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Zygmunt Bauman on Time and Detemporalisation Processes*

Abstract: This article is about social and cultural time as a constant and recurrent motive in Zygmunt Bauman's work. Time and detemporalisation processes, continuity and mutability, permanency and episodicity are all sometimes more, sometimes less clearly outlined but always present themes in his analyses of modernity, postmodernity, globalisation, consumption, consumer society, contemporary social polarisation, and the condition of the socially excluded. This recurrent presence of the temporal dimension in Bauman's writings means that his entire work can be viewed as an original, multidimensional, coherent, consistent and also very interesting voice on time and its vicissitudes in our present world. Bauman's contribution to the temporal analysis of our age is presented against the broader backdrop of contemporary reflection on the issue of time.

Keywords: culture; social and cultural time; the present time; detemporalisation; postmodernity

Introduction: Following in the Wake of Durkheim and Sorokin

In his introduction to *The Sociology of Time*, a collection of classical and contemporary texts on the sociological problems of time published in 1990, John Hassard deplors that the temporal dimension has been ignored in contemporary sociological analyses and that sociologists in general have failed to see that time is a significant research problem. He points out that, even up to the nineteen-seventies, very few researchers took the route demarcated by the classical works of Emile Durkheim or Pitirim Sorokin, both of whom had discussed the sociology of time. He also regrets the very conspicuous absence of analyses of the relations between modern concepts of time and the mutable forms of industrial society (Hassard 1990: 1–2).

The last two or three decades have been marked by a rapid increase in concern with these issues and the picture of the situation in sociology outlined by Hassard has changed radically. Although sociology's contribution probably can still not rival the achievements of anthropology, which has contributed more than any other social science to the study of time, it is nevertheless significant. This is attested to by the work of the most distinguished sociologists such as Norbert Elias, Niklas Luhmann, Pierre Bourdieu, Anthony Giddens, Zygmunt Bauman, Michel Maffesoli, Manuel

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Castells, Ulrich Beck, or Piotr Sztompka, all of whom have made time, the temporal dimension of social life in general, and the temporal aspects of contemporary culture and contemporary societies in particular, a focal part of their sociological theories. Also, it is now possible to pinpoint those outstanding sociologists who have specialised in the analysis of time as a social phenomenon, and whom we may certainly call sociologists of time. I am thinking, for example, of the American sociologist Eviatar Zerubavel, the author of books on social time that have been pivotal for sociological reflection on temporality, *Hidden Rhythms: Schedules and Calendars in Social Life* (1981) and *Time Maps: Collective Memory and the Social Shape of the Past* (2003) on social constructions of the past. I am also thinking of Helga Nowotny, former president (1992–1995) of the International Society for the Study of Time and author of e.g. *Time: Modern and Postmodern Experience* (1994), an important book which identifies the essence of contemporary varieties and vicissitudes of time, and of Barbara Adam, author of many highly esteemed books: *Time and Social Theory* (1994), *Timewatch: The Social Analysis of Time* (1995), *Timescapes of Modernity: The Environment and Invisible Hazards* (1998), and *Time* (2004).

Of course the recent dynamic outpouring of research and sociological reflection on time is not unique to sociology alone, it is part of a more widespread phenomenon rooted in the increasing interest in the problem of time and its vicissitudes within various scientific disciplines and among researchers representing various specialities. Time, speed, acceleration, the place of novelty and antiquity in culture, the status of the past, present and future in various types of culture and society, including contemporary culture, have not only become a popular theme in multidisciplinary scientific discourse but have even assumed the status of a specific key offering insight into the characteristic phenomena and mechanisms of ongoing changes in the contemporary world. Not only chronosociology¹ but also chronosophy² has been flourishing within the last two or three decades. Hence it is worth amending the list of sociologists who have discussed time with the names of such writers as Jean Baudrillard, Umberto Eco, Paul Virilio, David Harvey, George Ritzer, Jeremy Rifkin, and many other intellectuals, authors of salient concepts and popular best-sellers. A separate list should be reserved for books devoted entirely to the phenomenon of time in contemporary culture such as Julius T. Fraser's *Time: The Familiar Stranger* (1987), an in-depth analysis of the crucial changes in the realm of time, Stephen Bertman's *Hyperculture: The Human Cost of Speed* (1998), an insightful discussion of contemporary American society's temporal obsessions or Thomas Hylland Eriksen's *Tyranny of the Moment: Fast and Slow Time in the Information Age* (2001), a Norwegian anthropologist's discussion of the similar problem of the dominance of the present. These examples only demonstrate that time and its contemporary vicissitudes has become an important, timely and forever approached subject in the analysis of contemporary changes of culture

¹ Michael Young and Tom Schuller coined this term in their introduction to the collective work *The Rhythms of Society*. They entitled it *Towards Chronosociology* (Young & Schuller 1988).

² A term coined by Julius T. Fraser for the interdisciplinary perspective in time research (Fraser 1966). I use this term here to identify those time studies which have been conducted side by side within many different disciplines, whether or not they adhere to the interdisciplinary ideology.

and society within the social sciences, the humanities, and elsewhere. Also one must not ignore the significant activities of such institutions as the International Society for the Study of Time, which groups representatives of the human sciences with representatives of the exact and natural sciences, artists and practitioners. The Society organises conferences devoted to salient temporal issues (the most recent ones have been devoted to relations between time and uncertainty or time and memory). These conferences attract increasing numbers of individuals who are interested in, or even fascinated by, the problem of time. Also noteworthy is the recent eruption of separate journals devoted to the problems of time such as *Time and Society* or *KronoScope*.

