

# Introduction

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The likes of Zygmunt Bauman will never be found in the world of academia again. He is one of that generation of Central and European intellectuals who literally lived through the disasters of the twentieth century. He experienced what others only write about ... By the time he was twenty, Bauman had confronted anti-Semitism, Stalinism, Nazism and warfare. (Keith Tester, *The Social Thought of Zygmunt Bauman*, 2004)

Bauman's recent writings travel light, burdened neither by research nor theoretical analytics, but borne up by an unusual life wisdom, a trained observer's eye and a fluent pen. (Goran Therborn, *From Marxism to Post-Marxism?*, 2008)

A day without scribbling feels like a day wasted or criminally aborted, a duty neglected, a calling betrayed. (Bauman, *This is Not a Diary*, 2012)

If you are not failing now and again, it's a sign you're not doing anything very innovative. (Woody Allen (timeless))

My book was already in press when the sad news of Zygmunt Bauman's passing was announced in January 2017. My tribute to him, together with those of Tony Blackshaw, David Owen and Caroline Wintersgill, is available at [www.manchesteruniversitypress.co.uk/remembering-bauman/](http://www.manchesteruniversitypress.co.uk/remembering-bauman/).<sup>1</sup>

This project did not start its life as a book on the voluminous writings of Zygmunt Bauman, who has been described as perhaps 'the greatest living sociologist' (Fearn 2006) and who has been such a prolific writer that a complete bibliography of his publications is not available, although he has probably written over seventy books and numerous articles, and by his own (ac)count (Bauman, Jacobsen and Tester 2013: 68) has had his work translated into thirty-five languages. To those who will decide to read this book, it might truly be said that he needs no introduction in the formal sense of that term.

Bauman was going to be part of a wider project that I had conceived after finishing a two-book project that resulted in *Racism* (2007) and *Multiculturalism* (2011). These two texts bore fruit as part of my attempt to bring research from the social sciences and humanities, and the *rethinking* I had been pursuing in the fields of racism and multiculturalism, to a wider readership than the academic one which I had so far addressed, in a number of books and papers (see, for example, Donald and Rattansi 1992; Rattansi 1994; Rattansi 2002; Rattansi 2005).

My initial idea was to write about the rise and very sudden demise of the ‘postmodern turn’ in the social sciences and humanities. I had embraced and reworked *some* aspects of this new wave, especially its poststructuralist elements as found in the work of Foucault, Derrida, Hall, Laclau and Mouffe and the ‘postcolonialist’ holy trinity of Said, Bhabha and Spivak. Feminism had also had a profound effect on my thinking, and my work on racism made a determined attempt to confront and reveal how issues of sexuality and gender were deeply, although in a complex manner, entangled with racism. Here I had found the work of Frantz Fanon, Stuart Hall, Phil Cohen, Sander Gilman, Michele Barret, Nancy Stepan, Ann McClintock, Catherine Hall, Avtar Brah, Floya Anthias, Nira Yuval-Davis, Ann Phoenix and Patricia Hill Collins and others of great help in thinking through these difficult issues. Most – though not all – of them had deployed poststructuralist insights in a variety of ways that I had found helpful. A reading of three works by Bauman, *Legislators and Interpreters* (1987), *Modernity and the Holocaust* (1989b) and *Modernity and Ambivalence* (1991), had been part of my wider exploration of the postmodern turn (Boyne and Rattansi 1990; Rattansi 1994; Rattansi 1995; Rattansi 2002) that had convulsed the social sciences and humanities, especially after the English translation of Lyotard’s *The Postmodern Condition* (1979, English translation 1984) had been published.

