
Bauman and the Postmodern Secular Dilemma

THE transition from modernity to postmodernity is represented metaphorically in Bauman's and Elmessiri's writings as an inherent transformation from solid modernity or solid rational materialism (reason, science, nation/state, families, and factories) to liquid modernity or liquid non-rational materialism (body, sex, global markets and consumption). This chapter approaches the mapping of this transformation in Bauman's writings, and the last chapter will trace Elmessiri's mapping of this transformation with particular emphasis on its convergence with, and divergence from, that of Bauman.

5.1 END OF INTELLECTUAL IMPERIALISM

Bauman assumes that there is a "genetic bond" between modernity and postmodernity. "Solid modernity" aspired to establish

a fully rational perfect world, rationally perfect, or perfectly rational.... The most powerful thinkers were convinced that it was a matter of acquiring enough information, enough knowledge, and enough technological skills in order to achieve such a perfect world. Change was seen as temporary until we construct a world which won't require further change.¹

Bauman and the Postmodern Secular Dilemma

This utopian urge, however, has not been fulfilled, and new conditions have been emerging. Understanding the nature of these conditions can be grasped only if compared to the utopian ambitions of modernity. The basic assumption of *les philosophes* was that more education would necessarily entail more rationality and tolerance. However, this assumption, according to Karen Armstrong, “proved to be as utopian as any of the messianic fantasies,” and secular ideologies “proved to be just as murderous as the old religious bigotry, as become clear in the Nazi Holocaust and the Soviet Gulag.”² Bauman underlines the ironic transformation of the basic assumption of the Enlightenment, and modernity at large, by drawing our attention to the two Greek lexemes of the word “utopia”: eutopia (a good society) and outopia (nowhere).³

The term postmodernity, in Bauman’s view, underlines the defining traits of the conditions that emerged throughout the affluent countries in the course of the twentieth century, and took its present shape in the second half of that century.⁴ Postmodernity was seen by the early Bauman as a new human condition resulting from the divorce between culture and power or the nation-state and the authority of intellect. In the new condition, intellectuals no longer play the role of the legislators and their position is reduced to the modest role of the “interpreters” and “semiotic brokers.” Though the intellectuals may remain loyal to their elevated and lofty ideals of freedom and justice, they have abandoned “the universalistic ambitions” of modernity. And even if they still maintain such ambitions, their opinions are set on the same level of any other ordinary citizens. The postmodern political state is hardly in need of intellectual mobilization, and it relies instead on the rational techniques of coercion, panoptical control and the seduction of the market; and therefore, culture is no longer expected to be the intellectuals’ monopolistic domain of authority.⁵

The postmodern world, in Bauman’s view, celebrates the “political dispossession of the intellectuals” and the end of their “intellectual imperialism.”⁶ Unlike the age of the Enlightenment and the era of solid modernity which represented a glorified image of *Les philosophes*, the postmodern worldview conceives of the intellectuals as mere

MAPPING THE SECULAR MIND

“semiotic brokers with the function of facilitating communication between communities and traditions.”⁷ Bauman does not hesitate to claim that the “universalist, imperialist, and assimilationist ambitions of the modern state are resented everywhere.”⁸ The role of the intellectuals becomes a target of ridicule in postmodern times because history has become nothing but scattered details and phenomena dominated by the reign of relativity. The realm of art is no exception, since the boundaries between art and non-art are blurred in the same way the boundaries between truth and falsity, justice and injustice are blurred. Over and above, postmodernity witnesses the dissolution of the signifier and the signified as well as the distortion of communication. Here the decline of the position of the intellectuals is eloquently described by Bauman in a series of rhetorical questions:

How ridiculous it seems to try to change the direction of history when no powers give an inkling that they wish to give history direction. How empty seems the effort to show that what passes for truth is false when nothing has the courage and the stamina to declare itself as truth for everybody and for all times. How farcical it seems to fight for genuine art when one can no more drop anything incidentally without the dropped object being proclaimed art. How quixotic to debunk the distortion in the representation of reality once no reality claims to be more real than its representation. How idle it seems to exhort people to go there rather than somewhere else in a world in which everything goes.⁹

Though Bauman conceives of postmodernity as a chance to open the closed systems of modernity and to transcend the universalistic ambitions of the intellectuals as legislators, he is also aware of the dilemmas of postmodernity, particularly its tendency to challenge all foundations and any points of referentiality. Bauman refers to the domain of art and literature as obvious examples that reflect the end of the ambitions of legislation in postmodernity; there are no longer any explicit and determined rules that govern or control the discourses of taste and artistic judgment. The best metaphor that can reflect the state of contemporary art, in Bauman’s view, is that of the rhizome, a metaphor which is very close to Jacques Derrida’s metaphor of the

Bauman and the Postmodern Secular Dilemma

zigzag movement that characterizes the infinite, unexpected and undetectable direction of the process of both artistic creation and aesthetic interpretation. Caught in a state of “perpetual present,” art and literature do not conform to any vision of development or rules, embracing instead the absence of all referential frameworks. It is precisely for this reason that postmodern art can be conceived of as a state of protest against the notions of mimesis and its negative connotations. This postmodern orientation, however, has its promise of creativity as well as its threat of radicalism.

