# The Worlds We Create: Bauman Meets Foucault, and Some Others

PETER BEILHARZ
LA TROBE UNIVERSITY
MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA

What are the worlds we create, and how might we do other? The image of creation has a roseate aura, from the biblical to the romantic, but it need not have. Bauman's sociology depends upon the idea of second nature, the sense that humans generate the cultures which form them, to the extent that modern repertoires of action often seem closed rather than open. Iron cages are everywhere. What can be done, within the frames of rationalization and commodification? Very little, apparently. Yet even the largest of social processes are the result of collective action, or second nature. Human beings, in other words, are instituting animals, and not only in the formal or organizational sense. Even in the most fearful of situations we create, we apply anthropological intelligence, we work against the current. At a metatheoretical level, even the worst of our actions are nevertheless creations. And as Bauman insists, like the early Marx, to know what we have done is to know that we can do other.

Bauman's work bristles with the presence of visitors. Some are strangers; some pass by, some return, some stay. Those who dwell with Bauman across the path of his work include Marx, Gramsci and Simmel. When it comes to creativity, to the institutions which maim and enable, three more recent visitors are the French historian Michel Foucault, Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben and Greek radical Cornelius Castoriadis, the first two with more negative institutional inflexion, the last in ambivalence. In this paper I use the points of contact between them to discuss Bauman's thinking about the worlds we create, and may yet look forward to. For even after all this monumental loss, across world history and culminating in the creation of totalitarianism, even

after its collapse and the final triumph of global capitalism, there has to be something less than final in this.

## *Meeting Foucault*

Everybody knows the street signs in critical theory. Antonio Gramsci languished in Mussolini's prisons; Michel Foucault wrote about prisons, and later agitated for their reform in France. A moment arrived, in the nineteen eighties, when the image of the prison was made by radicals to speak for the whole of modernity. This was a concrete condensation of the earlier image of the iron cage. Social control theory revived dramatically. Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man* (1964) had renewed the radical sensibility that all modern societies were totalitarian. This was not Foucault's mission, in *Surveiller et punir*, recast in English as *Discipline and Punish*. But Foucault's book was taken to express its moment, and was like other such books waved around in public, carried under the arm rather than read.

One way to read *Discipline and Punish* is to align it less with structuralism than with the historiography of the Annales School. *Discipline and Punish* is a kind of left Weberian historical sociology, an institutional history of a cultural form with a primary interest in its effects on internal culture or personality. The historical shift from the spectacle of the scaffold to Bentham's Panopticon tracks a privatization and internalization of discipline, and implies self-discipline, which connects to one of the powerful motifs of May 1968, "the policeman in the head." Of course, the shift toward the punishment of souls does not mean that bodies are sacred, even if carceral self-mutilation comes in its own way to parallel the systemic application of torture. The policeman in the head is always accompanied by the torturer, at least on a world scale.

Another way to read *Discipline and Punish* is indeed as a critique of Enlightenment, or more specifically of the politics and ethics of social engineering, of reformism. The great reformers, such as Bentham, built a silent logic of violence into their systems of human improvement. The earlier French sensibility was that no one could be forced to be good, though it might also be said that in the shadows of Foucault's case there is an ongoing struggle between Rousseau and Sade. On this account liberal improvers—and this is also an old

conservative argument, powerfully articulated elsewhere for example by Gertrude Himmelfarb[1]—are totalitarian in consequence if not intention.

Was Foucault, then, the lost French member of the Frankfurt School? Various commentators have observed the connection, most wittily perhaps David Roberts, who notes that Habermas is as French (Enlightenment) as is Foucault German (Nietzschean).[2] Foucault, of course, acknowledges the pioneering German work in critical theory, Rusche and Kirchheimer's 1939 *Punishment and Social Structures*; and he infamously observed, in an interview, that had he known the work of the Frankfurt School better, earlier, the logic of his own project could have been quite different.[3] But if the embarrassing silence on the part of the Frankfurt School was its incapacity ever to take on frontally the question of actually-existing communism, Adorno and Horkheimer did at least make the pattern of their views on fascism clear. Foucault, in contrast, writes the history of various French institutions, then expands his optic to sexuality and the ancient world, but the scope of his earlier work is local or national, and might be seen as social history as much as historical sociology. Fascism does not enter this optic, not even in the form of Vichy.

