, chooses the category
of an intellectual to describe the author of the *One Way Street*, claiming that this is the only
category eluding all classifications. According to Bauman, Benjamin deliberately took the
course of life of an intellectual made of it his personal destiny and life program (Bauman
2005: 1152). The problem is that the intellectual today is just a peculiar synthesis of a critic,
an archaeologist and a translator.

Benjamin emphasizes that no poem is intended for the reader, and therefore it does not
require a translator (Benjamin 1923/1996). One should be concerned not so much about
the lack of translator as about the proliferation of bad translators. The translation is erro-
neous as long as it remains at the service of the recipient, the reader, or the audience. For
Benjamin, "poor translation" means inaccurate transfer of irrelevant content. Translatabil-
ity of a work is doubly conditioned and it is completely dependent on these two conditions.
A "good translation" is possible when the work itself demands, desires, wants or awaits
its translation; and secondarily, when among the "readers" there is a translator dissatisfied
with the previous bad or erroneous translations. It is essential in Benjamin's reasoning that
a "good translation" is not indifferent to the life of the original, in that determines its sur-
vival and future life. Translations give the original fame and history; it is in translation,
where the original flourishes and acquires new life. Bauman's life flows not only in the
world of multiple languages, but also in the world of "claims" made about injustices that
demand a translator dissatisfied with existing translations.

However, it can be argued that translations only prove that the affinity of multiple and in-
commensurable languages is to a vast extent limited. The translator constantly experiences
untranslatability of words and sentences, and gradually becomes a slave to the idiomatic
nature of language. Moreover, the translator constantly engages in either caricatured or
heroic attempts to repel and resist the widespread corruption of language; the translator
only comically defends himself against the fall of the "language of the original" and its
degeneration into "meaningless language," "dead language" or "tarnished language." As
such, the translator only delays extermination of the language. Maturation of the original
in its translation, that Benjamin was writing about, is really finding the "time of youth" of
the original, providing us with new impressions of and relieving the signs of wear. In fact,
a "good translation" experiences the birth pains of its own language, since what is to be born
in this language are the words of "a new mother tongue" (Benjamin 1923/1996). Transla-
tion, therefore, does not simply prolong life of the original in the second language—instead,
the original is born again. It is in this context where Bauman—a "good translator"—directly
repeats this quote from Derrida: "I have but one language—yet that language is not mine"
(Derrida 1998).

Let us also note that translation is a movement between one language and another—
not a language and the world, and that—consequently—it is never a paraphrase based on
similarity. A translation is but one way to cope with the foreignness of languages, whereas
a "good translation" allows the meaning concealed in the original language to mature in
the new language. The translator's work, or otherwise—mission, is filled with the great

motif of integrating the multitude of languages into a new language. It is the language of reconciliation between discordant and conflicting discourses remaining at war with one another. The language of translation is never a "language of truth" but a language that attempts to go beyond the corruption and war of words. Therefore, it is not a compliment for the translation to say that it reads as if it were the original text. Fidelity to the original should bring about the situation where the translated work is longing to be complimented. The translation only allows for the liberation from otherwise corrupt language; for the liberation of words in travesty. With this in mind, great translators such as Martin Luther or Friedrich Hölderlin have always overcome the barriers of their own language, i.e., they have broadened the boundaries of all language. It was not different with Bauman. Bauman, as a translator, was seeking "eternal peace" in the language of conflicting words.

Let us then ask, what is the task—mission—of the translator, and therefore the ultimate stake—or failure—of translator's work? Well, according to Bauman, the translator all times remains exposed to the risk of rendering a "bad translation," i.e., "inaccurate transfer of irrelevant content." The translator is neither a lawmaker nor the legislator, he is neither the administrator of the work nor the absolute authority of the work. The translator can never do what the original text has done. A translation is always secondary to the original text and at a disadvantage from the very onset. History did not record any other translator except Luther, who renders "language of the Bible" as a bourgeois language, or language in general. The translator is by definition "overworked," in the sense that the work to be done is to be reworked in one language from another. Moreover, history will not remember the translator on par with the author. Facing the task of rediscovering what was in the original, the translator must always capitulate. The translation, unlike the original, cannot make demands on its durability nor claim the re-finement of a work.