In trying to understand the rise and especially the rapid decline of postmodernism I decided to start my project by way of a reading of Bauman’s own explanations for what seemed to be an emphatic rejection of his postmodern turn (Bauman and Tester 2001; Bauman and Gane 2004). I noted, too, that two of the better-informed commentators on Bauman, Tester (2004) and more especially Blackshaw (2005), had not seen Bauman’s move

from viewing the present as 'postmodernity' to what he had now called 'liquid modernity' as marking a radical departure. When I read Bauman's first post-postmodern work, *Liquid Modernity* (2000b), I understood why Tester and Blackshaw had not made very much of the liquid modern phase. Even a cursory reading of *Liquid Modernity* explains this, for it was clear that Bauman had not changed his perspective very much. He had only distanced himself from what he regarded as unsuitable but unnamed 'bedfellows' with whom he had found himself lumped under the wide umbrella of postmodernism (Bauman and Gane 2004), and said that he also wanted to provide something more positive than the blank space left by the 'post', which only indicated what was passing away without any guidelines on that which was emerging in the wake of modernity. But most of the themes from his postmodern phase had survived the transition to liquid modernity intact. His critical remarks in this interview with Gane on the alternative idea of 'reflexive modernity', a term preferred by Beck, are very revealing, and I discuss their significance later in the book.

By this stage I was intrigued by Bauman's whole intellectual trajectory and the idea for a book on Bauman took shape, one which would address the original question, especially of the demise of postmodernism, but as only one aspect of a closer inquiry into the evolution of Bauman's thinking. An initial impulse was provided by my reading of the other single-authored English-language books on Bauman by Smith (1999), Beilharz (2000), Tester (2004) and Blackshaw (2005), all of which are merely exegetical; my close reading of Bauman's output convinced me that what was now required was a single-authored *critical* engagement with Bauman's work.

The initial intention was to comment on all of Bauman's English-language writings, but given the extraordinary number of his publications, the necessary limitations of space, and the fact that there seemed little of contemporary interest in his earlier works such as *Between Class and Elite* (1972), a study of the British labour movement, or *Culture and Praxis* (1973) or even *Socialism: The Active Utopia* (1976a), I decided to focus on the postmodern and the liquid modern phases of his work. However, as I will argue in this book, there were important continuities in Bauman's work throughout his intellectual career, and these require some understanding of

his earlier English-language writing, especially as manifested in *Towards a Critical Sociology* (1976b), *Hermeneutics and Social Science* (1978) and *Memories of Class* (1982). Works written while he was still in Poland, and especially the intellectual influences that shaped his thinking then, are important in understanding the nature of his mature sociological thinking, and I will address some of the relevant issues briefly here before writing about his postmodern and liquid modern phases.

I should make clear that this is not a biography of Bauman nor, strictly speaking, an intellectual biography. It is primarily a critical engagement with Bauman's ideas and arguments as found in key selected texts and interviews of his postmodern and liquid modern phases which form part of his formidable oeuvre. I need to emphasise that I have made no systematic attempt at concerning myself with the minutiae of intellectual influences on Bauman during different phases of his intellectual career, although in a more general sense I have of course referred to obvious important influences, for example those of Simmel, Adorno, Foucault, Bourdieu, or Rorty, where necessary. However, I do need to point out that having studied Bauman's English-language works relatively thoroughly, I take the view that despite his eclecticism, which has been much remarked upon, and despite the influence of intellectual figures such as Simmel, Foucault, Rorty and, latterly, Bourdieu, Bauman is best understood as a latter-day representative of the German Critical Theory tradition and its humanistic, somewhat tangential version of Marxism much influenced by Weber, inaugurated by the Frankfurt School (Held 1980; Bronner 2011; Wiggerhaus 2010). Thus, as we shall see, some of the main influences on Bauman's thinking were Adorno, Horkheimer and Marcuse. He was briefly but strongly influenced by another latter-day representative of the Frankfurt School, Habermas, but Habermas's influence on Bauman waned when he embarked on a massive systematisation of his own eclectic views and incorporated forms of sociology which Bauman found particularly distasteful; Bauman and Habermas also parted company on the question of postmodernism. I will discuss these issues as and when they are relevant.