Postmodernist theories, in Bauman’s view, can be conceived of as an explicit declaration of the mitigation of the ambitions of modernist art and critical reception; it is a call for the end of political or missionary ambitions of art, of artistic canons, and of interest in aesthetic grounds. In short, it is a declaration of the “impossibility of legislating the rules” that distinguish between true art on the one hand and non-art or bad art on the other.¹⁰

Bauman’s attitude is influenced by the views of Walter Benjamin, particularly his reference to what Marcel Duchamp had already shown in 1919. Andreas Huyssen refers to Benjamin’s lamentation on the loss of the aura of artistic creation and reception, including *l’art engage* and critical realism:

By iconoclastically altering a reproduction of the Mona Lisa and, to use another example, by exhibiting a mass-produced urinal as a fountain sculpture, Marcel Duchamp succeeded in destroying what Benjamin called the traditional art work’s aura, that aura of authenticity and uniqueness that constituted the work’s distance from life and that required contemplation and immersion on the part of the spectator.¹¹

Bauman refers to this act as one of the most “scandalous” acts of “ostensible radicalism,” foreshadowing the anarchy that dominates the creation and the perception of art at present:

Post-modern art (which truly took off, according to most analysts, only in the 1970s) has gone a long way now from the iconoclastic gesture of Marcel

MAPPING THE SECULAR MIND

Duchamp, who sent to an art exhibition a urinal dubbed 'Fountain' and signed 'Richard Mutt,' with the explanation that 'whether Mr Mutt with his own hands made the fountain or not has no importance. He *chose* it.'¹²

It seems that Bauman is shocked with this vulgarity of non-art, and one wonders what his reaction and comment would be if he were acquainted with Vanessa Beecroft's latest public performance which transformed the pictorial tradition of idealized fantasy of femininity and the world of naked bodies into reality. According to Luke Harding, the performance featured one hundred women standing still in Berlin's *Neue Nationalgalerie* for three hours, each woman oiled from the waist up and wearing nothing but a pair of pantyhose. The performance was said to be an attempt at the exposition of "naturalness," since these naked bodies were expected to do nothing on stage but to react "naturally" to their physical feeling in the form of physical actions as standing, sitting, lying and yawning.¹³

5.2 PROMISE AND RISK OF POSTMODERN ETHICS

The state of confusion in mapping postmodernity becomes very obvious when Bauman introduces many definitions to cover the newly emergent human condition. Here he does not define postmodernity as the situation created by the divorce between the state and the intellectuals but as

the state of mind of philosophers, social thinkers, artists – all those people on whom we rely when we are in a pensive mood or just pause for a moment to find out whence we are moving or being moved.¹⁴

Philosophers, social thinkers and artists are expected to articulate the new emergent reality and its orientation. However, the cognitive mapping of postmodernity presupposes a state of confusion not only in the world around us but also in the way a critic or a philosopher attempts to determine the contours or the significant signs of such a map. In other words, the state of confusion does not exclude the

Bauman and the Postmodern Secular Dilemma

philosophers, the artists and the intellectuals who attempt to map this confusion because they themselves are, as cartographers of the post-modern, like nomads in uncharted space.

The state of confusion, if not inconsistency and ambiguity, is enhanced by the fact that it is very difficult for Bauman to determine the significant difference between modernity and postmodernity, especially when he stresses that the postmodern mind is the radical victory of modern critical culture over the modern society it aimed to improve through throwing it wide open to its own potential.¹⁵ It comes as no surprise then that Bauman does not provide a clear-cut definition of postmodernity. Rather, he takes refuge in metaphors so as to uncover the complexity of the new emergent reality.