The philosophical founders of the Frankfurt School were displaced Germans, rather than cosmopolitans. World history had run its Panzer-tracks across their home. Adorno and Horkheimer had to address the question of fascism, however fragmented or aphoristic their responses, yet the issue of the Holocaust and an institution remained marginal within sociology, and barely present in Foucault's vision at all.

## *Enter Bauman*

In 1989, Bauman published *Modernity and the Holocaust*, as much a book of its period as was *Discipline and Punish* ten years earlier. The only regret we can have about its success is that it, similarly, has become a symbolic text, which means that it is also unread. Bauman

[1] Gertrude Himmelfarb, *The Idea of Poverty* (London: Faber, 1985).

[2] David Roberts, *Reconstructing Theory* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1994).

[3] Michel Foucault, *Remarks on Marx* (New York: Semiotext/e, 1991), ch.4

has instead become the whipping-boy for ranks of writers who want to cast his as the view that bureaucracy equals Nazism.[4] Is fascism the result of bureaucracy? The answer is obvious. We are surrounded by bureaucracy, but not yet by fascism. The spectacle based on the punishment of Bauman is symptomatic indeed. Perhaps his repeated offence is to act as the messenger, and to insist that bureaucracy is one central precondition of state violence or modern genocide. But the argument of *Modernity and the Holocaust* makes it clear that bureaucracy is a necessary but insufficient precondition of totalitarian rule. Then there are all the other factors—the means of production or destruction, the Nazi will-to-power, the murderous policy of the Final Solution and the Fordist means of its delivery. For Bauman, then, the Holocaust cannot be normalized; yet the task of sociologists is, emphatically, to think through its consequences for ordinary modernity and for the sociology of violence. Here it is the camp, rather than the prison, which is the central institution, and indeed Bauman proceeds then in *Postmodern Ethics* to describe ours, this twentieth century that we remain entrapped within, as "The Age of Camps."[5]

Unlike *Discipline and Punish*, *Modernity and the Holocaust* is not, however, an interpretation of the internal dynamics of the camp or camp life, and death. *Modernity and the Holocaust* is not a work of social history; it is not, for that matter, a work of history at all, let alone a history of everyday life. It is an interpretative essay, the purpose of which is to read Holocaust literature across into the field of sociology, where the labourers have been caught by the spectre of world history and found napping. On Bauman's account, all modern states can choose between expelling or assimilating their others; these days, some nation-states like Australia choose to follow both strategies at once. The modern process of nation-building includes the project of making peoples, constituting races and subjects. The Nazis were the murderous vanguard of this world-historic process. The Panopticon became refigured first as prison, then as camp. The victims were

[4] See, for example, Pellicani, O'Kane, Kurzweil, Moses, Bauer, Fine, in Volume 2 of Peter Beilharz, ed., *Zygmunt Bauman–Masters of Social Thought* (London: Sage, 1992) 4 volumes.

[5] Zygmunt Bauman, *Postmodern Ethics* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1993).

held to be beyond reform, beyond assimilation. They could only be annihilated, made into nothing. And any of us, then or now, here or there, Bauman wants to say, could have done this. If the story of the Final Solution was local, or German, both its various preconditions and its moral implications were nevertheless universal.