Bauman himself cited the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci as a strong formative influence, but apart from absorbing from him the importance of 'culture', and in principle a non-deterministic

Marxism, in my reading of Bauman he failed to do justice to the nuanced and complex manner in which Gramsci saw cultural hegemony as a legitimating but always unstable process that shored up the power of the elites and upper classes in the Western European social order. For Gramsci, the 'common sense' of citizens was a contradictory phenomenon, containing both conservative and oppositional elements. At one level Bauman grasped this, but Bauman's is a more totalising interpretation of the manner in which popular cultural forms dominate the understanding of the world of ordinary citizens that is more in keeping with the critique of the 'culture industry' that Horkheimer and Adorno, in particular, formulated after the fall of Nazism and which reappeared in Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man* (1964). Hence, too, the attractions of Christopher Lasch's *The Culture of Narcissism* (1979) and Neil Postman's critique of popular culture, *Amusing Ourselves to Death* (1987) for Bauman. Bauman's critique of positivism and scientism in sociology was also heavily influenced by Adorno and Horkheimer's equally dismissive perspective, although like them, he was not averse to deploying positivist research, in Bauman's case the work of experimental psychologists such as Milgram, in the case of Adorno and Horkheimer the extraordinary positivism of their involvement in the project of *The Authoritarian Personality*.

My book should be judged by its success or otherwise in actually engaging critically with the substance of Bauman's changing postmodernist and liquid modernist arguments. I have written it as a commentary on the coherence, usefulness and evidential basis of Bauman's major works in his postmodern and liquid modern phases. This introduction draws out themes from some key earlier works, but briefly and only in so far as they assist in an understanding of what I see as important continuities as well as departures in his postmodern and liquid modern periods. I will also be parsimonious in providing biographical details about Bauman, except when these are deemed especially relevant to understanding his analyses.

This is a critical study, not an attempt at a comprehensive appreciation of Bauman's many achievements and insights. My book is thus primarily a critique of Bauman. It is, to reiterate, an attempt to redress the balance in single-authored English-language books on Bauman, especially those of Smith, Tester, Blackshaw and

Beilharz. Mark Davis (2008) and Best (2013) are more critical in their different ways, but Davis's text is limited in focus and now out of date, while Best's concerns are also different from mine, especially in his attempt to explain, as his sub-title says, 'Why Good People do Bad Things'.

It is important to provide an outline of key events in Bauman's life, for as my epigraph from Tester implies, Bauman's singularly unique biography was an important stimulus to his thinking. Tester (2001: 3), though, warns against autobiographical reductionism, although he seems to have changed his mind by the time he came to write his excellent exegesis of Bauman's social thought (Tester 2004). Jay (2010) has suggested that there is something 'mercurial' about Bauman, and that this may have something to do with his Jewishness. Certainly, displacement and dislocation, as well as racism, were experiences that loomed large in his life. However, as will become clear later, Bauman was oblivious to the racism suffered by Britain's Asian and black ethnic minorities.

Bauman was born to relatively poor Jewish parents in Poznań, Poland, in 1925. With his family he fled from the Nazis to Russia, where he had ambitions to study physics but ended up joining the army, fighting against the Nazi armies in Russia and Poland. Bauman was by now a committed communist and stayed in the army, but was driven out by a nasty anti-Semitic purge in 1953 (see, especially, Tester 2004 and Best 2013 for valuable, more detailed biographical narratives). Bauman went on to study sociology and philosophy and became an academic. He was particularly influenced by two of his teachers, Hochfeld and Ossowski. He absorbed from them a profoundly anti-positivist, that is to say, anti-scientistic version of sociology (Bauman and Tester 2001: 20–1; Tester 2004: 34–43; Satterwhite 1992: especially 61–6), one which eschewed the notion of a value-free social science. Their passionately held view that any sociology worth practising had to take a moral stance, focus on the eradication of social evils and relentlessly stand up to the powerful, was one that obviously left a life-long mark on Bauman's thinking. Bauman became active as a dissident against Stalinism in the Polish Communist party, especially influenced by a workers' uprising in Poznań in 1956 and the Hungarian uprising of the same year, together with a number of other 'revisionists' such as Kolakowski, Brus, Hirszowicz, and

Kuron and Modzelewski (Kolakowski 2005: 1153–62; Satterwhite 1992).