Like Jameson, Bauman is aware that no theory of modernity makes sense today unless it comes to terms with the hypothesis of a postmodern break with the modern. The dominant paradigms of modernity, as Bauman suggests, celebrated a shared vision of modern history as a movement with a direction by means of universalization, rationalization or systemization. None of those concepts can be upheld in the light of postmodern experience, and new metaphors are required to describe the newly emergent phenomena and their point of convergence with and divergence from the original project of modernity. Not surprisingly, Bauman holds that it is necessary to discard the metaphor of progress and the conception of society as an organismic or mechanistic metaphor because all order that can be found is a local and transitory phenomenon whose nature can be grasped by a metaphor of a whirlpool appearing in the flow of a river, retaining its shape only for a relatively brief period and only at the expense of constant renewal of content.¹⁶

This metaphoric representation, in Bauman's view, signals the movement from the closed systems of modernity to the open systems of postmodernity i.e. from a uni-dimensional mode of existence and a singular modernity to a multiplicity of being-in-the-world and alternative modernities. Within the postmodern worldview, the very image of society as the human body or the *telos* of progress (the organismic metaphor) or as the system and machine (the mechanistic

MAPPING THE SECULAR MIND

metaphor) are no longer operative because agency and habitat have become more important as unpredictable and complex systems.

In an attempt to trace the most decisive difference between modernity and postmodernity as understood by Bauman, Peter Beilharz argues that the postmodern worldview gives priority to localism, relativism, plurality of models, communities of meaning and hermeneutic interpretation over the universalistic ambitions of intellectuals, the obsession with mastery over nature and social engineering.¹⁷ According to this explanation, postmodernity can be seen as a critique of culture rather than a new vision that entirely breaks with modernity; and therefore, the nature and the contours of postmodernity cannot be fully determined, giving rise to a state of confusion, ambiguity and ambivalence that can be expressed only in metaphors. Vit Vanicek attributes Bauman's metaphorical approach to postmodernity to the fact that metaphorical expressions try to capture the "elusive nature of post-modernity," providing the reader with the realization that such metaphorical language is inevitable for reinforcing the way the new human condition is being presented.¹⁸

A close examination of Bauman's early understanding of postmodernity shows that he bases his perception of postmodernity on a call for the abandonment of the "ontological and epistemological premises of modernity."¹⁹ Postmodernity called into question the premises of social reality, including art, the nation-state, society, ethnicity, race, family, gender and religion. Thus an adequate theory of postmodernity was expected to be constructed only in a "cognitive space organized by a different set of assumptions; it needs its own vocabulary."²⁰

But Bauman's faith in the achievements of the Enlightenment and modernity leads him into a state of confusion in mapping postmodernity. In other words, it is extremely difficult for a European intellectual to abandon the legacy of Western modernity, one which is seen as, to borrow Bauman, an "incomplete adventure" or, to borrow Habermas, an "incomplete project." It is precisely for this reason that Bauman finds it difficult, paradoxically, to abandon modernity; and therefore, he defines postmodernity as "modernity conscious of its true nature,"

Bauman and the Postmodern Secular Dilemma

“modernity for itself” and “modernity emancipated from false consciousness”²¹

Though aware of the fact that postmodernity is an inherently polysemic and controversial idea, Bauman has attempted to describe its main tenets and its expected roles. Five major tenets and roles can be detected in Bauman’s writings on postmodernity: (1) the acceptance of the plurality of the world; (2) the resolute emancipation from the modern drive to overcome ambivalence; (3) the admittance of the non-feasibility of the original project of modernity; (4) the belief in the possibility of peaceful coexistence rather than a temporary equilibrium of hostile powers; and (5) the celebration of a new trinity: liberty, diversity and tolerance as opposed to nation, blood and territory.

Bauman, however, is not idealistic, and he believes that if the aforementioned ambitions fail to materialize, postmodernity will be another version of “adolescent modernity.” Here the state of confusion in cognitive mapping is clear because we are confronted with a state of fluidity and uncertainty that defies predication or clear-cut definitions. Though aware of the social and moral consequences of the “collapse of grand narratives,” “the death of God,” “the death of man” and the “disappearance of all sacred and secular authorities,” Bauman is still optimistic, and he attempts to dismiss our exaggerated “popular fear of the void,” “anarchy” and “universal carnage.”²²

Bauman is aware of the fact that postmodernity is characterized by the dominance of relativity, especially when subjectivity becomes the only ultimate authority and when postmodernity “proclaims all restrictions on freedom illegal, at the same time doing away with social certainty and legalizing ethical uncertainty. Existential insecurity – ontological contingency of being – is the result.”²³

According to Richard Bernstein, it is true that the ambitions and the intentions of postmodernists are good, particularly their critiques of logo-centrism, Euro-centrism, humanism, and the Enlightenment legacy. They, however, are believed to be obsessed with a “relentless questing of any appeal to *archai* or foundations.”²⁴

In both *Modernity and the Holocaust* (1989) and *Postmodern Ethics* (1993), Bauman attempted to show that technological and bureaucratic