How could we characterise in a nutshell the problems that focus the attention of the aforementioned researchers? They cover a very wide range and a wide variety of issues. On the one hand we have such classical issues as time as a social phenomenon or the multiplicity of social and cultural times and on the other hand we have issues directly relating to the changes we are witnessing. Researchers have been analysing various types of cultures: premodernity, modernity and postmodernity with their unique constructions of time, varieties of time sets and ways of experiencing time. They are also studying such typically contemporary phenomena as temporal and spatial compression or their consequences for individuals and groups; the changing status of the present, past and future in contemporary culture; the unique place of the present in the contemporary world (the concepts of extended present, global present, dominance of presentism, tyranny of the moment etc.); metamorphosing situation of the future and attitudes towards the future (incorporation of the future by the present, atrophy of prospective thinking) and the past (so-called amnesia on the one hand and memory explosion on the other hand). Considerable attention has also been paid to the category of time in the context of IT-society. Researchers have investigated the effects of new communication and information technologies on the experiencing of time, and particularly the vicarious consequences of technological progress and their effects on how time is experienced; the contemporary obsession with time, civilisational maladies caused by incessant hurry, acceleration and new tensions relating to the experiencing of time, new hazards and proposals concerning the prevention of negative phenomena; consumption, consumer society and the time structure typical for this complex as well as changes in the sphere of work and the temporal dimension of these phenomena; the effect of changes in the experiencing of time on identity, interpersonal relations and interpersonal bonds, on love, ethics, creativity, art; and finally social diversity and stratification and time-related conflicts, reinforced by differences in temporal experiences or manifested thereby.

All these problems (and each of them could easily be appended with numerous bibliographic footnotes) can be found in the works of one scholar, Zygmunt Bauman. The temporal characteristics of social and cultural change which—as I have tried to demonstrate—is one of the great topics of analysis of our age has been a permanent, immutable and recurrent motive in Zygmunt Bauman's writings. Discussions of time and detemporalisation processes, continuity and mutability, permanency and episodicity, have all been sometimes more, sometimes less clearly outlined but always present themes in his analyses of modernity, postmodernity, globalisation, consumption, con-

sumer society, contemporary social polarisation, and the condition of social outcasts. Bauman has interpreted different approaches to time and time structures as either the consequence of other processes and phenomena or their cause. In some texts the problem of time is clearly delineated and front-line, as for example in *Mortality, Immortality and Other Life Strategies* (1992), *Globalization* (especially the chapter on “Time and Class;” 1998b), in such articles as “From Pilgrim to Tourist”—or a “Short History of Identity” (1998a), “Identity—Then, Now, What For?” (1998c) or “Tourists and Vagabonds: The Heroes and Victims of Postmodernity” and other essays collected in the volume *Postmodernity and its Discontents* (1997). It is an important motif in such books as *Liquid Love* (2004a) and *Wasted Lives* (2004b). It is also a recurrent theme, appearing in various ways and forms in many other places in Zygmunt Bauman’s work. This extensive presence of the temporal dimension shows that Bauman’s entire life work can be viewed as an original, multidimensional, coherent and consistent, and also extremely interesting voice on time and its vicissitudes in the contemporary world. Hence Bauman’s work may be considered an original contribution to the sociology of time and the temporal analysis of our times.

The present article attempts to outline Bauman’s sociology of time. It is just that—an attempt, a first fitting, an effort to signal the problem and draw attention to it rather than a complete reconstruction. Such a reconstruction would require longer and deeper studies far exceeding the confines of this article.

The Cultural Constructions of Time

Zygmunt Bauman has discussed the heterogeneity of times in a variety of social and cultural frameworks, a crucial problem in the sociology of time, repeatedly since the nineteen-sixties, i.e., since the ‘anthropological breakthrough’ which took place in his scientific biography at that time. In those days, as I said before, very few sociologists took the route demarcated by Durkheim, Durkheimians and their scattering of followers. In turn, anthropology, whose penetration of the problem of time was much more advanced, had not yet developed a fixed direction of research, had not yet created a ‘school’ (Tarkowska 1987; Gell 1992). It had, however, provided the necessary empirical findings from which researchers interested in the cultural and social heterogeneity of time, like Zygmunt Bauman, could draw.

In “The Poles of Cultural Analysis,” an article published in Polish in 1964, Zygmunt Bauman juxtaposed the ways in which time (and space) are understood in two types of culture, “stable” cultures and “developmental” cultures. Drawing upon the findings of anthropologists, Bauman described the first type of cultural time as: concrete, eventful, qualitative, repetitive and cyclic, non-linear, and rejecting change and the process of becoming. These neolithic cultures (nowadays we would put them in the catch all category of ‘premodernity’) had a number of characteristics such as authority of the past, antiquity, tradition. This concept of time is contrasted with the abstract, quantitative, objectified concept of time endorsed by “developmental” societies and cultures, cultures associated with “industrial-machine” civilisation which rejected the

past and were future-oriented (Bauman 1964: 84–89). According to this approach, the specific category of time was one of three basic criteria distinguishing between the different types of culture and determining the profound differences between them.