## *Memories of Modernity*

*Memories of Class* signals Bauman's turn to Foucault. The year is 1982. But is it a turn, or a drift? The index to *Memories of Class* indicates four references to Foucault's work, which is suggestive of an opening rather than a diversion. It is difficult to say; the traces may be deceptive. After all, *Modernity and the Holocaust* has only three references to Weber, and yet it is a fundamentally Weberian critique of modernity as the rationalization of society. Bauman's first contact and great love in Britain was the labour movement, Marx's great hopes for it and its subsequent stories, both as social history and as sociology. So that when Bauman introduces Foucault into *Memories of Class*, it is in the company of Edward Thompson, not exactly a holy alliance into the eighties. If Bauman's early concern with British labour is in the wake of Marx, it is also under the influence of his concern for masterless men, for the surplus populations pioneered by the Enclosure Acts and followed through into the Age of the Camps, the Holocaust and the Gulag, and to contemporary problems of forced immigration and detention across the globe. This earlier, formative moment is one that Bauman agrees, with Foucault, is aptly described as the age of the prison–the time when legislators, manufacturers, doctors and psychiatrists co-operate in using the enclosure-principle as a public method of separating order and disorder.[6] The figure of the pauper became the pariah, later to be followed by Gypsy, Jew, homosexual, made strangers all. Bauman then picks up on the idea of biopolitics, for he understands from Marx's *Capital* that capitalism had first to enclose and then to enculturate. The new power of capital, expressed practically in the symbol of the factory, had to be constant and ubiquitous. Through its numerous institutions it had to chart the entire territory of life. It had to come into direct and permanent

[6] Zygmunt Bauman, *Memories of Class* (London: Routledge, 1982), P. 8.

contact with the body of the producer.[7] This is what Bauman, in his second explicit reference here to Foucault, connects into the necessity of a new capillary form of power, which reaches into the very fibre of individuals, result in a regime of power which works through the social body rather than upon it, from above.[8]

Does capital, then, rule? Eventually, perhaps; but in *Memories of Class* this is no longer the main, or the only story. *Memories of Class* is the turning point in Bauman's project which anticipates another, the critique of Enlightenment or high modernism and its intellectuals aspirant in *Legislators and Interpreters*.[9] For here, in *Memories of Class*, Bauman takes Foucault's cue in expanding the critical optic - both conceptually and historically. Conceptually, because in sympathy with his own Weberian-Marxist path in critical theory, Bauman does not identify power with capital; historically, because the new regime of power precedes the reign of capital. Bauman's third explicit engagement with Foucault in *Memories of Class* takes this path. The Enlightenment project, on this account, precedes the project of capital. "The new tools and mechanisms of control and the conquest of human body and soul preceded the establishment of the factory system by roughly two centuries."[10] Modernity cannot be understood as a function of capital, regardless of the extent to which capital may seem to work both as its expression and as its best impulse.

The point is by no means peculiarly Foucauldian. In a different voice and register, it can also be found in Karl Polanyi's *Great Transformation*, in the grounding claim that capitalism is a political invention, or at least that it depends on one. Polanyi is another of Bauman's interlocutors.[11] Foucault's final appearance in Bauman's text before his own exit as interlocutor soon follows. It is, of course, the appearance for which Foucault became most celebrated, modernity's synecdoche in Bentham's panopticon. There was, in fact, a discourse on Bentham's panopticon before Foucault, but Foucault's trick was to

[7] *Ibid.*, p. 11.

[8] *Ibid.*, p. 39.

[9] Zygmunt Bauman, Legislators and Interpreters: On Modernity, Post-modernity and Intellectuals (Oxford: Polity Press, 1987).

[10] *Memories of Class, pp.* 42-3.

[11] *Memories of Class, p.* 9; Karl Polyani, *The Great Transformation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1945).

represent it. Bentham, as Bauman reminds us, also had a history, as indeed did the panopticon before him. Foucault's skill was to present the Panopticon as a figure, as an iron cage, a condensing symbol for Power as a universal principle, where the eye was god, or the devil.

The extent of Foucault's influence on *Memories of Class*, however, is less apparent in these details than in the larger frame of the first part of the book. For what follows is what Bauman refers to as "The Birth of the Factory." If we grant Agamben's later observation, that the surprising absence in Foucault's project is the figure of the camp; if we are prepared to entertain alternative suggestions, such as the observation that an even more remarkable absence from Foucault's scrutiny of professionals in their will-to-power concerns architecture, then Bauman's point nevertheless remains striking in its power. Alongside clinic, hospital and prison in the Foucaldian project, the most surprising absent presence concerns the factory-form itself. Bauman thus travels together with Foucault, but now takes a different path, which he has already followed through the history of Marxism and the British labour movement. The factory is the panopticon site here, and it will remain so, in Bauman's work, until the postmodern shift takes his gaze from production to consumption, from the factory to the shopping mall.

