

Keith Tester & Michael Hviid Jacobsen: *Bauman Before Postmodernity: Invitation, Conversation and Annotated Bibliography 1953–1989*.
Aalborg: Aalborg University Press, (2005), 226 pages

Published in 2005 by the university publishers in Aalborg, the book is the first of two parts of a series dedicated to less known works of the sociologist from Leeds. The second part, describing 1989–2005 publications, is due to appear in 2006. The title is easily guessed: *Bauman Beyond Postmodernity*.¹ Both authors are sociologists and both have already dedicated their publications to Zygmunt Bauman. Keith Tester is the author of *The Social Thought of Zygmunt Bauman* (2004) and the mammoth interview book *Conversations with Zygmunt Bauman* (2001). Working at the university in Aalborg, Michael Hviid Jacobsen published several works in Danish—I hope I quote correctly—*Zygmunt Bauman: Den postmoderne dialect [Zygmunt Bauman—Dialectics of Postmodernity]* in 2004; two years later, jointly with Poul Poder *Om Bauman: Kritiske essays [On Bauman—Critical Essays]*.² This year, edited by him, will also appear *Bauman's Mosaic—Essays by Zygmunt Bauman on Ethics, Critique and Utopia, 1990–2005*.

Bauman Before Postmodernity (referred to as BBP further down) is essentially a bibliographic-biographic guide to Bauman's lesser works in English and German written in the period 1953–1989,³ preceded by a short foreword, *Invitation*. The authors decided to divide the material in three decades—the 1960s, the 1970s and the 1980s respectively. Every decade-part consists of a short conversation with Bauman prepared on the basis of electronic correspondence and a 'critical bibliography'—a systematic description of articles published in a given time. This work leaves out Polish language publications, which—particularly regarding the first period—is inevitable, although the drawback is important. Tester and Hviid Jacobsen put an appendix at the end of their book consisting of bibliography of Bauman's works published in Polish, compiled according to Kilminster and Varcoe (1996). It is quite easily noticed that while *Bauman Before Postmodernity* includes a description of sixteen articles from 1953–1969, the list of Polish language publications from that period placed in the appendix quotes as many as thirty positions plus fifteen books. It stands to reason that

¹ Sophia Marshman co-authors *Bauman Beyond Postmodernity*.

² Titles translated as suggested by the author. I thank Michael Hviid Jacobson for his commentary and for providing the English translation of the Danish titles of his publications.

³ It is in fact an analysis of 1962–1989 texts.

the most important short texts had been translated and included in the number of English language articles. Moreover, from the point of archaeology of Bauman's thought, some early works can be perhaps omitted if necessary. But only some: only in Polish appeared eg. *Kultura a społeczeństwo: Preliminaria* [*Culture and Society: Preliminaries*] from 1966 and the article "Znak, struktura, kultura" ["Sign, Structure, Culture"] published in *Kultura i Społeczeństwo* in 1967. As shown by Marian Kempny (1995, 2005), these works are of key importance to any analysis of Bauman's conception of culture. It is not my wish, of course, to set forth a narrow-minded thesis that when not conversant with the language of Mickiewicz and Słowacki one should not approach the Polish sociology or the Polish sociology *in statu nascendi*. I only wish to say that not all important works have been translated or released in English, even though—as Bauman himself believes—it is a *lingua franca* of sociology (see BBP pp. 37, 8–9). Therefore, *Bauman Before Postmodernity* offers a critical review of only a limited number of texts, at any case regarding the earliest period. I must also emphasize that Tester and Hviid Jacobsen are fully aware of this problem (BBP pp. 9, 223).

The beginning of this biographic-bibliographic narration coincides with the start of Bauman's academic career, who was demobilized from the Polish Army in the wake of anti-Jewish purges in 1953; its end—with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the publication of *Modernity and the Holocaust*,⁴ a book that elevated the author into the pantheon of 20th century social thought. Evidently the structure of Tester and Hviid Jacobsen's book can rouse some doubts. Neither Zygmunt Bauman's biography nor the order of his most important works fit precisely into the three ten-year periods. Yet, it is not clockwork precision that is required here. The 1960s, writes Hviid Jacobsen in personal correspondence, saw Bauman's 'golden epoch' in Poland. That stage, termed *The End of the Beginning of a Sociological Imagination* by the authors, begins (biographically) in 1953, and bibliographically in 1962 with the publication of "Values and Standards of Success of the Warsaw Youth" in *The Polish Sociological Bulletin*, to reach its dramatic conclusion in the March 1968 developments. The 'sociological imagination' category comes from C. Wright Mills (BBP p. 29); Tester and Hviid Jacobsen present that period as the years of emergence and strengthening of Bauman the sociologist. The publication of "The End of Polish Jewry—A Sociological Review" in January 1969 provides a symbolic conclusion.

The next part, entitled *In the Shadow of Socialism*, is the time of Bauman's settling in Great Britain and Leeds after leaving Poland and a three-year stay in Israel. However, the 'Shadow of Socialism' is not the shadow of a totalitarian state. Bauman does publish a few articles dedicated to sociological analysis of Polish society vis-à-vis the socialist system; anyway, this issue interested him even before his compulsory emigration, particularly regarding the hiatus between hierarchy of values imposed by ideology and the level of aspirations and commitment ascertained in sociological surveys.⁵ Yet, he also shows above political-ideological formation on a considerably wider scale—in the important book *Socialism: The Active Utopia* (1976) and "The

⁴ *Nowoczesność i zagłada*. Warszawa: Fundacja Kulturalna Masada, 1992.

⁵ See e.g. Bauman (1963). Tester and Hviid Jacobson analyse an English translation of that text in *The Polish Sociological Bulletin* and find it "not exactly a wildly exciting read" (BBP p. 47).