Bauman adopted the temporal dimension in a similar way in his typology of societies, distinguished according to the criterion of heterogeneity versus homogeneity of their social and cultural structure and presented in the book *Culture and Society*. In “heterogeneous societies whose culture is homogeneous” positive evaluation of the past, antiquity and tradition is associated with a-historic thinking and de facto timelessness: “The world does not have ... a temporal dimension: what is perceived is the sequence of events but the process of change whose concept is always a scientific abstraction goes unnoticed” (Bauman 1966: 367). In this type of society time is eventful, concrete, qualitative; time is “the function of human activity.” Such societies and cultures do not possess the category of “time in general”—abstract, quantitative, linear time (Bauman 1966: 368).

These analyses belong to the framework of the search for relations between “the historically changing nature of time and space and the pattern and scale of social organisations” (Bauman 1998b: 3). In these early texts the author wanted to highlight the differences in the way social and cultural time are conceived in premodern and modern society. Zygmunt Bauman returned to this opposition many years later in *Legislators and Interpreters*; here time is defined in terms of the differences between “wild cultures” and “cultivated” or “garden” cultures (Bauman 1987: 51). Here again the problem of time appears to be an important criterion of cultural diversity; first and foremost, the former type of culture lacks “an idea of temporality and mutability of human characteristics” (Bauman 1987: 83). Detemporalisation of time in these cultures is contrasted with modern time, with its “breathtaking pace of development” (Bauman 1987: 112). But what interests Bauman most and what he pays most attention to in his works is the second component of the premodernity-modernity-postmodernity triad (and in later works liquid or late, reflective modernity), i.e., analysis, comparison and juxtaposition of the modern and postmodern experience of time. The different ways of conceiving time and the different ways of living in time in the various types of culture and society are evident in the changes in identity, forms of bonding, interpersonal relations, the emotions, work and leisure time, consumption, art and other forms of human activity—changes which, as I said before, Bauman discussed and analysed time and again. The structures of time, durability, timelessness and transience, i.e., various modern and postmodern temporal strategies, are presented in the book *Mortality, Immortality and Other Life Strategies* (1992). The heterogeneity and diversity of culturally specific types of time can best be seen in the context of attitudes towards death, dying and immortality and therefore let us take a closer look at *Mortality, Immortality and Other Life Strategies*.

In this book awareness of death, mortality and the quest for immortality are a prism (or better still, a ‘window’ to adopt Bauman’s own term) through which we can reach the essence of a particular culture, its typical attributes. As a matter of fact, what this boils down to is time. Death and transience, durability and immortality are all aspects of time; attitudes towards these phenomena exactly express the ways in which a given

culture conceptualises and experiences time. And—as Norbert Elias said—one of the reasons why the category of time is an attractive research instrument is that it allows the researcher to penetrate previously unfathomed, overlooked or neglected phenomena (Elias 1992: 3). This is also true in this case. Analysis from the temporal perspective and using the concept of time allows us not only to see differently but also to notice more. The category of time is also a good tool for comparative analysis because it is a common denominator that enables us to grasp the basic features of the cultures we wish to compare, their major differences and similarities (Kern 1983: 5). As far as Zygmunt Bauman's work is concerned, the temporal categories he uses help to uncover fundamental differences between various cultures and to distinguish first between stable and developmental cultures and now between modern and postmodern (or liquid modern) cultures.

Mortality, Immortality and Other Life Strategies, which is an analysis of modern and postmodern approaches to death, mortality and immortality, is also an account of different temporalities that are typical for these types of culture. Modern strategies towards death and mortality consist in their deconstruction, in the rationalisation and medicalisation of death and dying, i.e., transformation of the phenomenon into a series of mundane, minor, solvable tasks and actions such as health care, hygienic lifestyle, proper diet, caring for the natural environment, etc. When this strategy is adopted, death is viewed as the effect of individual carelessness or accident, something avoidable. Human beings do not die because they are mortal, they always die for some specific reason which could have been avoided had the individual adhered to the proper rules. This way modernity rejects or marginalises death which does not fit into its temporal logic. One of the characteristic features of the structure of modern time is that this time, i.e., linear time, is clearly future oriented. The future, future goals, projects, are naturally prospective. This was a crucial dimension of this kind of time: “Projects gave meaning and direction not only to the present but also to the past” (Bauman 1992: 164). Not only the present was subordinated to the future, so was the entire modern time horizon. Such features of time as linearity, measurability, homogeneity, quantitativity, progress as a key category, a specific time structure consisting in the unrepeatable past, the transient present and the infinite future, may be found in many analyses of modern culture and industrial society (cf. Hassard 1990: 12). For Zygmunt Bauman it is a point of departure for the analysis of the transformations of contemporary temporality and the consequences of these phenomena for individuals, social life and culture.

This kind of time is contrasted with postmodern, ‘postlinear’ time, vectorless time consisting of undifferentiated (“now one moment is no different from another;” Bauman 1992: 164), brief, fleeting moments, time which in fact is “nothing but a succession of episodes without consequences” (Bauman 1992: 190). “In a life composed of equal moments, speaking of directions, projects and fulfilments makes no sense” (Bauman 1992: 168). This time is, more than anything else, devoid of any future. It is no different than the present—“the future is now” (Bauman 1992: 164). In postmodern culture transformation of time and space consist in formation of “a space time of the perpetual present and ubiquitous ‘here’” (Bauman 1992: 184). This dispersion of

the future in the present, breaking up of time into brief, fleeting episodes, are new detemporalisation strategies, ones which typify postmodernity and enrich existing repertoires of cultural practices for the invalidation of time. Instability, discontinuity, evanescence, irregularity, fragmentation and transience are all part and parcel of postmodern culture just like the mutable, momentary, unstable nature of all things: objects, events, relations, bonds, emotions, and identities.