MAPPING THE SECULAR MIND

efficiency and state monopolization of action are the major forces that disrupted the possibility of transcendence and the recognition of the humanity of all human beings. Killing at distance within a closed and rationalized system turned the intersubjective relationship among human beings into a subject-object relationship that discards all implications of guilt and responsibility. The liberation of means from ends is seen as a major mechanism of modernity, one which has led to the marginalization of God, and thus “sapped the most solid of grounds on which moral instruction rested in the past,” promoting contractual obligations and even replacing “being for the other” with “being for oneself.”²⁵

In order that Bauman overcomes the vacuum created by rationalistic materialism he takes refuge in the philosophy of Emmanuel Lévinas (1906-1995), particularly his notion of the ethic of care for the Other. Bauman’s reference to Lévinas is interpreted by Keith Tester as an attempt to recover ethics from the vacuum “created by metaphysical and historical rebellion when they are combined with the modern instruments of rationality.”²⁶

Ross Abbinnett holds that the centrality of the concept of the care for the Other can be seen as response to the negative consequences of modernity in general and the Holocaust in particular. Emmanuel Lévinas attempted to introduce a transcendental philosophy based on the experience of the encounter with the Other i.e. the face-to-face encounter with the Other-than-self rather than the legislative structures of law, contractual obligations and economic necessity. This encounter is a metaphysical, though non-ontological, tendency towards transcendence and responsibility for the Other.²⁷

Lévinas himself maintains that his philosophy is based on a “phenomenology of sociality” that takes the face of the other man as the starting point of transcendence. It is a form of transcendence based on an intersubjective relationship among human beings rather than on ontology or formal legislation (perhaps a Kantian universal moral law). The transcendence of the self in the face of the other, or the situation of becoming oneself as another, is seen as the locus of transcendence as it creates the fear of rejecting, excluding, exiling or killing the Other.

Bauman and the Postmodern Secular Dilemma

Transcendence, Lévinas holds, becomes a never-ending process in which the human subject questions itself whether the *Da* (there) of *Dasein* (being-there) is not the usurpation of someone's place.²⁸ Here transcendence is almost synonymous with the infinite. Lévinas puts it this way:

The face-to-face is a relation in which the *I* frees itself from being limited to itself...from its reclusion within itself, from an existence in which the adventures are but an odyssey, i.e. a return to the island. The exodus of that limitation of the *I* to itself, which is revealed in a whole series of reflections of contemporary philosophy on the meeting with the Other...is also worthy of the adjective infinite.²⁹

Lévinas's philosophy is a response to the consequences of modernity, especially the processes of bureaucratization and rationalization that stood as an obstacle between the *I* and the Other through a long process of disciplinary actions and legislative morality. Here postmodern morality is offered as a way out of the universalistic ambitions that excludes the Other.

Fascinated with Lévinas's philosophy, Bauman believes that postmodern ethics can be based on the realization of the following ideas: (1) human beings are morally ambivalent; (2) the moral code is thoroughly personal; (3) moral phenomena are inherently non-rational because they are not regular, repetitive, and predictable; (4) morality is not universalizable since it is relative to time and place; (5) postmodern morality is neither relativistic nor nihilistic but it opposes the monopoly of ethical authority.³⁰ Postmodern ethics repudiates all attempts to impose a comprehensive ethical code that overlooks other temporalities and becomes nothing but an instrument of domination. Bauman maintains that humankind's moral unity is thinkable as the utopian horizon of deconstructing the claims of nation-states and nations-in-search-of-the-state.³¹

The presence of Lévinas in Bauman's thought becomes very obvious when he states that morality is a transcendence of being or the chance of such a transcendence through the choice of 'face to face' with the Other as if being had no voice, or if it had voice, that voice

MAPPING THE SECULAR MIND

can be ignored.³² Though Bauman emphasizes that this vision does not imply the reign of subjectivity, relativism and nihilism, it is better to shed light on the criticism levelled against this notion of postmodern ethics.