The translation, however, is never a simple "metaphor" or a "repetition" of the original. The meaning of the German word *die Übersetzung* should be sought in words such as "moving," "re-settling," "re-locating." The translator is therefore a wanderer, a tramp, a homeless bum. The translator, constantly on the move, resembles more a "critic," "therapist," "anthropologist," "diplomat," "carrier" than "author," because he undermines the original and in the "new phrasing" seeks "another place to live." All translations release not so much the "original speech" and confirm or approve the integrity of the "source," but on the contrary, they reveal that the original was already broken at the source. The failure of the translator may be that, like no one else, he discovers non-originality and non-singularity of the source, as he discovers that the source is a myth and illusion, and that at the beginning there was commotion and a multitude of motifs shaping it.

Perhaps, what Bauman has to say is scandalously simple: we live in the culture of reviewers and in the culture of reviews, where the etymological trail bringing the Latin term *recensio* to its root in "census, inventory" exposes our culture as that of bourgeoned inventories. Bauman himself refused to be part of this culture. Contemporary press and media produce audiences unable to judge. Yet, the audience is interested in having opinions, and that is why the media stuff dead audience with dead opinions and copious data. The journalist exists in relationship with the media as a producer of public opinion, but lacks substance of an authority who would himself testify to the information. Bauman chose the role of the translator because he chose the role of a critic and messenger at the same time, someone

who reports on a fire of the social world, on the demolition of society. From Bauman's point of view, two great structures that for centuries have been integrating social life—law and language—are now in a state of madness. The words of the language have gone mad in the sense that we no longer know what they mean. Letters of law went mad in the sense that we no longer know what they regulate nor what judgments they render. The individual, listening to the voices of the world, needs an interpreter, because one does not know in what language and in what name the world speaks today. The translator personifies active utopia of language and law undergoing disintegration.

## Society Does not Exist
## (There is only Socialization)

It was Georg Simmel and his "sociological impressionism" that convinced Bauman of the fact that sociology had for too long preoccupied itself with "large and well-formed organs"—be it states, societies, or communities (Simmel 1950; Simmel 2009). Bauman, similarly to Simmel, wanted to study social life on a different scale, in order to—almost like a dentist—probe the "inside of things." For Simmel, society is the mutual spiritual interaction of individuals. In this regard Simmel wrote that there is only society in action, i.e., in the making. It was Simmel who wrote that one should speak not so much of society (*Gesellschaft*), but of socialization (*Vergesellschaftung*), which means that society is not a substance, but a process, actions and events, a multitude of forms giving things their meanings. If "society" is understood as the mutual interaction of individuals, then describing the forms of this interaction is the true task of sociology. Such was the mission of sociology bequeathed by Simmel to Bauman.

Here, however, a multitude of questions arise. One feels compelled to ask: what are the forms of socialization? Are they the possibilities of realizing a pre-existing "interest" or "drive"? Is "sociability"—the core of what is social—the result of social life, or merely its "medium," its "technique"? Is sociability a social life itself , or is it a "fantasy of social life" detached from this life? By establishing the primacy of sociability—in the process of socialization, do we establish the primacy of the play as a form of social life? Is sociable community a community *tout court*? Does living in society simply mean communing with sociable community? Is sociable community just a playful form of socialization that is to reality as a work is to the world?

One should also ask whether socialization, as a generalization of the idea of society, takes place through and within the power relations. Or is socialization the outside of power, and where is power there is no socialization? Is power just an instrument of socialization? The relations of power and subordination are not interpreted in terms of control but in terms of material and spiritual technologies that form bodies and actions. Finally, one should ask about the transparency of sociability and the principle of its transparency. Does this "secret of sociability" lie in the true charm of its secrecy, or also in the charm of its betrayal? Does lying in society threaten the very foundations of social life—especially if we accept that the evolution of our relationship to lies is not yet complete? Is the "society" not founded on a certain constitutive contradiction, since the liberal axiom is that the right of every person

to keep a secret (*Geheimnis*) comes along with the right of every person to ask questions and attempt to unveil the secrets of other individuals?