All these attributes are manifested in the postmodern strategy of coping with immortality, i.e., deconstruction, obliteration of the differences between the permanent and the transient, the eternal and the temporal, the immortal and the mortal. Hence the time horizon is stripped not only of the future but also of the past, which becomes distant and falls into oblivion. It is as if this culture was a “perpetual dress rehearsal of death” in which death loses its previous meaning. The irreversible end of life thus gives way to fleeting disappearance whose many forms are omnipresent in the postmodern world with its typical short-term interpersonal ties and nomadic lifestyle. As Zygmunt Bauman points out, nothing is permanent but nothing is eternal either; nothing happens once and for all but also nothing ends for good. The differences between these states are almost nonexistent. Death has become something momentary, temporary, and reversible and instead of immortality we now have a never-ending possibility of repetition. What really counts is not the past and not the future, it is the present, simultaneity, synchronism.

This is probably the most important feature of postmodern temporality: ubiquity and dominance of the present (Bauman gives the example of the Buddhist ‘total present’ experience) encrypted in the catch phrase ‘Now, wonderful now’ which is the title of one of the fragments of the book on mortality and immortality. Elsewhere, Bauman quotes Agnes Heller’s ‘culture of the absolute present’ and attributes this version of time to a certain category of people in the globalised world (Bauman 1998b: 90). For a number of years now analysis of the specific status of the present has come to the fore of critical reflection on contemporary change, not only in Zygmunt Bauman’s work.

“Now, Wonderful Now”

The strategies and mechanisms of detemporalisation adopted in the world today and reducing time to the present moment, the increasing importance of the present, the value of novelty, incessant change and immediacy are one of the key and timely themes that attract the attention of investigators of contemporary culture.

David Harvey, for example, discussed these issues in his famous book *The Condition of Postmodernity* (1989). Of course he was neither the first nor the only writer to show interest in the diverse constructions of time in ‘Fordian modernity’ and ‘fluid postmodernity,’ he did however contribute significantly to the problematisation of the processes of compression of time and space which have been taking place within the last few decades. In the part of the book called “The Experience of Time and Space,” Harvey analyses modern and postmodern concepts of time within the frame-

work of the ideas of one of the classical sociologists of time, Georges Gurvitch and his typology of social times (not at all familiar outside the circle of researchers who specialise in the study of time). He discusses such elements of time compression as ubiquitous acceleration, the value of immediacy, the ability to discard things, values, lifestyles, stable relationships (all illustrated by examples gleaned from American society). Modernity-postmodernity relations and their manifestations in time structures are an interesting focus of his approach: time-space compression, a typically modernist phenomenon, is accelerated and intensified in postmodern conditions. Hence, under certain aspects, postmodern time is a specific, vicarious quintessence and culmination of a number of features of modern time, not necessarily its reverse, just as postmodernity is a specific phase of development of modernity, one which some writers (including Zygmunt Bauman) call late, liquid or reflexive modernity. Other authors present a similar approach.

One example of the analysis of modern and postmodern temporality is Helga Nowotny's book *Time: The Modern and Postmodern Experience* (1994). This book is an attempt to answer the question: "How time changes?," and what the social consequences of these changes are. Like many other researchers who have studied modernity and postmodernity, Nowotny conceptualises postmodernity in terms of unrealised promises and the vicarious consequences of modernity. She shows how the reality, culture, technological inventions and innovations created by men and women have led to consequences which contradict their original purposes. For example, focus on the future, modern planning, disposing of the future as if it were the present, have all narrowed the gulf between future and present and, paradoxically, incorporated the former in the latter leading to its atrophy and to the phenomenon of the extended present. This phenomenon consists in the decline of linearity, the increasing role of the moment, the growing sense of global simultaneity, freedom to experiment with time—to speed it up or slow it down or to reverse its direction. Helga Nowotny says that this sense of simultaneity is just an illusion, a product of technological advancement. In no way does it automatically translate into genuine community, solidarity or equality; in heterogeneous and fragmented society social inequalities are reinforced by time-related inequalities. This writer further goes on to demonstrate that contemporary societies live in two different rhythms. Those who live in the faster rhythm belong to the privileged category whereas those who do not work or are unemployed feel that time has come to a standstill. She detects the outline of a new, as yet unnamed conflict rooted in different time resources, the conflict between the employed and the unemployed, the overworked and the workless. She also points out a number of other significant differences and divisions, e.g., those relating to women's specific 'time culture.' She struggles with such problems as the experience of time as external coercion, a phenomenon which generates the need to gain command, to develop coping strategies to cope with shortage of time or adopt escape strategies (meditation, mysticism), to experiment with time, i.e., to use time stimulants (drugs) and depressants (e.g., alcohol).³

³ For a discussion of these practices cf. e.g. James Gleick's book *Faster: The Acceleration of Just About Everything* (1999).

Helga Nowotny also discusses the problem of a certain kind of time, one which is rare or even disappearing in our culture yet is extremely necessary and sought after, i.e., time relating to direct interpersonal relations, time which cannot be bought or substituted by mechanical devices, time which may only be exchanged for another form of time, the time of care, shared emotions, love and affection, joy, sorrow and grief, when somebody else's presence, co-presence is essential.