Ross Abbinnett argues that western civilization in both its modern and postmodern versions, in almost all Bauman's writings, conceived of human beings as "technical utilities" with "functionally specific traits;" and therefore, it comes to denote "the instrumental, technical and materialistic relations" which Bauman views as "the determinants of cognitive, disciplinary space." Abbinnett maintains that a political structure is required to overcome the "functionalisation of both the cognitive and the aesthetic space." However, Bauman, according to Abbinnett, repeats a certain Rousseauist logic in which human nature, in its original and compassionate purity, is constantly set in a sharp contrast with the "corruptive" institutions of civilization.³³

Bauman's idealistic vision has been also repudiated by Shaun Best. The major problem of this perception of ethics, in Best's view, is that it attempts to give the impression that the "I am responsible for the Other," and "I am responsible for myself" come to mean the same thing.³⁴ The same critique has also been launched by Ruud Kauling-freks who argues that Bauman comes very close to a "romantic and simplistic" view of organization being evil and man being essentially good as long as he stays in the proximity of the Other. It comes very close to a romanticism of emotions, impulses, spontaneity and passions versus the distance of reason and calculated behaviour.³⁵

5.3 FROM POSTMODERNITY TO LIQUID MODERNITY

In his late writings, Bauman comes to realize that the critical scene is abundant with confusing and conflicting interpretations of postmodernity. More importantly, the terms postmodernity and postmodernism have been "hopelessly confused" and used in many cases "synonymically." Bauman found himself "in the company of bedfellows" with whom he "would rather not share a bed," especially when the word "postmodernity" started to imply the "end of modernity."³⁶

Bauman and the Postmodern Secular Dilemma

Bauman, nevertheless, has rejected the alternative terms introduced by Anthony Giddens (late modernity); Ulrich Beck (second modernity); and George Balandier (*surmodernite*). He even decided to abandon the term postmodernity altogether, arguing that the post-modern age turned out to be, as Michael Hviid Jacobsen puts it, a “pandemonium instead of the promised paradise.”³⁷ Postmodernity, like modernity, has become an “anti-eschatological revolution.”³⁸ Bauman’s realization of the loss of the aura of postmodernity became very obvious when he published *Postmodernity and its Discontents* (1997). Beilharz remarks:

Around 1989 the idea of the postmodern still had the aura of a modernist mission, to save us from the stultifying past and high certainty that for Bauman characterizes modernity. Postmodernity seemed to offer so much; less than ten years later, a decade of living without an alternative, and the postmodern was beginning to look tawdry, having delivered little by way of new lives to either intellectuals or especially to vagabonds.³⁹

“Liquid modernity” is the new metaphor Bauman introduces to map the transformation of western modernity. This metaphor echoes Karl Marx’s metaphor “all that is solid melts into air,” which he used in the Communist Manifesto in reference to the self-confident modern spirit and its ambitions to change the so-called stagnant traditions. The same metaphor was used in the early 1980s by Marshall Berman as the title of his well-known book *All That is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (1982). Commenting on the cosmic scope and visionary grandeur of Marx’s image, Berman argues that the affinities between Karl Marx and the modernists will be clearer if the entire image is quoted: “all that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and men at last are forced to face with sober senses the real conditions of their lives and their relations with their fellow men.” The significance of this metaphor lies in the fact that Marx’s proclamation of the destruction of everything holy goes beyond the standard nineteenth-century materialist argument against the existence of God and highlights the absence of the very aura of holiness, affirming that it

MAPPING THE SECULAR MIND

would be very difficult for us to understand ourselves in the present unless we confront what is absent.⁴⁰

In the late twentieth-century and at the beginning of the 21st century, the melting of solids has acquired a new meaning or, to borrow Paul Ricoeur, a “surplus of meaning.” According to Bauman, such Marxist concepts and terminology as “bourgeois society,” “alienation,” “reification” and even “liquefaction” had been used in a completely different context and circumstances and for entirely different analytical purposes. In *Liquid Modernity* (2000), Bauman points out that modernity’s call for melting all solids was feverishly sought “not in order to do away with the solids once and for all...but to clear the site for *new and improved solids*.”⁴¹

In a conversation with Keith Tester, Bauman refers to Thomas Kuhn’s notion of paradigm shift and stresses that new concepts are avidly sought when “the old concept tends to the aspects of realities which are no longer central and offers an axis around which the current experience no longer rotates.”⁴² In the present stage of the history of modernity, traditional metaphors have lost much of their “original cognitive capacity” because they no longer have a significant place in our contemporary experience.⁴³

But why does Bauman choose this metaphor of liquidity in particular? Among the crucial reasons behind Bauman’s admiration of the images of fluidity and liquidity as fitting metaphors to grasp the nature of this phase in the history of modernity is that liquids, unlike solids, “cannot easily hold their shape. Fluids...neither fix space nor bind time.... [They] do not keep to any shape for long and are constantly ready (and prone) to change.”⁴⁴ In an interview with Milena Yakimova, Bauman points out the sensitivity of fluids, as opposed to solids, to time and change; they make salient the brittleness and breakability of both inter-human bonds and identities. The liquidity metaphor has been dominating Bauman’s recent publications: *Liquid Modernity* (2000), *Liquid Love* (2003), *Liquid Life* (2005), *Liquid Fear* (2006) and *Liquid Times* (2006).⁴⁵