Bauman's essay 'Modern Times, Modern Marxism', first published in 1967 and then made available in 1969 in Peter Berger's *Marxism and Sociology: Views from Eastern Europe* (Berger 1969: 1–17), gives an important insight into his thinking at this time, for he emphatically rejects economic determinism ('Modern Times': 2, 15), dismisses a natural science-derived positivism for its 'Quantification' and 'atomization' ('Modern Times': 3), cannot imagine 'Marxian thought made to the measure of the managerial type of social problems' ('Modern Times': 7), and affirms, in a profoundly humanist and anti-deterministic manner, that the 'predictions' of social science are intertwined with praxis, for 'conscious human beings are the only actors' who can make predictions become reality ('Modern Times': 16–17). In the social sciences such as Marxism, truth itself is 'a process', rather than a timeless, reified, stable set of verified propositions. These ideas reappear in his *Towards a Critical Sociology* (1976b) – which he recommends to readers in *What Use is Sociology?* (Bauman, Jacobsen and Tester 2013: 74–5) – and *Hermeneutics and Social Science* (1978), written in exile in Leeds, where he and his wife Janina had finally settled, via Israel, after Bauman's expulsion from his academic position in Poland in yet another anti-Semitic and anti-revisionist purge. His relatively late interviews, published as *What Use is Sociology?* (Bauman, Jacobsen and Tester 2013), rehearsed many of these themes, including the one that marked his formal departure from Marxism, *Memories of Class* (1982). This latter text is notable for its strongly argued view that Marxism had been mistaken in seeing the now declining industrial working class as the agent of a new type of society and that consumerism was becoming the dominant ideology of the Western world; and it prefigures a persistent strain of pessimism in Bauman's thinking.

My book is both an introduction to Bauman's later work and a critical appreciation of it, although in effect I have ended up shining an unwavering critical light on Bauman's postmodern and liquid modern phases. However, the idea of a critique of Bauman's thinking and writing runs into a number of cautionary warnings by many commentators, particularly his ardent admirers. Especially, one has to contend with assertions regarding the special

and unique quality of his form of sociological analysis. Bauman, his admirers argue, was no 'ordinary sociologist'. Indeed, one such admirer (Blackshaw 2006) has suggested that Bauman, in not being 'respectable' in British sociology, is actually 'too good for sociology'. The suggestion is that most sociologists, especially in Britain, fail to appreciate the special qualities of Bauman's sociology, qualities that indeed made him not only unique but also particularly insightful. Thus, the same author, in expounding the virtues of Bauman, says that the reader should be made aware that Bauman is a 'poet-intellectual', and that Bauman does not work under the illusion that 'fantasy', 'magic' and 'reality' are 'something apart' (Blackshaw 2006: 295).

This 'poetic' and 'literary' character of his sociology is particularly what sets him apart and creates supposedly irrelevant criticisms that he is not a proper sociologist. Bauman's analyses proceeded by way of metaphors and analogies as much as, indeed more than, by recourse to empirical research and the 'facts of the matter'; and Bauman was not 'concerned with methodological issues in sociology as such' (Jacobsen and Marshman 2008: 20). But lest it be thought that this makes him a non-sociologist, the argument is made that it is sociologists who misunderstand what their enterprise is about. They tend to see a strict distinction between sociology and the arts, but are simply mistaken in this assumption. Mark Davis, Director of the Bauman Institute at the University of Leeds, is only one among many who refer anyone reading Bauman to Nisbet's pioneering essay 'Sociology as an Art Form' (1962) in which it is argued that sociological theories should be 'tested as much by their reach as their grasp, their importance as their validity, and their elegance as their congruence with such facts as may be at hand' (Nisbet 1962: 67; M. Davis 2013: 4). Thus, as Tester and Jacobsen (2005) suggest, if Bauman is judged by conventional standards he is probably a 'very poor sociologist', but it is precisely his liberal use of metaphors that gives his sociology its strengths.