To summarise, the spectre of problems relating to the extended present is wide indeed and includes the vicarious consequences of acceleration, new temporal varieties or new time-related needs.

In both the aforementioned approaches to the changing modern and postmodern constructions of time, Harvey's and Nowotny's, these categories have two meanings, historical and typological. Modernity involves changes in the sphere of culture and social life that reached their apogee at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, such as technological innovations, which led to incessant transformation and change in the man-made world.⁴ The term postmodernity, meanwhile, applies to the changes that took place in the second half of the twentieth century and also to the critical reflection on these changes whose tempo and intensity often invalidated the original goals and intentions. The spatial and cultural framework of these phenomena is 'Western time culture,' to quote Helga Nowotny; new temporal phenomena are often illustrated by examples gleaned from American society.

One of the key problems of these analyses is the same or similar complex of phenomena, i.e., time compression—time which has been squeezed into the present—or extended present—time which has swallowed the future. Other researchers mention time contemporarisation, i.e., inclusion of the past and the future in the ever-expanding present (Young 1988: 203), development of temporal proximity on a global scale (Fraser 1987: 341), the global present (Adam 1995), time implosion (Ritzer 1999), domination of 'now' and 'nowist culture' (Bertman 1998), or 'tyranny of the moment' (Eriksen 2003).⁵ It is worth taking a closer look at the last two books. Although their ambitions are more humble than those of the cultural analyses of modernity and postmodernity, they are valuable nevertheless in that they give a very specific yet penetrating account of time which has been reduced to the present (Stephen Bertman's *Hyperculture: The Human Cost of Speed* from 1998) or even the moment (Thomas Hylland Eriksen's *Tyranny of the Moment* from 2001).

Bertman's book shows how the contemporary presentist culture (which he calls the nowist culture and the nowist society) is focused on the now and dominated by the present, impatience, acceleration and is derived from e.g., technological progress and new technologies including information and communication technologies. These lead to accelerated tempo of living and development of a specific hurried or accelerated

⁴ This time framework corresponds well with the period which Stephen Kern analysed from the perspective of the metamorphosing categories of time and space, i.e., 1880–1914 (cf. Kern 1983).

⁵ My own presentist orientation concept, referring to Polish society in which present-orientation was viewed as a rational and functional reaction to change and the relating uncertainty and unpredictability of the past on the one hand and various forms of restriction and coercion on the other hand, dealt with similar problems (Tarkowska 1992).

culture which involves performing as many activities as possible in the shortest possible time. Continual shortage of time, stressogenic effort to keep in pace, resignation from time-consuming activities, transfer of hurry and temporal discipline into spheres of life which should adhere to very different temporal regulations such as leisure time or family life. The explosion of new technologies is producing a specific informational and electronic environment and leading to more and more widespread technostress, i.e., information overload, information anxiety or even cable guide panic.

Another source and symptom of the culture of the present is consumption and consumerism that reject continuity and permanency, preferring incessant change, transience, and immediacy instead. According to Bertman, a classical philologist by training and a chronosophist by predilection, the culture of the present is a complex of factors which shape all and every dimension of life of contemporary men and women and its specific attitude towards time is a key to understanding of many of today's problems, from the emotional problems of contemporary men and women through family relations and changing family life, work and ways of spending leisure time to problems of protection of the natural environment. Such processes as commercialisation and present-oriented hyperculture have produced the 'synchronic individual' who lives only in the present, disconnected from both past and future, ignores past experiences and the future consequences of present actions, all of which translate into lack of permanent bonds with other people. By putting a premium on tempo and efficacy, the culture of the present does not encourage such qualities as patience and endurance. Time-consuming skills are also losing their previous significance. Bertman analyses American society but in fact his book is much more than a simple account. It is a critique of culture and society based on hurry and the predominant 'now.' The author concludes with a number of suggestions as to how to resist these trends: gain control of the culture of acceleration, discover that slow does not necessarily mean bad and fast does not necessarily mean good. "Slow is beautiful," says Bertman who also points out the need to reconstruct the connections between the present on the one hand and the past and the future on the other hand.

Remedial programs which can be found in publications on contemporary chronocentrism, including so-called time starvation (cf. e.g., Robinson & Godbey 1999) caused by hurry is an important theme in Eriksen's book. This Scandinavian anthropologist also draws attention to the consequences of hurry and acceleration in many aspects of life of contemporary men and women: family life, work, politics, consumption and even style of thinking. Like other researchers, he interprets the current state of affairs as the vicarious consequences of the development of information technology and exposes their paradoxical effects, such as the quest for greater flexibility that in fact reduces flexibility, greater choice that really limits our choices, or the introduction of timesaving devices that ultimately reduce our temporal resources.

Contemporary societies (or at least western ones) are crazy about the present and the proximal future, says Eriksen. They live in a specific kind of time, one that has been reduced to the moment; time which is really no longer time. Erikson says that time has been fragmented, broken up into little pieces and there is nearly none left. He concludes his account of the various negative consequences of such time (degraded

family life, serial monogamy, the cult of youth, the crisis of knowledge transmission etc.) by postulating the defence of slow flowing time and indicating the need for an appropriately oriented social policy. Slowness needs to be protected nowadays, says Eriksen. This protection should include state assistance, privileges, and subsidy and quota systems. At the individual level it requires heightened awareness and conscious control of the changing rhythm of the passage of time (Eriksen 2001).