It seems that Simmel and Bauman share the conviction that mutual knowledge about oneself is not a sufficient condition for the creation of certain relations between people, and that ignorance is still needed. It is only in "purpose associations" where it is not so much discretion that applies but full anonymity, where members need to know about themselves only that they create it. Everything is exhausted in the substantive content of the relationship, which does not involve personality. Trust, on the other hand, is an "intermediate place," extremely sensitive and located between knowledge and ignorance. One who knows everything does not need to rely on trust, and one who does not know anything cannot trust. Trust is, therefore, all about knowing based on discretion, that is, respect for the partner's secrets, partner's will to keep concealed certain content and about refraining from knowing what the partner chooses to keep secret.

However, here too, we come across a contradiction between two principles—what is not hidden can be known; what is not disclosed should not be known. The right to confidentiality is the right to spiritual private property. However, is the democratic subject entitled to confidentiality? Modern man has certainly too much to hide to truly engage in friendship and to give in to the principle of loyalty and transparency. Does this mean that only partial friendships are possible in the "society of individuals" and even in sociability?

In fact, what sociability brings to light from social reality is—for both Simmel and Bauman—the very moment of socialization. Sociability is a "pure form of socialization," it is a free association of individuals who interact with each other. In society and the more so in "regime of tact" man seems to be himself, yet he is not quite so. The nature of social relations is fully symmetrical—it releases the individual's joy of communing with others. If sociability is not to be just an "abstraction of socialization," then it must demand material interactions between equals. Sociability is the regime supporting the process of socialization. In German, this requirement is conveniently expressed by the words *sich Unterhalten*, which mean "maintaining together," but also "to talk with," "have a good time," "enjoy oneself." Social subjects are mutually simultaneous translators. The question is: what is maintained in sociability? What translations are possible? Who explains what? Does sociability maintain merely the appearance of a free society outside the real class society?

It would seem that arriving at sociability understood as mere cultivation of the "spirit of the surface," those "play forms" pursuing life "beyond life," "above life," or "more than life" (*Mehr-als-Leben*), is not what fulfils the pursuit of a sociologist of an active utopia. The utopia of sociability would lack activity. It does, however—as Simmel observes—become "more-life" (*mehr-Leben*), in the sense that it is "a constant production of life anew." Certainly, production is not the only function of life that it fulfils, as it constitutes life itself. Sociable life is constantly in the act of its self-creation. Sociability becomes an active utopia only when sociable culture is about common acquisition and improvement of "dexterity" in the disposition of the sensual world, and when it is about the effective use of "instruments" for purposes consistent with solidarity and freedom. Thus, "social culture" is an area of possible mediatisation between "freedom" and "nature."

Bauman, while continuing Simmel's work, says this perhaps: universal freedom means universal equality, for freedom is the negation of all rule. No one can be liberated or en-

dowed with equality—neither by grace, nor individually, by the power of the sovereign or by decision—otherwise than by mutual recognition—in sociability. The problem is that politics, including "politics of sociability," or "politics of socialization" always exists under certain conditions. Of course, the conditions that constitute a certain form of economic relations and entanglement of relations of power do not exhaust the entire politics. Nonetheless these conditions define it significantly and give it a substance. Civilization, or socialization, is an active utopia and a new reason of politics—including the politics of emancipation—when it appears to be developing the principle of democracy. In this sense, civilization, or socialization, is not politics abolishing all violence: it only shifts its boundaries to create public and private space for a deeper and never complete socialization for the politics of emancipation of sociability, i.e., the establishing a universal society. Here, Bauman asks in amazement: why are there so many "now-ready-people" who are unable to live in society? Bauman says: what we genuinely miss is becoming a human in sociability.

## Society of Individuals
## (New Assembly of the Social)

Norbert Elias in the preface to his famous book *The Society of Individuals* admits that "It is unusual to talk about the society of individuals. But it may be quite useful to be able to emancipate oneself from the older, more familiar usage, which often makes the two terms look like simple opposites" (Elias 1939/2010). For Elias, the concept of the "society of individuals" is not an expression of methodological individualism, nor even a theorem on the ontology of the social world, but a simple epistemological postulate, according to which "individuals" for other individuals are more "real" than "society," which through individual deontologization becomes nothing else but a momentary and unstable association of individuals.