Here it is normality, or the emerging second nature of capitalist conformity which is central for Bauman, more than the image of the extreme. It was only later, for example in *Intimations of Postmodernity*, that the image of the prison became more haunting. Here, in a blacker moment, Bauman contemplates the range of total institutions as disabling, from prison, houses of detention, houses of correction, workhouses, poorhouses, hospitals, lunatic asylums, schools, military barracks, and dormitories to factories. As he put it ten years after *Memories of Class*, modernity was a long march to prison. It never arrived there (though in some places, like Stalin's Russia, Hitler's Germany or Mao's China, it came quite close), albeit not for the lack of trying.[12]

From Dickens through to Engels in Manchester and Marx's *Capital*, to Taylor and Fordism, from Manchester to Leeds in

[12] Zygmunt Bauman, *Intimations of Postmodernity* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. xvii.

Bauman's personal path, the image of the factory first ruled. Yet this was, as Bauman indicated earlier, a story as close to social history in the manner of Thompson as it was to the critical theory of Foucault. *The Making of the English Working Class* was its monument, in terms of social history; but the bridge across the channel was established in Thompson's shorter, sharper essay, "Time, Work Discipline and Industrial Capitalism," which first appeared in *Past and Present*, a journal itself in turn a bridge between English social history and the historiography of the Annales School.[13] Even at this relatively early point in his own project, however, Bauman connects to empire, and not only the heart of empire. For the lessons of the slave trade and slave plantations overseas could well have played their role in the formation of patterns of factory life in Britain.[14] The concentration camp was born in the peripheries. For the Empire, the dangerous classes were everywhere, not only in the East but also in the East End. The white man's burden was not only in Africa but also in Ireland, and elsewhere. But where there was a bid for total control, there were also competing rationalities or competing images of moral economy. This was the birthplace of socialism, and a different face of enlightenment. For, unlike Foucault, Bauman has never given up on Enlightenment, even if it is two-faced. Foucault's encounter with Marxism was brief, and it was with the local Stalinist culture of the French Communist Party. Bauman's encounter with Polish humanist Marxism, the bane of structuralism, was as profound as his encounter with structuralism was passing. The Foucauldian inflexion in *Memories of Class* reflects Bauman's elemental concern with suffering, and its individual and social embodiment, as much as any other influence, personal or intellectual.

## *Agamben: Cities and Camps*

If *Modernity and the Holocaust* complements *Discipline and Punish*, it also points in the direction of a sociology of violence. Here it is the state, rather than capital, which shifts into focus, even if the imperial

[13] Edward Palmer Thompson, "Time, Work Discipline and Industrial Capitalism," *Past and Present* (1967), p. 38.

[14] *Memories of Class*, p. 53.

stories of colonialism sometimes make it hard to tell the difference. Here Bauman draws, most recently, on the work of Giorgio Agamben. The central work of Agamben for our purposes here is *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. First published in Italian in 1995, it postdates *Modernity and the Holocaust* by six years, and makes no reference to it. Yet the coincidence of concerns across the two projects is striking, and it is no surprise that Bauman adopts Agamben in his later work, not least when Bauman returns to questions of displaced persons and surplus populations.

*Homo Sacer* is, from one perspective, an engagement with an expansion of the idea of biopolitics opened by Foucault. Here, perhaps, Foucault is the prompt rather than a frame, as in Bauman's *Memories of Class*. The immediate prompt for Agamben comes from Foucault's claim that "For a long time, one of the characteristic privileges of sovereign power was the right to decide life and death."[15] Put this maxim together with Weber's, concerning the legitimate monopoly of violence that can only be claimed by the State, and we are in Bauman's territory in *Modernity and the Holocaust*. The peculiarity of the classical image of *homo sacer* is that it takes us way back beyond the modern, in its reference to that "*life that cannot be sacrificed and yet may be killed [which] is sacred life*."[16] The striking attribute of *homo sacer*, as Agamben explains, is therefore less in the originary ambivalence of this sacredness than in the peculiar character of the double exclusion into which he is taken and to which he is exposed. *Homo sacer* is a third category, outside subject and sovereign, and distinct from citizen, which is open to the unsanctionable killing that, in this case, anyone may commit. The killing of *homo sacer* is classifiable neither as sacrifice nor as homicide. Sovereignty, then, confers the capacity to kill within this third space, where neither homicide nor sacrifice are applicable categories. There is a kind of visibility here, alongside invisibility.

