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Zygmunt Bauman: *Liquid Love: On the Frailty of Human Bonds*. Cambridge: Polity Press (2003), 162 pages

"This is not a love song," sang the band Public Image Limited, and similarly one can ask whether Zygmunt Bauman's *Liquid Love* is or is not a book about love? At its very beginning, Bauman declares that the principal heroes of the book are the "human relationship" in general and the "man with no bonds" typical of the "liquid modern setting" in which relationships have dissolved. It is a book, the author adds, about living "together, and apart" in liquid modernity—and the Polish version of this book was published under this title.

Liquid Love is an engaging read but difficult to review. It is divided into four relatively autonomous parts, each of them a flock of thoughts that not only lacks a straightforward argument, but even makes it difficult for the reader to draw all the lines of thought together. Bauman admits that *Liquid Love* is a condensation of "life's sound and fury" into short, loosely tied fragments. Such a form, Bauman writes, is as useful a tool for grasping life's great experiences like love, as is a safe box of a fully developed theory or the sharp point of a direct argument.

If the reader is inclined, like I am, to find for herself a greater narrative that organizes the book, then its multiple threads can be tied together by the idea of love. This is a book about love, albeit in many different forms—and about its lack, which in liquid modernity, is more common than its presence. In the four parts of the book, Bauman looks in turn at love as a personal feeling, personal emotional relationships, other forms of bonding and sociality, living together in the public spaces like the city and living apart in a global reality.

The first chapter, "Falling In and Out of Love," is concerned with the shape and fate of love in liquid modernity. Love, writes Bauman, is each time a unique event. Love strikes suddenly, we can neither prepare nor learn to love. It might seem that the workings of love, unpredictable and capable of striking fast, should easily align with other patterns of life in liquid modernity. Just one more experience as uncertain as randomizing weather patterns and as sudden as changes on global financial exchanges. But love does not leave as swiftly as it arrives and instead binds two people together. Loving has always meant, according to the author, walking the narrow path that leads between distance too great for love to grow and closeness too strong to enable the duality of beings on which love depends. Today, this becomes even more difficult

for two reasons. Firstly, a consumer culture that favours instant use and satisfaction depends on qualities opposite to those necessary for the fostering of love, such as courage, faith or discipline. To make matters worse, we interpret our inability to love by the lack of proper knowledge and believe that love, like everything else, can be learned, with the help of lifestyle magazines and self-help guides.

As a side note I should add that Bauman quotes such publications as often as works of other social thinkers. For every quote from Levinas about "Eros as a relation with alterity" there is one from the "Relationship" section of *The Guardian* newspaper. Bauman reads them because these are, according to him, the narratives of the "present generation"—from which he clearly distances himself.

Bauman begins the next chapter, "In and Out of the Toolbox of Sociality," with an analysis of "sex as such," detached from love or commitment and on its own becoming the basis for what Anthony Giddens has called the "pure relationship." Here the author introduces an important, in my opinion, distinction between *homo faber* and *homo consumens* in the context of relationships. For the former, commitment and construction of lasting relationships was a natural instinct—and sex was a tool of sociality. For the latter, sex is another object of consumption that does not lead to further accumulation, as it is based upon quick usage and disposal. The question remains, why do people favour today lightness and speed over long-term commitment? According to Bauman, it is because love (and family as well) is a project that can be compared with a "bridge leading to nowhere, or to nowhere in particular." Family life and close relationships become revocable, and thus a matter of choice, a situation with which *homo consumens* is well acquainted. But at the same time they become as uncertain as much of our risky liquid modern reality.