Bauman and the Postmodern Secular Dilemma

5.3.1 *From Gardeners to Hunters*

In *Liquid Life*, Bauman defines the present mode of being as “liquid life” dominated by a growing atmosphere of “uncertainty” and “fast-moving events,” a “succession of new beginnings” or “the swift and painless endings.”⁴⁶ This liquid mode of existence is compared to a risky and fearful game of musical chairs that threatens to exclude the powerless, the poor, and all those who cannot or do not want to cope with the fast-changing liquid life. Progress is no longer a metaphor of “sweet dreams and expectations,” “radical optimism” and “promise of universally shared and lasting happiness” but a terrible nightmare and a sinister real “game of musical chairs” in which a second’s inattention results in irreversible defeat and exclusion.⁴⁷

Unlike solid modernity, liquid modernity can do without a strong emphasis on the ideas of patriotism and the modern hero who expresses his willingness to die for the nation. As Ulrich Im Hof suggests, patriotism did not refer only to loyalty to the king but also to a sense of identity with a fatherland, one that is different from other nations. This process required the creation of a glorified image of historical authenticity and patriotic virtue, thus implying a powerful state with a political will to achieve the ambitions of the Enlightenment.⁴⁸

Bauman relates the dominance of national and heroic patriotism in solid modern times to secularization and the deification of the nation-state. The modern hero is enlisted by the modern nation-state not for the sake of moral salvation but for the sake of securing the secular and “material immortality of the nation;” the latter task is confirmed by the erection of memorials that could stand as an ample evidence of the material gains and benefits gained by death on the battlefield:

[M]odernity also deified and enchanted the ‘nation,’ the new authority – and so by proxy the man-made institutions that claimed to speak and act in its name. ‘The sacred’ was not so much disavowed as made the target of an ‘unfriendly takeover’: moved under different management and put in the service of the emergent nation-state. The same happened to the martyr: he was enlisted by the nation-state under a new name of the hero.⁴⁹

MAPPING THE SECULAR MIND

In liquid modernity, the utopian imagination of heroism, martyrdom and sacrifice is severely ridiculed, stressing instead the primacy of the pleasure principle. Here it is very important to contrast Bauman's *Postmodernity and Its Discontents* with Sigmund Freud's *Civilization and Its Discontents*. Whereas Freud emphasized the reality principle and its connotations of repression, regulation, suppression and forced renunciation, Bauman underlines the reign of individual freedom combined with a growing sense of uncertainty and insecurity.⁵⁰

Unlike solid modernity, liquid modernity is associated with "free reign of the pleasure principle in the realm of consumption" because reality is no longer the enemy of pleasure. On the contrary, "spending is a duty," since it gives "symbolic rivalry" and monopolizes the "definition of good life."⁵¹ Here Bauman's thesis is set in a sharp contrast with Freud's old lamentations because the reality principle "has today to defend itself in the court of justice in which the pleasure principle is the presiding judge."⁵²

According to Bauman, it is hardly surprising that the metaphors of the gamekeeper, the gardener, the martyr and the hero are thrown into the background in the modern liquid era. Bauman attributes the celebration of "the end of utopia" and the fading of utopian imagination to the transformation from solid modernity to liquid modernity i.e. the transformation from the gardener's intervention to the hunter's freedom. In this sense, human beings are granted their freedom and are required to be independent and to play the role of the hunter. Bauman describes this stage as a fertile soil for the growing atmosphere of both individualization and deregulation.⁵³

In the modern liquid era, the cognitive map of prospective consumers is manipulated by seductive commodity symbols: (1) the authority of celebrities (public personalities, great athletes, popular actors and singers) and (2) the authority of science (authority of scientific surveys, numbers and algebraic formulae). These authorities are "symbols of social approval," "rational and solid knowledge" and "well-informed choice."⁵⁴ Bauman suggests that liquid modernity can be seen as a "casino-like culture," in which life is turned into individual games of "self-enclosed, self-referential and self-centred

Bauman and the Postmodern Secular Dilemma

episodes,” a “series of new beginnings” or a “collection of short stories.”⁵⁵ The saddest irony, according to Bauman, is that lavish consumption becomes the sign of success and fame. The possession and consumption of certain objects are seen as necessary conditions of happiness and perhaps even of human dignity.⁵⁶