The exemplary analyses of modern and postmodern time, time of the present and time of the moment, presented above illustrate the multiplicity and variety of issues concealed behind the cliché about the exceptional status of the present in contemporary culture. This backdrop allows us to see more clearly that Zygmunt Bauman's work is a unique contribution to this line of reflection. What strikes us is not only the broad spectre of Bauman's analyses of the consequences of dominance of 'now,' in both the social micro-scale and macro-scale, but also the way in which he strives to reach a deeper understanding of the temporal tissue of social life, the nature of interpersonal relations and the forms of bonds and emotions which bring people together and drive them apart. But what interests Bauman most is what is happening with people and between people. The consistency with which he looks for, and finds, similar temporal structures, similar mechanisms of invalidation of time and similar detemporalisation practices in many walks of life (work, consumption, everyday life, art, education, morality and many others) is truly admirable. The remainder of this article will take a closer look at some of these analyses: identity and bonding, consumption and work, social inequality and polarisation.

The Individual and Time

Individuals' lives under postmodern circumstances, their identity, their bonds and ties with other people, their lifestyles, are all determined by this culture's specific temporal framework. Among its key elements is the absence of permanent and stable social structures and conditions, i.e., a social reality that is mutable, mobile, lacking continuity and devoid of relations. Another key element is the shrinking horizon of future-oriented time. Life in postmodernity, says Bauman, is a journey without a predefined direction. Time has lost its previous continuity and become a collection of episodes. This way of experiencing time is affecting, e.g., individual identities which Bauman calls (in various places) "unanchored" or "disanchored," "drifting" or "palimpsest."

In the past, individual and group identities were 'constructed,' developed throughout a whole biography and enriched in the course of history. Nowadays in our mutable and mobile world, lacking permanency and continuity, mutability and lack of permanency also refer to identity. We no longer construct our identity, we choose it: "it is the degree of genuine or putative freedom to select one's identity and to hold it as long as desired that becomes the principal measure of social advancement and successful life" (Bauman 1998c: 209). The ability to adjust quickly to changing conditions is the need of the moment, the ability to forget is an asset, identity that is too consolidated is

a hindrance, a burden. As far as identity is concerned we are now witnessing practices which involve severing the past from the present and the present from the future, the tendency “to cut the present off at both ends, to sever the present from history, to abolish time in any other form but a flat collection and arbitrary sequence of present moments, a *continuous present*” (Bauman 1998a: 24).

Fragmentation of time which is no more than a collection of current moments and life broken up into episodes can be seen in postmodern ways of life whose metaphors are the tourist and the vagabond. Freedom and living from day to day are the essence of their existence. “Do not plan your trip too long,” “do not get emotionally attached to people you meet at the stopover,” “do not commit yourself too strongly to people, place, causes,” “do not think of your current resources as of capital,” “do not delay gratification” etc. are their strategy (Bauman 1998a: 25). The episodic, the adventitious, the ever changing affect every sphere of the individual’s life; his emotional relationships are short-lived, her interpersonal relations are fleeting. As a result, no-one is responsible for other people any more, others are treated as objects and interpersonal solidarity is smashed (Bauman 2004a: 76). In other words, the micro-scale of human social functioning in everyday life has changed profoundly due to the specific postmodern way in which time is experienced. Another area that has been similarly affected is consumption.

Consumption, Work and Time

Consumption can and has been analysed from various perspectives. Zygmunt Bauman discusses it from the perspective of its typical temporal dimension.

When he discussed the so-called ‘consumer syndrome’ in his lecture on “Consumer Society” delivered at Collegium Civitas in Warsaw on 29 April 2005, Zygmunt Bauman emphasised its typical “reversal of the values of durability and transience.” For most of human history durability was highly valued. Nowadays, meanwhile, under the predominant influence of consumption, durability has been degraded and given way to transience. Transience is attractive because it “holds the promise of further changes and adventures.” Bauman put his finger on a similar change in an interview with Keith Tester: “Transience has replaced durability at the top of the value table” (Bauman & Tester 2001: 95). Another new arrival in the consumer value hierarchy, one that also has to do with time, is reversal of the value of delaying gratification. Putting off for later, accumulating, saving—values which were highly esteemed for centuries—are now thought to be a waste because they clash with the demand to use and discard as quickly as possible and with the model of living on credit and debt. The temporal characteristics of consumption, which are typical of Bauman’s approach, capture a very significant feature of this phenomenon if not the most significant one.

The ‘consumer phase’ of capitalist society, discussed in terms of the temporal dimension, has of long been one of Zygmunt Bauman’s principal areas of investigation. Like postmodernity and globalisation, consumption is another perspective (Bauman’s ‘window’) from which to interpret the changes that are taking place in the world

today. The complex of temporal phenomena relating to consumption is a specific prototype of what is going on in all the other spheres of life of contemporary men and women.