Left as the Counter-Culture of Modernity” published in *Telos* in 1983, we shall find the idea of socialism as a cultural opposition to capitalism. It would be worthwhile to mention an aspect which, unfortunately, was not handled in depth in the work by Tester and Hviid Jacobsen. In the foreword they say that “Bauman has never entirely shed his Marxist roots and has retained his socialist sympathies” (BBP p. 29). Janina and Zygmunt Bauman heard in 1993 the following question from Ulrich Bielefeld: “You were both active members of the Communist Party. You had a concrete utopia, you wished to build a socialist society,” to which Bauman simply replied: “Certainly” (Bielefeld 1993: 113). We shall not find in Zygmunt Bauman’s biography a ritual purification from the Marxist past, one which was performed by e.g. Leszek Kołakowski. Keeping track of work of the author of *Modernity and Holocaust* one easily notices that this shortcoming is in line with the general character of his theory set on emancipation. Bauman did not renounce Marxism, yet it was not the orthodox version but ‘humanistic’ variant which he propounded even in the 1960s (cf. BBP pp. 20–21, 24, 170, 181; Bauman 1987). Gramsci’s thought was the foundation stone of ‘humanistic Marxism’—man is a factor that changes history, not its puppets (Fearn 2006: 30). “I discovered Gramsci and he gave me the opportunity of an honourable discharge from Marxism. It was a way out of orthodox Marxism, but I never became anti-Marxist as most did. I learnt a lot from Karl Marx and I’m grateful” (Bauman in Bunting 2003). When we find an emancipation theory at the foundations, and quite radical at that, we should not be surprised that, in Bauman’s interpretation, a morally neutral sociology turning away from social life is not possible (BBP p. 32; Bauman 2000: 216) and its emancipating function should “make it possible for an ordinary person like you and me to see through our experience” and see his own life in another light (BBP pp. 20–21).

The third part, *The Beginning of the End of Postmodernity*, is the most important time—scaling the heights of sociological Olympus culminating in 1989 with the publication of *Modernity and the Holocaust*. In the West, it is the decade of Thatcher and Reagan, and in the East the time of *Solidarity* which symbolically ended with the fall of the Berlin Wall (BBP pp. 97–98, 140–141). It was at that time that Bauman assumes the role of ‘the prophet of postmodernity,’ to use the notion of Dennis Smith (1999). The ‘critical bibliography’ describes it well. From the 2003–2004 perspective when he was in correspondence with Tester and Hviid Jacobsen, Bauman expresses an anxiety that his own books have become a commodity, which is not a good point of departure for critical analysis (BBP p. 151). “But,” as he goes on to say, “the *agora* of our times is filled to the brim with market stalls and admits only the buyers and sellers of commodities. Information travels only when it is commoditised, only when it is sold and bought. And if you wish to repair that sorry state of the *agora*, you must first gain an entry. You have to be listened to if you wish to be heard. Gaining entry to the market stalls is anything but the guarantee of being heard. But it is, alas, its unavoidable preliminary condition” (BBP p. 151). Starting with the 1983 article “Industrialism, Consumerism and Power”, Bauman welcomes a critical theory of consumer society, although first traces of some conceptions can be found much earlier, for instance in a mass culture study of 1965 (Bauman 1965; see BBP p. 54).

I take up this aspect of criticism of consumer society to show a deficiency of Tester's and Hviid Jacobsen's book. The thing is that the 'critical bibliography' boils down to a registration of all aspects without showing the links that join them together and, worse still, one can hardly find any real censure there. Like, for instance, censure involved in the famous statement made by Ian Varcoe, one of the best experts in Bauman's works: "What's wrong with a bit of shopping?" (quoted in Fearn 2006: 32). This apparently trite pronouncement seems to identify a major weakness of sociological criticism of consumerism—Bauman, just like other critics, e.g. George Ritzer (1998), speaks with the aloofness of members of a culture that stands apart; most often assuming the position of a privileged person. On the one hand, he is a member of a specific society, living in a specific epoch, in the socio-historical 'here and now;' and on the other, by turning away from a consumer's role, he tries to weaken this link and, consequently, is deprived of the language belonging to that reality. Let me recall a distinction employed by culture anthropologists: rejecting an emic strategy, he adopts an etic attitude (from *etic*, see Pike 1967; Harris 1976; see also Bauman's (1973: 70–71) criticism of Pike).

Tester and Hviid Jacobsen ascribe two advantages of *Bauman Before Postmodernity*. First, it should be an instrument of investigation providing "a detailed bibliography of some of the lesser-known work by one of the better-known contemporary social thinkers" (BBP p. 203); second, they call our attention to the recorded conversations (correspondence) in which Bauman describes the ever changing conditions of his work and, more importantly, talks of events he never spoke of publicly before (BBP p. 203.). In as much as a thorough verification of the latter statement is rather difficult, what with the huge number of interviews and publications with Bauman and on Bauman, a short comment on *Bauman Before Modernity* as a tool of investigation will prove useful. It is a little confusing that there is no list of analysed articles enclosed. Therefore, a reader interested in particular in Bauman's articles must know their date of publication: otherwise laborious leafing through 226 pages of *Bauman Before Postmodernity* is likely. Furthermore, the lack of a guide to the bibliography necessary for any factual index is a publishing failure. This basically commonplace instrument would facilitate navigation in scores of texts and, primarily, would help to find interesting aspects across three decades, e.g. categories of consumer culture since 1965. Failing that, there is only intuition left, a sense which is of tremendous importance in social research work, yet the authors do not offer opportunities to improve this sense and do not enter them in the list of advantages of *Bauman Before Postmodernity*.

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