When Jacobsen and Marshman encapsulate Bauman's sociology with the label 'Humanistic, Hybrid Sociology', they are suggesting that it has the unusual merits, according to them, of 'humanising sociology', of recalling for us our 'common humanity', for Bauman is concerned with the intricate connections



between ‘social structure and lived experience’: he develops a sociology that ‘poetically and poignantly’ mirrors ‘lived experience from the point of view of those human beings being described’ (Jacobsen and Marshman 2008: 20–1), something that Bauman confirms as the main purpose of his sociology in an interview with Jacobsen and Tester (Bauman, Jacobsen and Tester 2013: 105). In Bauman’s act of concerning himself with ‘lived experience’, his metaphors are ‘inherently *moral*, they give voice to the voiceless, they recall to us our inescapable human and moral responsibility for the Other’ (Jacobsen and Marshman 2008: 22, emphasis in original). Simultaneously, they function to point to alternative possibilities that remain hidden ‘behind the immediate observable reality’ which is obscured in more conventional social science by ‘mechanical models, mathematical reasoning or *rational argument*’ (Jacobsen and Marshman 2008: 22–3, my emphasis). Metaphors ‘defamiliarize’ the ordinary world, thus opening eyes to the reality that the actually existing world is not the only one possible, and that it is not immutable but amenable to human intervention and change precisely because it is a human-made world, not a natural given that has to be accepted with all its suffering and injustice. Thus Bauman’s is a ‘sociology of hope’. His ‘awe-inspiring body of work’ is particularly concerned to address ‘the plight of those “cast out” from society, those who have been marginalized, forgotten and ultimately “wiped out”’ (Jacobsen and Marshman 2008: 23).

This common refrain from many interpreters of his work is undoubtedly true to Bauman’s intentions, but is often belied by the actual style of his work, or so I shall argue in this book. Asked by Jacobsen, Marshman and Tester (2007: 29), ‘For whom do you write?’, Bauman turned to Adorno for help with his answer, arguing that the disappearance of the working class as a historical agent does not mean that all hope for emancipation should be abandoned. Even *disengagement* from political activity, Bauman avers, following Adorno in *Minima Moralia*, is a way of ‘showing some measure of solidarity with those down and out’ (Bauman in Jacobsen, Marshman and Tester 2007: 34–5; reprinted in Bauman, Jacobsen and Tester 2013: 47). An abiding concern with the ‘down and out’ means that emancipation should never be ‘taken off the agenda’; ‘the noxious persistence of social ills is one more and admittedly powerful reason to try harder’ to conceive of alternatives. Much

like C. Wright Mills in *The Sociological Imagination*, Bauman took the view that the job of a sociology 'up to the task' is the 'laying bare [of] the complex network of causal links between pains suffered individually and conditions collectively produced'. Bauman says that Adorno's recommendation to keep producing the 'message in the bottle' describes what he himself is following. The bottles have no named, 'preselected addressees', but there will always be 'sailors in our liquid modern world' who will be seeking guidance for the problems of our times, and these are the ones on whom Bauman pinned his hopes, for these sailors 'will be eager to open the bottles and absorb the messages inside them' (Bauman in Jacobsen, Marshman and Tester 2007: 35). Elsewhere (Bauman, Jacobsen and Tester 2013: 105) Bauman implied that it is only individuals *as individuals* who will open these bottles, because 'in our increasingly individualized society ... the resolution of socially created problems is relentlessly shifted from social powers onto the shoulders of individual men and women'.