This approach is legitimised by the importance of consumption in the contemporary world where it is a ubiquitous and inevitable framework. “We all live in a society of consumers and we cannot—at least singly or severally—help it,” said Zygmunt Bauman in an interview with Keith Tester. “Living in the society of consumers means to be measured, evaluated, praised or denigrated by the standards appropriate to consumer life” (Bauman & Tester 2001: 116). This applies to both rank and file consumers and semi-legitimate “flawed customers” or those who contest the standards set by consumption. Various elements of consumer society permeate the entire social reality, appropriate social life completely and enforce its typical values on its various segments. In various walks of social life and various forms of individual activity we find evidence of typical consumer time sets. The present expansion and ubiquity of culture, proliferation of consumer culture and development of consumer society is accompanied by changes in the very essence of time. In contrast to future oriented, cumulative and linear time that typified earlier periods, consumer time is present oriented, momentary and incessantly changing. In various places Bauman points out the nature of consumer time, time which has been compressed to the present or even the instantaneous. “There is a natural resonance between the spectacular career of ‘now,’ brought about by time-compressing technology, and the logic of consumer-oriented economy. As far as the latter goes, the consumer’s satisfaction ought to be *instant* ...” (Bauman 1998b: 81). In Bauman’s approach, “now” is the quintessence of consumption and consumer culture, the consumer way of life. Change, novelty, tempo, immediacy, volatility and transience are all part and parcel of consumption per se: the ‘impatience syndrome’ is a typical feature of consumer society and consumer culture: obsessive-compulsive alteration is typical for the consumer strategy of ‘use and discard’ and as far as the approach to time and the past are concerned it is also the art of forgetting what has been used, repressed and exchanged for something new or even newer. Consumption, consumer society and consumer culture all embody time that has been constricted to the present.

These phenomena also include work and its place in a consumption-dominated world. In traditional capitalism the temporal dimension of work and production and the work-based temporal orientation of society were linear and future-oriented. As far as work is concerned, what counted most were continuity, permanency, stability, delay of gratification and planning for the future. In consumer capitalism the culture of the present also applies to work. Due to the changes which are taking place in work itself and on the ‘liquid’ labour market, and to the development of flexible forms of employment, work is losing its previous stability, permanency and continuity; it is no longer the foundation on which individuals build their perspectives for the future. Instead, it is becoming an arena of new tensions and insecurities. “Jobs come and go, they vanished as soon as they appeared. They are cut in pieces and withdrawn without notice while the rules of the hiring/firing game change without warning—and there is little the job-holders and job seekers may do to stop the see-saw” (Bauman 1998b:

105). Work-related changes, according to Zygmunt Bauman, are crucial phenomena in the life of contemporary societies.

Social Inequality and Time

Time sociologists, such as the oft-quoted Helga Nowotny and others, have drawn attention to the present inequalities and conflicts, one of whose significant elements or fertile soils are the differentiation and change which are taking place not only in work but also in time itself. The distinction between the privileged job holders and the marginalised unemployed, the overworked and those who have nothing to do,⁶ applies both to the fact that one has a job or has lost one's job but also to one's attitude towards time and one's position on the social stratification ladder, defined by criteria which are specific for the world of consumption and globalisation. This is another important theme in Zygmunt Bauman's writings.

The author of *Work, Consumerism and the New Poor* has repeatedly written about the diversity of consumer society, the deep polarisation of the globalised world, the predicament of the impecunious, the redundant, and the outcasts excluded from the world of consumption and overabundance. A recurrent if sometimes latent dimension of Bauman's analyses of this complex of phenomena is the temporal dimension or, to be more precise, the time-space co-ordinates which are a significant social stratification factor. "The uses of time and space," writes Bauman in his discussion of the consequences of globalisation, "are sharply differentiated as well as differentiating" (Bauman 1998b: 2).

In his description of the tourist—vagabond opposition, the most significant distinction in contemporary societies, Bauman makes freedom of choice of one's life, identity, place, affiliation, and—consequently—one's degree of mobility his main stratification criterion (Bauman 1998b: 86). The range and freedom of mobility is the most powerful stratification factor in the world today, a world of constant hurry and acceleration. It is the criterion of belonging to the world of prosperity or the world of outcasts: "The mark of the excluded in the era of time/space compression is immobility" (Bauman 1998b: 113).

Rather than leading to polarisation, contemporary metamorphoses of time-space, i.e., "the technological annulment of temporal/space distances" (Bauman 1998b: 18) are laying the groundwork for new social polarity. Globalisation understood as the global, unintended and unpredictable consequences of change is leading to social re-stratification on a global scale and to a sharp division into two worlds, 'the world of globally mobile,' i.e., the world of the global rich, and to the world of the 'globally tied,' i.e., one of social impairment and degradation. This division also has a temporal dimension: "The shrinking of space abolishes the flow of time. The inhabitants of the first world live in a perpetual present, going through a succession of episodes hygienically insulated from their past as well as their future. These people are con-

⁶ In an earlier publication of mine I drew attention to a similar distinction which I called the "unequal distribution of time" (cf. Tarkowska 1996).

stantly busy and perpetually ‘short of time.’” Meanwhile the inhabitants of the second world “are crushed under the burden of abundant, redundant and useless time they have nothing to fill with. In their time ‘nothing ever happens’ ... They can only kill time, as they are slowly killed by it” (Bauman 1998b: 88). Boredom caused by having too much time on one’s hands, the lot of the unemployed in consumer society, is the psychological consequence of factors which determine one’s place in the social structure: freedom of choice, freedom of movement, the capacity to cancel space and shape time (Bauman 1998d: 39). Membership of the upper strata of society means being able to satisfy all one’s needs immediately whereas those at the bottom of the social ladder are destined to wait and to have too much time which becomes a source of torment and misery, a violation of human liberties and rights (Bauman 2004b). Of course Bauman’s account of the place of the poor, redundant and excluded in the world today is not limited to temporal differences alone. However, this criterion is a good illustration of one of the important aspects of these people’s condition.