Liquid modern life is referred to as a “consuming life,” since it transforms the whole world, including human beings and their lifestyles, into “objects of consumption” or, to borrow Elmessiri, “useful matter.” When objects, humans and cultural traditions lose their “usefulness” or “instrumental value,” they can be, and should be, easily disposed of. The saddest irony is that any attachment or expression of loyalty to old objects or traditions is conceived of as “a cause of shame, not pride.”⁵⁷ When possession and consumption of objects become the central value of life, all human beings are thus haunted by “the spectre of exclusion.”⁵⁸ The consumption race is merciless:

The true task in the race is (temporary) rescue from being excluded into the ranks of the destroyed and avoiding being consigned to waste. And with the competition turning global, the running must now be done round a global track.⁵⁹

5.3.2 Sex and the Body: The Unwinnable Jihad

In liquid consumerist societies, such lofty concepts as ‘self’ or ‘identity’ are thrown into the background and the metaphor of the body comes to the fore. The celebration of the body is no longer centred on the intensification of production and capital accumulation (the Weberian Protestant asceticism) in industrial plants or military service in the army. As Giddens suggests, the body, in the spheres of biological reproduction and medical interventions, has become a “phenomenon of choices and options.”⁶⁰ This orientation is closely related to the dynamics of the market which has replaced both the factory floor and the battlefield. The consuming body “moves into the focus of life politics as its ultimate purpose, the body is cast in a unique position not comparable with the role assigned to any other entity in the *Lebenswelt*.”⁶¹

MAPPING THE SECULAR MIND

Consumerism has created a “body-centred” and “body-fascinated” individual addicted to the struggle for pleasure and fitness. Bauman uses an originally Islamic concept as a metaphor to place emphasis on the significance of the struggle for fitness; the latter is compared to “the lifelong, unwinnable jihad.”⁶² The celebration of the body has become one of the most prominent characteristics of liquid “worldly transcendence” or, to be more precise, the neo-Gnostic immanence. In other words, it becomes the ‘pattern’ or ‘supreme metaphor’ for the effort to transcend individual immortality.⁶³ Bauman argues that

the body itself turned into an object for technology; the owner of the body was now a manager, a supervisor and an operator rolled into one, and the medical profession supplied him or her with ever more complex technological products to perform these functions.⁶⁴

The centrality of the body metaphor has transformed the denotations and connotations of the term ‘individual.’ At the beginning of the modern era, this term was usually associated with the notions of free choice and responsibility, and it referred to a complex social structure based on ‘a combination of gravitation and repulsion’ among the members of society. This meaning is no longer operative and the term ‘individuality’ comes to denote the collapse of the “dense social bonds that tightly wrapped the totality of life’s activities.”⁶⁵ Individuals in the liquid era are not just sensation seekers; they are obsessed with learning the art of enjoying and enhancing sensation. Here Bauman uses a sexual metaphor to explain the desire to enhance “sensual intensity” and the “overwhelming sensation”:

The purpose of such training is provided by the metaphor of multiple orgasm: a fit body, served by an equally well-trained mind, is a body capable of repeated, even continuous, intensity of sensations, a body forever ‘on the high,’ constantly open to all chances of experience which the world around may provide – a sort of well-tempered clavier always ready to emit tunes of sublime beauty.⁶⁶

Bauman and the Postmodern Secular Dilemma

In the phase of solid modernity, sex was seen as one of the most outstanding areas where the panoptical modern power was exercised. Bauman puts it bluntly when he says, the role of the male master was “akin to that of the foreman in the factory or the sergeant in the army.”⁶⁷ Bauman holds that sex was primarily functional and instrumental, but the rules of the game have changed or, to be more precise, have disappeared altogether.

Sex is no longer seen as an instrument of creating lasting social structures and it “serves as first and foremost the process of the ongoing atomization.”⁶⁸ Liquid free-floating eroticism

enters alliance with neither sexual reproduction nor love, claiming independence from both neighbours and flatly refusing all responsibility for the impact it may make on their fate; it proudly and boldly proclaims itself to be its own only, and sufficient, reason and purpose.⁶⁹

As Bauman suggests in his thought-provoking paper “On Post-modern Uses of Sex,” sexual activity in its postmodern rendition is “focused narrowly on its orgasmic effect.... Its paramount task is to supply ever stronger, infinitely variable, perfectly novel and unprecedented *Erlebnisse*.”⁷⁰ The celebration of sex is accompanied not only with the liquefaction of the family as a basic social unit but also with the new danger of paternal love and intimacy:

Children are now perceived mainly as sexual objects and as potential victims of their parents as sexual subjects; and since the parents are by nature stronger than their children and placed in the position of power, paternal sexuality may easily lead to the abuse of that power in the service of the parents’ sexual instincts. The specter of sex, therefore, also haunts family homes.⁷¹