One might think that the 'down and out', even as individuals, upon whom 'social ills' weigh most heavily, might be the very ones who will be tempted to open the bottles; by so doing they will not only understand how their suffering is collectively produced, but will find hope for emancipation in Bauman's scribbblings put to sea in books-as-bottles. Thus we come back to the thinking behind Bauman's metaphors: when he speaks of 'vagabonds', 'tourists', 'nomads' and those suffering 'wasted lives', those who are callously dismissed as 'collateral damage', those sailing in 'liquid' modernity, all, one might think, will read and find illumination in Bauman's writings.

But I shall argue in this book that however laudable Bauman's intentions, his prose style as well as his general 'method' of doing sociology militated against his admirable intentions. His style is often highly abstract, and neither his way of delineating his main concepts nor his metaphors will necessarily help the 'down and out' or the sympathetic sociologist, or at least not in any straightforward manner. For example, for all Bauman's interest in inspiring hope in emancipation, he often speaks in highly depersonalised terms whereby all human agency is 'wiped out', to use his own phrase. Thus, as we shall see, he often speaks in highly reified terms of 'modernity' and 'postmodernity' setting

themselves ‘tasks’, or of having a ‘mind’; despite Bauman’s severe objections to the ‘systemic’ sociology of Talcott Parsons he nevertheless speaks of ‘postmodernity’ as a separate, almost self-sustaining ‘system’; and as even Mark Davis, Director of the Bauman Institute, admits (2008: 107), it is often not clear to whom the metaphors of ‘vagabond’ or ‘tourist’ actually apply, so these figures are not likely to recognise that it is for them that Bauman’s bell tolls. Bauman at one point – as I shall demonstrate – even argued that those ‘seduced’ by contemporary consumerism were so *totally* seduced that they were not likely to be at all convinced by a critique of consumerism when it was presented to them by intellectuals who *knew* better, and had somehow escaped (it is not clear how anyone failed to be seduced, including Bauman himself) the lures of consumerism. The messages in Bauman’s bottles were simply likely to baffle them according to some of the nostrums of his own sociology. Moreover, Bauman provides few hints concerning what alternative social arrangements might look like, thus severely blunting his intention to challenge the notion of ‘TINA’ (taken from the political slogan, ‘there is no alternative’), although he not only claimed to be a socialist but argued that ‘this world of ours needs socialists more than at any other time, and ... this need has become much more poignant and urgent yet after the fall of the Berlin Wall’ (Bauman and Tester 2001: 153). And Bauman certainly had more than a streak of utopianism in his thinking (Jacobsen 2008).

There is also what Mark Davis (2008: 107) has called Bauman’s ‘will to dualism’, which results in abstract and unhelpful dualities such as ‘modernity’ and ‘postmodernity’, ‘solid’ and ‘liquid’ modernity, ‘vagabonds’ and ‘tourists’, the ‘seduced’ and the ‘repressed’. I shall argue that often the abstract dualities result in entities that are more than just ‘ideal types’ which selectively shine their light on important aspects of the social world that Bauman wants to highlight: they actually end up as caricatures, ‘solid modernity’ and ‘liquid modernity’ being entities of this sort, as I shall argue. Also, there are various degrees to which his work collapses into reductionisms, especially economic reductionism, partly as a result of over-extending sketchy generalisations about modernity and, especially, consumerism, but also ‘liquidity’ and globalisation. Moreover, his views on the complete hold that consumerism

supposedly had on individuals also typified his habit of producing unsupported totalisations in social analysis.