Concluding Remarks

The analyses of modern and postmodern time, the temporal dimension of the micro-scale of individual experience, consumption and work, and social inequality outlined in this article are just a small sample of the issues which Zygmunt Bauman has interpreted in temporal terms. The purpose of the present discussion was to demonstrate that the changes which are taking place in the structure and nature of time are a constant albeit sometimes latent (or at least not always front stage) dimension of Zygmunt Bauman’s analyses of our times. His work shows that time’s historically mutable nature and social constructions are an indispensable and extremely useful tool with which to analyse changing social reality. Thanks to Bauman’s writings we can learn something new and important about this reality.

One issue that needs to be reflected on is the continuity of the time theme in Zygmunt Bauman’s work. His scientific biography can be split into two distinct periods divided by the 1968 caesura when he was sacked from Warsaw University and submitted to other post-March repressions that forced him to emigrate. If we look closely at Bauman’s work we can detect two different phases, in terms of both the problems he tackles and the way he approaches them. Bauman himself tends to see his work as continuous; he says that they all combine into one coherent whole thanks to his continuing concern with culture understood as an instrument of change of the world, a manner of “making things different from what they are; the future different from the present” (Bauman & Tester 2001: 31; cf. also Kempny 1995, 2005). Time as a category of culture also seems to be a constant motive in Bauman’s work although if we looked at it from a different perspective, we could highlight the differences rather than the similarities.

And another thing. In the already quoted book *Tyranny of the Moment*, Thomas Hylland Eriksen is critical of ‘influential intellectuals’ who investigate contemporary changes of time, acceleration and the unintended consequences of these changes

‘deadly seriously.’ He accuses them of failing to suggest remedies and showing how the side-effects of acceleration can be effectively removed (Eriksen 2001). He himself gives a long and interesting list of such remedies. Indeed, broad, philosophical reflection on contemporary culture, including the category of time, rarely includes practical recommendations for social policy and those who use time. It is thus in stark contrast to work which is firmly rooted in empirical research such as Bertman’s *Hyperculture* or John Robinson and Geoffrey Godbey’s *Time for Life*.

Readers of Zygmunt Bauman, one of those ‘influential intellectuals,’ will not find many specific guidelines to help them to reduce the negative effects of the culture of the present or the ‘impatience syndrome’ although they may guess what the author’s temporal preferences are. Let me prompt them with Bauman’s ‘declaration of personal opinions’ expressed many years ago in the context of the already mentioned distinction between “stable” and “developmental” cultures: “I am far from romantic idealisation of the paradise of insular idylls, all the more so that I am well aware that no-one who has ever had a taste of hell would be happy in the Garden of Eden. I am equally far from claiming that a bigger refrigerator is better than a small one and the number of smoky chimneys is in direct proportion to the amount of human happiness. To reverse this line of argumentation—I do appreciate the advantages of industrial civilisation but I am also convinced that ‘stable culture’ has solved many human problems whose solution within the framework of ‘developmental culture’ remains a utopia. So, as far as I am concerned, the terms ‘stable culture’ and ‘developmental culture,’ if not completely devoid of any evaluative element, are axiologically ambivalent to say the least” (Bauman 1964: 90–91).

I began my analysis of Bauman’s chronosociology from his texts written forty years ago not only because I wanted to show the amazing permanence of time as a historically and culturally mutable social construction in his work. I also had a hidden personal motive rooted in my own experience of those days. My interest in Zygmunt Bauman’s approach to time has a long and very special history. In 1967 I wrote my master’s thesis under Zygmunt Bauman’s supervision. This work, entitled “The Concept of Time in Traditional Societies,” was to be published in *Studia Socjologiczne*, 1968, no. 1 (28), pp. 107–138. This work was written from the perspective of the sociology and anthropology of time (as we would say today—these names were not yet in use at the time). It dealt with a purely academic and rather exotic problem, very far removed from the political and ideological reality of communist Poland. I largely drew upon French, British and American sociological and anthropological literature and quoted such writers as Émile Durkheim, Henri Hubert, Georges Gurvitch, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Edward Leach, E. E. Evans-Pritchard, Pitirim Sorokin, and others. I also quoted the research and theories of Polish authors, both classics such as Stefan Czarnowski and Bronisław Malinowski, and contemporary researchers. I quoted fragments of Zygmunt Bauman’s article “The Poles of Cultural Analysis” and his book *Culture and Society*, both of which discussed the specific nature of time and attitudes towards the past in traditional cultures. Finally, I quoted Adam Schaff’s book *Language and Cognition* (1964) in which he discussed e.g., Benjamin Whorf’s analysis of the Hopi nation’s timeless language as well as Leszek Kołakowski’s discussion of ‘the

negation of time' in seventeenth-century mysticism in his famous and then much read study *Religious Consciousness and Ecclesiastic Attachment* (1965).

In March or April 1968 I received the proofs of my article. The editorial board of *Studia Sociologiczne* demanded that I delete three names from my text: Bauman, Schaff and Kołakowski. These names were banned by the censor following the post-March 1968 repressions against these scholars. I refused to delete the names or the quotations and the article was not published. I still have the proofs, which are my own, completely private, unobjectified evidence of affiliation with a small circle of researchers who were already following in the wake of Durkheim and Sorokin.

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