Therefore, in the "society of individuals," "society" is not the primary value but as a construct drawn from putting together individual interests or actions. The claim that in "reality" there is no such thing as society—but a multitude of individuals unable to be subsumed under a single denominator—exposes the singularity of experience of social reality. In practice, this this is tantamount to the termination of the social contract and return to treating one's own distinctness (body) as the only reality worthy of interest. In this line of thinking, there returns the false myth about the beginning of the social, where the first person on Earth—biblical Adam—enters almost as a *deus ex machina*; an independent person to whom other people join, subsequently forming larger groups. Needless to say, this fabric can easily be lost. The myth of the unitary social constitution excludes, of course, a competitive image whereby the "individual" is constituted by what is "originally social." This myth of individualism excludes the idea of a constitution and the assembly of what is "individual" through conversation and exchange, i.e. through the tools provided within the social. The individual is unable to imagine oneself as a "something" assembled in a social process. The individual imagines oneself as "something" that dismantles the social.

All of Bauman's books on liquidity are critiques "a society of individuals," the society after the dismantling of the social. *Liquid Modernity* published in 2000 provides a theo-

retical framework for analysing liquidity, and pronounces the withdrawal or concealment of the notion of "society"—as if Bauman wanted to frighten us (and himself) with the famous 1987 statement by Margaret Thatcher: "There is no such thing as society." This statement from the former Prime Minister of Great Britain has become the emblematic motto of the economic and political changes of recent decades. Neoliberal economics, well-conceptualized by so many theorists of culture, such as David Harvey, Judith Butler, Isabella Lorey, Lauren Berlant, or Zygmunt Bauman, continues to be the mainstream of contemporary cultural theory (Harvey 2014; Butler 2015; Lorey 2015; Berlant 2011). In the last decades contemporary culture and its theories have reacted, in particular, to the phenomena of globalization and precarization, thus becoming a space for public debate, but also providing inspiration for scientific analysis. Studies by Luc Boltanski, Fredric Jameson and Zygmunt Bauman opened the space for discussion on the transformations of culture in economic context and in the global perspective, especially after the untapped social crisis of 2007–2009 (Jameson 2009; Boltanski 1990/2012).

Consecutive volumes of Bauman's writings speak only of the consequences of the dismantling of the social, that is, they talk about the fate of concepts that cannot be thought separately but together, yet because of "liquidity" they are thought within the framework of "a society of individuals." These concepts are: love (*Liquid Love: On the Frailty of Human Bonds* 2003), life (*Liquid Life* 2005a), fear and security (*Liquid Fear* 2006), time and uncertainty (*Liquid Times: Living in an Age of Uncertainty* 2006), power and surveillance (*Liquid Surveillance: A Conversation* 2013), and finally, wealth and poverty, work and unemployment (*Does the Richness of the Few Benefit Us All?* 2013).

Bauman writes, therefore, about disassembled society, i.e. about the society of aroused but deprived of love individuals, of the working but unemployed people, of the people who are constantly frightened and who are seeking security, of the people who have access to knowledge, but live in uncertainty, people who desire wealth and celebrate the wealthy, but experience nothing but poverty, of the people who still believe they make a difference, but have long ago been transformed into consumers.

Having delivered such a diagnosis on the demolition of society, Bauman asks the laconic question: is politics at all possible in an individualized society? Love, knowledge, safety, work, but also—one's own life and time cannot be experienced separately. Certain things cannot be done and should not be done in solitude. That is why the only subject of Bauman's thoughts are deep waters of life, which he tried to describe in his confession titled *This is Not a Diary* (Bauman 2012). Life is what is common and there is no life beyond what is common. The absence of socialism in our thinking about life leads to the privatization of life. This entails the death of "active utopia" and "culture as practice" or rather the death of "common multiple practices." All this together means death of human hope.

## Not Just Flows
### (Nearness)

Let me draw the final conclusion. Bauman is a sociologist deeply conflicted with his time. Bauman does not write his praise of liquidity, free flow, uncertainty, free love, terrifying

inequalities, dispersed time, empty life, illusion of immortality, or life reduced to pulp. Society is not just about flows. Bauman is certainly not a philosopher praising the "free flow" and the "sociology of fluids." His thoughts do not follow the thought of Gilles Deleuze or Luce Irigaray (Deleuze, Guattari 1993; Irigaray 1991). Alone, flow is not sufficient for the establishment of society. What is necessary is a socialist practice. For something to happen, it is not enough for something to be happening—on the contrary, it often takes something to stop happening and connect, bind, and be together. Bauman, as a result, writes about our unfulfilled hopes for a better life.