This is connected to another problematic aspect of Bauman's writings. Although Mark Davis argues, as I have shown above, that Bauman is interested in revealing how it *feels* to be living particularly oppressed lives, and he and others have suggested that Bauman's is a sociology of 'lived experience' and the everyday or 'quotidien' (Blackshaw 2005; Jacobsen and Marshman 2008; Bauman, Jacobsen and Tester 2013: 105), it is noteworthy that Bauman rarely if ever quotes from the people living these lives. His aversion to conventional, empirical sociology extends to ethnographic accounts produced by non-empiricist sociologists as well as journalists and other rapporteurs who study the 'down and out'. Thus what the anthropologist Geertz has called 'thick description' is rarely to be found in Bauman's work. But this is precisely what the reader who wants to learn about 'how it feels' to be poor and oppressed, or what the lived reality of the vagabond might be like, might justifiably expect from Bauman's voluminous output on issues of exclusion that Jacobsen and Marshman argue is his abiding concern (Jacobsen and Marshman 2008: 25–7). It is difficult to accept their claim that what Bauman provides is a 'voice for the voiceless', for these voices are conspicuous by their absence in Bauman's work.

To put it in somewhat stark terms, Bauman's poetic (Blackshaw 2005), genre-blurring (Jacobsen 2013b), story-telling (Smith 1999) form of sociology, which is full of metaphors and literary examples, often failed to meet the standards of adequacy that his admirers and even he himself seemed to set for his writings. Although Bauman's sociology is regarded as having a deep affinity with the literary and especially the novel as a form (Jacobsen 2013b: 194) this claim is misleading, for novels show us the internal world of their characters, while Bauman eschews this kind of 'thick description', dwelling upon archetypes such as 'vagabonds' and 'tourists' whose actual inner life is neglected by Bauman. I shall have more to say about the role of metaphors in Bauman's sociology in the section of the book – Part III – devoted to a discussion of liquid modernity. There I also discuss how one might judge the metaphors that abound in Bauman's work, that is, the extent to which sociological metaphors might be judged by the methodol-

ogy of sociology, mainstream or otherwise. It is worth pointing out here, meanwhile, that although Bauman readily admitted that his metaphors were meant to be selective (Jacobsen 2013a: 17–18), he had a tendency to totalise what was meant to be selective, as I have said about his analysis of consumerism: thus, in his writings on liquid modernity, almost all aspects of social life are seen as dominated by liquidity, something reflected in the titles of his books: *Liquid Love*, *Liquid Fear*, *Liquid Surveillance*, *Liquid Evil*; one book is simply titled *Liquid Life*, which exemplifies my point.

It is worth emphasising that Bauman did not wish to abandon or transcend sociology, and indeed in 2011 he accepted the British Sociological Association's 'Lifetime Achievement Award'. Jacobsen and Poder (2008: 2–3) have rightly stressed that Bauman sees an important role for sociology as a form of critical analysis (see also Bauman and Tester 2001: 33–4, 40); it is simply that he wants to push sociology to its 'furthest outer limits' and, as Mark Davis (2013) and Jacobsen and Poder (2008) emphasise, Bauman wants to do this in his own unconventional way: he was eclectic and made decisions to employ metaphors not necessarily on empirical grounds but on 'literary and artistic' grounds (M. Davis 2013: 6). It is precisely the aesthetic quality of his sociology, Davis suggests, that has allowed it to 'travel' globally, to speak to so many throughout the world, despite being viewed with some scepticism in Britain (M. Davis 2013: 4). Bauman confessed to being 'monumentally bored' of professional sociology journal articles (Bauman and Dawes 2011: 147–8).

When asked which books he might like to take with him on a desert island, Bauman chooses literary texts by Perec, Calvino, Musil and Borges rather than any sociology tomes (Bauman and Tester 2001). Citing Bauman's answer to the 'desert island discs' question, Mark Davis, founder of the Bauman Institute and therefore a privileged spokesperson for Bauman's project, repeats his assertion (M. Davis 2013: 5) that Bauman's work 'appears to be much closer to Nisbet's "sociology as art" than to "sociology as science"', and should be judged by its 'analytical reach' rather than 'empirical grasp' (M. Davis 2013: 5), although in his *Freedom and Consumerism* Davis criticises Bauman's analysis for lacking 'any supporting empirical evidence' (M. Davis 2008: 109).