The language of politics has always been caught up with corporeal imagery. From the body politic through to arguments concerning corporatism or the Durkheimian dream of the harmony of head,

[15]Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

[16] *Ibid.*, p. 82.

hand and heart, corporeal imagery has always been in the background of political philosophy. Marx's own work, in its turn, also indicates a subtext of biopolitics, for the suffering of labour is inflected not only on the soul but also on the sentient bodies of the industrial proletariat. Biopolitics reappears, invigorated, with the sexual politics of theory into the nineteen seventies, after Foucault and feminism. After the abstraction of systems theory, actors now reappear as embodied creatures. The return of the body is also a return to Aristotle, to a discursive scope which stretches from politics back to *bios*, to life itself. Yet if Foucault's grand emphasis is on institutions of control, and especially incarceration, his exceptions were also notable.

As Agamben observes, despite legitimate expectations, Foucault never brought his insights to bear upon what could well have appeared to be the exemplary place of modern biopolitics: the politics of the great totalitarian states of the twentieth century. The inquiry that began, for Foucault, with a reconstruction of the great confinement in hospitals and prisons did not end up with an analysis of the concentration camp.[17] Perhaps it is here, then, rather than with *Memories of Class*, that Bauman really takes on the baton from Foucault.

Nazism was, most brutally in the form of the Final Solution, a politics of and on the body. The numbers tattooed on the arms of victims, the physical sites of their assemblage, detention and destruction all indicate that. Where the text of *Discipline and Punish* opens, notoriously, with the torture and execution of the French regicide Damiens, Agamben's *Homo Sacer* opens with a far cooler discussion of Aristotle; the book's most powerful motif, in its English language edition, is a distanced, photographed cover image of the second architectural master plan for Auschwitz, as still as death. The extraordinary shift with Nazism was to make life the exemplary place of sovereign decision by renewing the identity of birth and nation. Blood and soil here, as in Alfred Rosenberg, could not be left alone; contrary to the image of unchanged tradition, they had to be engineered together to make the German race, or make it anew. As Agamben argues, this reinvention also involved the reinvention of the citizenship principle of Roman law, where the necessity of

[17] *Ibid*, p. 119.

birth in a certain territory coincided with the necessity of birth from citizen parents.[18] Little wonder that cosmopolitanism, later, should become such a radical if necessarily empty principle; for a citizen of the world, by these modern measures, could not be a "citizen" at all. Agamben proceeds to argue that this is why refugees represent such a disquieting element in the modern state, for refugees break the bond between man and citizen, or more explicitly between *nativity* and *nationality*. Refugees thus put the originary fiction of modern sovereignty not only under question but in crisis.[19] Since the First World War, the birth-nation link has no longer been capable of performing its legitimating function for the nation-state. The citizen proclaimed by the Great French Revolution of 1789 is now dissolved, not least because the motor of modernity proved to be, not the fact of the nation, but the principle of mobility, whether free or forced, geographical or social.

There are numerous other shifts and propositions in *Homo Sacer*, a book which is both systematic and yet associative in structure. One that points directly in Bauman's direction is the discussion of Binding and Hoche's 1920 text on *Authorization for The Annihilation of Life Unworthy of Being Lived.*[20] Whatever the historical lineage or the classical mystique around the originary idea of *homo sacer*, the space which he occupies returns with an unholy vengeance in modern times. As Agamben notes, it is the image of *authorization* which is crucial here. It might be argued that the authorization is already implicit in the distinction between life worthy and unworthy; the sociological point, as in Bauman's *Modernity and the Holocaust*, is that this moral stance needs ideological warrant and institutional forms or means of destruction as well as actors committed to carrying out the sanction against those deemed unworthy. The great novelty and achievement of Nazism was to foreground the living wealth of humans as the focus of the Reich's interests and calculations. Herein was the basis of its new politics.[21] Politics was now to give form to the life of the people,

[18] *Ibid.*, p. 129.