It was Bauman who famously proclaimed that the 20th century witnessed the transition—perhaps mediated by the "age of ambivalence"—from "Solid Modernity" to "Fluid Modernity." The former, "Solid Modernity," was characterized by striving for permanent and static forms of social life, ideal forms, the most rational and subjected to the widest possible control. Indeed, Solid Modernity dissolved the previous, existing structures—feudal, ethnic, religious—but only in the name of replacing them with rational and hard as solid structures that are modern, ideally designed, completely bureaucratic. The second modernity, "liquid," is also characterized by the dissolution but without a vision of organizing the whole of social life, without a project and without striving for stabilization. The foundation of liquid modernity is the exuberant and individual consumption of perishable goods and equally impermanent social relations. In liquid modernity, one loses support, gets lost, and does not know who one is, not mentioning the lack of social support in a world where all relations with people are of consumer nature and are impermanent. The world of liquid modernity is the world after dismantling the social.

We do not find in this world a vision of a new order, there are no attempts to reconstruct "society" or "community," or to re-connect a multitude of events into something bearing even a distant resemblance to a "collective" postulated by Bruno Latour (Latour 2005). Bauman's world of "liquid modernity" is the world of solitary individuals floating in the ocean of variation. It is not a rhizome, not even a web, but a collection of individuals. Liquid modernity condemns the subject to being an individual—literally: indivisible, permanent and closed, in return offers freedom of consumption. The "fluid life" described by Bauman has nothing to do with co-habitation, living together, living in a community, sharing life or work, joy or suffering, sex or eating together, but is rather a metaphor of uncertainty and risk used for critique of the consumption culture of late capitalism. Even if "being modern," as Bauman repeatedly says, is being in a state of constant modernization—which means that there is no such thing as "modernity," neither "solid" nor "liquid"—the compulsion to continually start again, this torment of new beginnings, condemns the individual to the logic of impermanence, life in a landfill, among ruins, in a world of permanent deregulation and management of endless crises and risks. Living in liquid modernity is life in ruins, and ruin is the abode of life after life has left. Bauman, speaking from beyond liquid modernity, as the spirit of active utopia, urges us to re-assemble the social world and re-new life together.

The author of *Liquid Times* is the writer of death of an active Utopia, describing the exclusion of socialism from our thinking and feeling. This exclusion leads to the annulment of the politics friendship and the ethics of hospitality necessary on occasions when we have fellow-creature guests at the door, i.e. when at the border, at the threshold of the society of individuals, there appears un uninvited guest. It is not abstract Other of philosophers

but a tangible Other with expressive face, unpleasant breath, foreign speech, incomprehensible customs, disturbing clothing and uncomfortable religious beliefs. It is a stranger seeking closeness, a stranger, about whom—in terms of moral panic—Bauman writes in *Strangers at Our Door* (Bauman 2016). It was Simmel who, when writing about "stranger" (*der Fremde*)—different from both "enemy" and "outsider" (*Feind, Gegner*)—added, that while being a person from afar, the stranger is not a "wanderer" who comes today and goes tomorrow, but the one who comes and stays. This is why the stranger is close and distant at the same time (Simmel 2009). The stranger is in fact "uncanny" (*das Unheimliche*) in the inverted Freudian sense of the word—it is the remoteness that must become close. Only for Freud, uncanny was what was primarily close and only later became infinitely distant.

When I think "Zygmunt Bauman," I think his definiteness, I think his face, I think the moment when he first read Janina Bauman's *Winter in the morning: a young girl's life in Warsaw ghetto and beyond* (Bauman 1986). When I think "Zygmunt Bauman," I think of my last letter from the Professor, where he responds to my request for a title of his lecture at the conference on atheism, which he was to be held in October last year at the Faculty of "Artes Liberales" at Warsaw University. He replied in the simplest possible way, guided as usual by his friendship with the world: "It's on non-self-sufficient man in search of god..." and added: "As long as I live and if in October I am able to visit my Polish friends without bringing them harm..."

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