Mark Davis's later (2013: 5) assertion about the need to understand and judge Bauman on other than conventional sociological

grounds is very much in line with recommendations by Jacobsen, Tester, Blackshaw and other interpreters of Bauman's work that he should not be judged in conventional sociological terms. But the distinction between 'analytical reach' and 'empirical grasp' proposed by Davis (2013: 5) is not only unhelpfully vague, but potentially misleading in its implication that analytic reach and empirical grasp are two entirely separate realms of judgement. By contrast, it is my view that the former must inevitably rely to a greater or lesser degree on the latter. Thus in this book I shall refuse a complete bifurcation between analytic reach and empirical grounding: I shall judge Bauman's project by way of both, and by also by interrogating the claims of Jacobsen, Blackshaw, Davis and others that Bauman tells it 'like it feels', gives 'voice to the voiceless', uses metaphors in a manner that humanises sociology as against forms of sociology which by using systematic and overarching theory and statistical and other empirical write human beings out of sociology, and that his sociology genuinely 'travels' because it transcends the bounds of his location in Europe; on the last, as we shall see, Bauman's Eurocentrism in fact was a crippling weakness which considerably limited the analytical reach and empirical grounding of his sociology. His imprisonment in his own gender and ethnicity, I will show, is also a source of considerable weakness in his work.

It might be argued, too, that he is mainly an essayist (Tester 2001: 6), and that his books should be treated as essays for a variety of audiences and therefore should not be judged on grounds of scholarship, academic rigour and so forth. But he only really became an essayist and populariser in the late 1990s, and especially in the early 2000s, so it is difficult to treat this defence of some of his weaker work as plausible. *Modernity and the Holocaust* (1989b), for example, can hardly be regarded as merely an essay.

Arguably, his is a particular form of the sociological imagination; and, later, a strategy of 'messages in a bottle'. But it makes for repetition and verbatim reproduction without warning or acknowledgement (Walsh and Lehmann 2015). His prose, though, is exceptional: it is luminous, sparkling and sometimes simply dazzling. No sociologist that I have read writes as well as Bauman does, in what is probably his third language (of at least five, also including Polish, Russian, French and German).

But Bauman's writing is given to huge generalisations, whether about modernity, postmodernity, consumerism or globalisation. There is a typical lack of nuance, caveats, qualified or tentative judgements, reference to relevant research even when it is readily available, for example on the effects of television. There is rarely any serious or elaborate justification for his adopted standpoints, for example his use of relativism from the work of Rorty.<sup>2</sup> In his economic deterministic moments – of which there are many, as I will show – he comes across as an old-fashioned Marxist, despite his early and perfectly justified criticism of deterministic perspectives.

These criticisms of Bauman's postmodern and liquid modern phases are spelled out in some detail in the book. However, this should not be taken to imply that there is little of value in his thinking. He would hardly have attained such a high degree of influence if his writings were worthless. It is my view that there are several significant merits to his work: his relentless – if sometimes flawed – critique of consumerism; his metaphors, though also flawed, nonetheless have proved to be highly productive and stimulating for many who read him; his focus on those who suffer the worst forms of exclusion in contemporary Western societies. His eclecticism is something I take delight in; and his refusal to treat the ethical and the sociological as separate realms, thus making his sociology not only an analytical exercise, but also a series of ethical demands on the readers of his works, is admirable. This ethical demand, intrinsic to so much of his work, will perhaps be his greatest legacy.

## Notes

- 1 Accessed February 2017.
- 2 Rorty's influence on Bauman was particularly pronounced in *Legislators and Interpreters* (1987) and throughout the 1990s. There are some useful collections debating various aspects of Rorty's work, including his alleged relativism and his flirtation with postmodernism: see Brandom 2000; Malachowski 1990; Festenstein and Thompson 2001. An excellent overview of Rorty's work can be found in Gascoigne 2008. See also Geras 1995.