[19] *Ibid.*, p. 131.

[20] *Ibid.*, pp. 136-143; Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Love* (Oxford: Polity, 2003), ch. 4.

[21] *Ibid.*, p. 145.

literally. To politicize life, in this way, finally, was also to politicize death. For Agamben, as for Bauman, however, this is not ultimately a local story. Rather, the implication is brutally global in its extent—the Camp is the *nomos* of the modern. This is a time-bound experience, at least in one sense; the concentration camp is a modern invention, one inextricably connected to recent technologies of empire and to modern warfare. The state of exception characteristic of war becomes normalized. We are always, today, under siege. The authority of the state is always under threat, and it needs to be ready to act accordingly. The distinction between judicial law and the state of exception now becomes perpetually confused.[22]

The formative moment of modernity for Agamben is not the birth of the prison but the birth of the camp. The camp symbolises the point at which the state takes on direct care for the nation's biological life and one of its proper tasks. Two powerful axioms then remain, as Agamben closes *Homo Sacer*: first, that *the camp is the space that is opened when the state of exception becomes the rule*; second, that *today it is not the city but rather the camp that is the fundamental biopolitical paradigm of the West.*[23] However provocative, the latter claim—that camp displaces city—is not one that Bauman would accept; he is too close to Simmel for that. The city, for Bauman as for Simmel, is the very locus of difference and vitality as well as of domination and ordinary suffering. Perhaps, with Bauman, we could rather say that city and camp depend upon one another, as does freedom upon domination, creativity upon suffering.

Bauman takes up Agamben, and especially the idea of *homo sacer*, in his more recent books from *Society Under Siege*.[24] Bauman uses Agamben's ideas as a stimulant, as is his habit. Sovereignty becomes a matter of exclusion; utopia loses its place or *topos*, from Bentham through to neoliberalism, as the invisibility of the excluded replaces the visibility of the panopticon. At the end of the day, however, it is not Foucault who occupies Bauman's study or his wingback chair, but Cornelius Castoriadis.

[22] *Ibid.*, pp. 166-8.

[23] *Ibid.*, pp. 168, 181.

[24] Zygmunt Bauman, *Society Under Siege* (Oxford: Polity Press, 2002).

## *Encountering Castoriadis: The Polis*

Bauman comes to Castoriadis late, and regrets it.[25] Castoriadis is both libertarian and classicist; his road from Marx goes back to the Greeks. Castoriadis' psychoanalytical dimension has no especial appeal for Bauman. But the attraction is also apparent—from the Greeks through to life in Paris, Castoriadis' work is held together by the aspiration to autonomy, understood as self-legislation, and the attendant critique of conformism. Autonomy, for Castoriadis, runs with and against the modern and especially the capitalist desire for rational mastery of the world. Bauman's interest in Castoriadis coincides with his own call for the reinvention of the agora in *In Search of Politics*.[26] *In Search of Politics* takes up as a recurrent theme the sense that we cannot go forward without going back. Modernity cannot, in this way of thinking, generate its own radical imaginary out of itself. Bauman is fond of quoting the maxim of Castoriadis, that the problem with society is that it has lost the capacity fundamentally to question itself. And if society needs to rediscover the means to question itself, what other norms are available? Obviously, the fundamental criteria contemplated by the Greeks, for Marxism is neither radical enough, nor sufficiently substantial in these terms.

There is no systematic engagement with Cornelius Castoriadis in Bauman's work. Castoriadis' world in fragments encompasses Bauman's work in fragments. Bauman's "Search for Politics" has two major interlocutors, Claus Offe and Castoriadis, with a third, absent presence, the maverick ghost of C. Wright Mills, who represents the prospect of the sociological imagination reborn. Castoriadis, so to say, stands here for Aristotle, the thinker of autonomy and critique; Offe and Mills stand for the modern, for Marx and T.H. Marshall. But the book is exploratory; it is not a treatise of politics.