In liquid modernity, identities are no longer seen as ‘meticulously designed,’ ‘carefully built’ and ‘rock-solid.’ “Solidity,” Bauman says, “is an anathema as is all permanence – now the sign of dangerous maladjustment to the rapidly and unpredictably changing world, to the surprise opportunities it holds and the speed with which it transforms

MAPPING THE SECULAR MIND

yesterday's assets into today's liabilities.''⁷² Commenting on Bauman's analysis and expressing his support for the postmodern turn, Steven Seidman remarks:

[A]s a fellow traveller along the postmodern road, I am in broad sympathy with much of what Bauman says. I especially admire the moral vision that he articulates. My experience as a Jew, as gay, as a parent, as a left intellectual, as a feminist man, feels like it will more likely be validated within a postmodern discourse than within modernist orthodoxy, which seems uncomfortable with these heterogeneous identities.⁷³

This quotation uncovers the most remarkable ironies that Sigmund Freud himself failed to anticipate. Modern civilization has abandoned the notion of solidity; and therefore, a free liquid reign to the sexual constitution of human beings becomes a potential possibility, if not a constitutional right. Freud's old lamentations, or rather, unfulfilled aspirations have been realized.⁷⁴

The dominance of the pleasure principle has led Bauman to conclude that the whole world has been transformed into two classes: tourists and vagabonds. The latter are said to be the waste of the world which has dedicated itself to tourist services:

The tourists stay or move at their hearts' desire. They abandon a site when new untried opportunities beckon elsewhere. The vagabonds know that they won't stay in a place for long, however strongly they wish to, since nowhere they stop are they likely to be welcome. The tourists move because they find the world within their (global) reach irresistibly *attractive* – the vagabonds move because they find the world within their (local) reach unbearably *inhospitable*. The tourists travel because *they want to*; the vagabonds because *they have no other bearable choice*.⁷⁵

Tourists and vagabonds are represented as the major 'metaphors of contemporary life' because we all are plotted on a continuum stretched between the poles of the "perfect tourist" and the "vagabond beyond remedy."⁷⁶ Bauman suggests that postmodern liquid life can be viewed as the transformation from the celebration of martyrs and

Bauman and the Postmodern Secular Dilemma

heroes to the celebration of tourists and celebrities. The liquid post-modern era, however, cannot continue without the existence of vagabonds:

The vagabonds, the victims of the world which made the tourists into its heroes, have their uses, after all; as the sociologists love to say – they are ‘functional.’ It is difficult to live in their neighbourhood, but it is unthinkable to live without them. It is their all-too-blatant hardships that reduce one’s own worries to marginal inconveniences. It is their evident unhappiness that inspires the rest to thank God daily for having made them tourists.⁷⁷

Liquid life, according to Bauman, can do without martyrs and heroes and it even fights the manifestations of any loyalty to martyrdom or heroism and considers them useless and irrational. However, Bauman stresses that the contradictions of postmodernity, particularly ontological and existential insecurities, give rise to a new postmodern religion i.e. fundamentalism. He insists that if the Holocaust is a legitimate child of modernity, fundamentalism is a ‘legitimate child of postmodernity.’ Bauman declares that religious fundamentalism offers an “alternative rationality” that unloads the burden of responsibility proclaimed by omnipotent postmodern culture and promoted by omnipotent market publicity.⁷⁸ Postmodern liquidity is a fertile soil for the growth of the Manichean vision which consists of two separate worlds in which the ‘other’ half is ruled by Satan and ‘our’ half is the one where good and truth reign. Bauman stresses that this vision is by no means an ‘invention of Islamic fundamentalism’ and he invites the reader to reflect on this fact:

Let’s remember that Islam has no monopoly on this vision. If we look at Palestinian and Israeli radicals, they both, amazingly, use the same sort of vocabulary. Both the Palestinian and Israeli sides present the conflict as a final clash between Jehovah and Mohammed and not between Palestinians and Israeli settlers. We see a quite similar kind of vocabulary when we analyze the news coverage of the last American elections, although the gods being worshiped had different names. But one must admit that in this vast current of today’s

MAPPING THE SECULAR MIND

Manichaeism, Islam has occupied a very important position, and this is for geopolitical reasons.⁷⁹

Karen Armstrong states that fundamentalism cannot be regarded as a purely Islamic phenomena; it is a global fact and has surfaced in very major faith in response to the problems of western modernity. Armstrong puts it this way:

At first religious people try to reform their traditions and effect a marriage between them and modern culture, as we have seen the Muslim reformers do. But when these moderate measures are found to be of no avail, some people resort to extreme methods, and a fundamentalist movement is born.⁸⁰