Bauman and Cornelius Castoriadis share the sense that it is in activity, or *instituting*, that we best glimpse the human creature: the dancer is the dance. Those beautiful first person passages in "Marxism and Revolutionary Theory" could just as well have come from the pen of Bauman, had they set upon him rather than on Castoriadis—"I

[25] Peter Beilharz, ed., *The Bauman Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), p. 335.
[26] Zygmunt Bauman, *In Search of Politics* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1999).

desire and I feel the need to live in a society *other* than the one surrounding me...I want the other to be free, for my freedom *begins* where the other's freedom begins, and, all alone, I can at best be merely 'virtuous in misfortune'...I want the Law not to be simply given, but for me to give it to myself at the same time"; I know that the world has changed before, and that it may change again.[27] Few of us will ever get to write like this. What Bauman adds, along with a modernist conception of freedom close to Simmel's, is the kind of sociological mediation which tracks not only the noble possibilities of the activity of instituting, but also the parallel details of the activity of abomination. Fascism, for example, is also an activity, an imaginary instituting, where the mediations which make up Nazi genocide include party, racism, ideology, will-to-power, state power, division of labour or the absence of proximity, means of destruction/production, and so on. This is precisely Castoriadis' sense. The closest parallel to this thinking in Bauman in Cornelius Castoriadis' work, I suppose, would be something like *Devant la guerre*, which dwells more at the macro level of Soviet stratocracy, where the critical concern is with the rulers rather than the ruled.[28] Earlier, in comparison, the orientation in a more utopian horizon takes the view from below, of the Soviet or the wildcat strike, as in the work in *Socialisme ou Barbarie* which we read in English in the Solidarity pamphlets in the 70's. So that Castoriadis' sociology, if we can call it that—perhaps it is political critique—operates at the societal or statal level, or even the global level in *Devant la guerre*, where the distinction between total bureaucratic capitalism and fragmented capitalism comes into play, or else at the local level in early works like *Le contenu du socialisme*, where the actors are movements, parties, rank and file.[29] Of course, there is also an in-between that mediates psyche and social, in the family, though often again through the primal figure of the mother and father, family, rather than families. But, then, Cornelius Castoriadis was not a sociologist.

Long before Bauman took on the sociology of fascism, he also wrote explicitly on the sociology of communism. In his early English-

[27] David Curtis, ed. *The Castoriadis Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), pp. 166-7.
[28] Cornelius Castoriadis, *Devant la guerre* (Paris: Fayard, 1980).
[29] Cornelius Castoriadis, *Le contenu du socialisme* (Paris: 10/18, 1979).

language, post-exile encounter with modernity and communism, we find an application or extension of Weber that is both fascinating and insightful. Here, Bauman proposes that the organisational principle of Soviet-type societies is not patrimonialism, but partynomialism.[30] As with Castoriadis, the key curiosity here is in a sense social psychological, or Weberian. What kinds of creatures are the subjects of partynomialism? As in Castoriadis, it is the mentality or imagination of state capitalists or bureaucratic capitalists that is telling. Theirs is a world view split by differences, but united by the desire for rational mastery.[31]

Perhaps the point of unity here is best described as that of philosophical anthropology. Castoriadis disliked sociology and postmodernity, though his tastes were also modernist. Bauman is a sociologist, but in the continental tradition. The emphasis in Bauman is sociological in the best sense, i.e. following Simmel. Bauman pushes the image of the personality-type, tourist and vagabond, parvenu and pariah, cosmopolitan and local, city and stranger. The interest in the city and its others which Bauman extends out of Simmel resonates with Castoriadis' work on racism; the curiosity about character-types or bureaucracy might be connected to Castoriadis' earlier division between ordergivers and ordertakers. Plainly, Max Weber is a common presence here. The elective affinity between *On the History of the Workers Movement*,[32] and *Memories of Class* evokes an ongoing post Marxist radical sensibility.

When it comes to modern and postmodern, the emphases in Bauman and Castoriadis differ. The postmodern, for Bauman, is not just an expression of the present, nor is the category of conformism sufficient to capture the newly emerging society of individuals. As Bauman argues in *Liquid Modernity*, to conform, today, means endlessly to reform the self.[33] We never arrive, as subjects—we are ever obliged to be individuals, endlessly to choose the new, no peace,

[30] Peter Beilharz, "Modernity and Communism: Zygmunt Bauman and the Other Totalitarianism," *Thesis Eleven* (2003), p. 70.

[31] Cornelius Castoriadis, "Reflections on Rationality and Development," *Thesis Eleven* (1985), pp. 10-11.

[32] Cornelius Castoriadis, "On the History of the Workers Movement," *Telos* (1976), p. 30.

[33] *Society Under Siege.*

no space for contemplation, no agora. The narcissism of private life replaces the politics of solidarity. The public obsession with the private obscures the politics. Where, then, is the public?

The implication of Bauman's work is that the dance continues; it did not end after 1968. When it comes to Sociology, Bauman's sense is that the whole twentieth century is a history of conformism. Yet the story of modernity as conformism might also be a story of second nature. The prospect of autonomy never entirely disappears. Bauman's cue in *Liquid Modernity* is that we are entering a society of new individuals, where it is precisely the intermediary institutions which are disappearing, or else being radically refigured. The irony of the neoliberal utopia is that it may only now become concrete. Bauman's case is in sympathy with those of others like Gauchet or Rosanvallon,[34] where the individual becomes, on pain of death (or failure), a radical entrepreneur of the self, forging forward while holding together the valiant principles of civil libertarianism and economic liberalism.

## *Conclusions: Suffering and Creativity*

Zygmunt Bauman famously adopts Levinas' view as his own: we ought begin not from ontology but from ethics, and the face of the other. The positive exhortation here is widely recognised. It is consonant with the logic of Bauman's project after *Modernity and the Holocaust*. If sociology has an ethical hole in its heart, then this reflects the absence or impertinence of ethics in modernity itself. There is, indeed, a strong sense in which ethics is premodern, precisely because it works on the proximity in the group of two, which modernity supplants and displaces with scale, complexity and the division of labour, the more so after the postmodern virtualization of culture. This is the reason why we now think of ethics as a private, or personal matter, for the organizations that stand between us and dominate our lives are not ethical actors, legal fictions regarding the organisation as a personality notwithstanding. The prospect of ethics, in this regard,

[34] See Marcel Gauchet, "The New Age of Personality: An Essay on the Psychology of Our Times," *Thesis Eleven* (2000); Pierre Rosanvallon, *The New Social Question* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

is to become another victim of modernization and commodification. The other side of the Levinas maxim nevertheless warrants positive emphasis, too: for none of this necessarily has ontological implications. The tragedies of modernization, especially into the twentieth century, do not leave us beyond redemption as humans, even without great expectations. As we look back on the tragedies of the twentieth century, totalitarian and other, we must agree that yes, we did this. But it does not follow that we can do no other.

Where might all this end? Where it began, with the sense that creativity is central to modernity and to the human condition; but without the presupposition that creativity is invariably good or positive in its results. The sense of contingency, or possibility, remains the arc within which Bauman's project continues. It is the residuum of the utopian impulse. If creativity remains central, however varied its outcomes, potential or actual, then this also indicates that Bauman's sociology is not a modern ontology of evil or an ontology of modernity as evil. If there is an ontology or frame of second nature here, it indicates the ubiquity not of totalitarianism or genocide but of capitalism as the dominant of the dynamic of rational mastery. Capital, however, remains this most creative of destroyers. Its plasticity, or fluidity in Bauman's sense, is what sets it apart from totalitarianism. Totalitarianism by definition is a hope for eternity which cannot be sustained. It is an excess which cannot be forever maintained, a frenzy which cannot be artificially sustained. The spirit of capital is at the same time more permeable and more agile. Yet other motifs from the sixties also persist: under Los Angeles, there is the Baja California. Where there is suffering, there will also be creativity.