Bauman returns to the opposition between consumption and production when talking about the *communitas*, a term he borrows from Victor Turner to describe an anarchic "moral economy" that co-exists with the structurated society. The *communitas* is based upon "mutual care and help, living *for* the other, weaving the tissue of human commitments, fastening and servicing inter-human bonds" (p. 74). It is a sphere in which humans act as producers and therefore become an object of attack by consumer market forces attempting to commodify the moral economy and deny relevance to anything that cannot be commodified. Bauman makes here one of the key, in my opinion, statements of the book: "The major and probably the most seminal success of the market offensive so far has been the gradual … but persistent crumbling away of the skills of sociality." Consumption is a solitary activity, writes Bauman, and cannot serve as a solid base for the construction of bonds or relations—at best we can find companions in individual consumption, whose presence serves to intensify its pleasures. The untethering of sexual activity from its social context and the transformation of sex into a light and swift event that can be consumed are but examples of a larger trend, in which other humans are no longer related to, but consumed as objects. Any production or construction, Bauman suggests, involves some form of love. In particular, relationships—of which loving one another is just a case—require some form or degree of love. The negative trends are mutually reinforcing. On one hand, consumption as a mode of living makes it difficult to love. On the other, it

becomes ever more difficult to live together and collectively construct a shared world, because necessary individual emotions and public virtues are becoming rare.

Bauman quotes Richard Sennett's idea of "an ideology of intimacy," a process in which psychological categories replace political ones in the public sphere. As a result, "shared identity," that could encompass strangers and unknowns, had been replaced by "shared interests," by the formation of groups on the basis of personal ties. As the art of civility was gradually being lost, people introduced into the public arena behaviours earlier limited to private life: "rubbing and patting of shoulders, closeness, intimacy, 'sincerity,' 'turning oneself inside out,' holding no secrets, compulsive and compulsory confessing." So as skills of togetherness crumble, we have unsuccessfully attempted to replace one more public form of love with ways of personal loving, as if these were functionally equivalent.

The second chapter ends with an astute analysis of the role of new communication media—the mobile phone and the internet—in the transformation of inter-human relations into connections and networks. A network metaphor is often employed by current sociology: Manuel Castells writes of a network society structured by new information technologies, Barry Wellman describes a shift from social groups to social networks, there is growing interest in social network analysis. Bruno Latour has written in the late 1990s that "with the Web" everyone treats the notion of a network as an obvious and neutral one. A critical edge, present for instance in the usage of this term by Latour and other actor network theorists, has been killed, as Latour (1999) writes, "by the double click." Bauman's thoughts on mediated human networks are interesting precisely because they reintroduce a critical perspective. Virtual social networks, of which our mobile phones are tokens, are treated as a stable resource in an otherwise shifting world. But this happens at the price of transforming relations into connections that can be entered and terminated with relative ease. As relations transform into connections, individual and particular ones become irrelevant, as they are dependent upon choice and therefore often short-lived. What matters is their excess or the network. By making "virtual proximity" possible, the electronic network finally separates proximity from physical closenesss. Virtual proximity is becoming the dominant mode of togetherness and in comparison with previous patterns of togetherness it is more detached, leaves a greater degree of freedom and choice, but is also less substantial. Furthermore, it causes a split between communication and relationship. Communication, like sex, is a previous tool for sociality that has now become increasingly autonomous—at the cost of losing its productive character and thus opening up for commodification.

In the third part, entitled "On the Difficulty of Loving Thy Neighbour," Bauman weaves his thoughts around Danish philosopher Knud Ejler Løgstrup's view of trust as a natural characteristic of human life—only to state that "the world today seems to be conspiring against trust." The focus shifts in this chapter from personal relationships to other, less proximate and more distant relations. Bauman describes a move away from a situation typical for the most of human history when "immediacy of presence" and "immediacy of action" overlapped. We everyday face distant misery and cruelty, but at the same time possess only limited capability of acting at such a distance. Un-

willing to face the impotence of our ethical acts, we detach and distance ourselves. But a similar distancing occurs in urban settings in regard to those in our very vicinity. Bauman quotes Manuel Castells's description of the split of urban populations into two polarized tiers. While the upper one is involved in the detaching experience of global flows, the lower remains territorially circumscribed. A the same time both groups lack to an equal extent tools of sociality, necessary for dealing with the perpetual presence of strangers characterising urban life. A sociality based upon the notion of "communities of similarity" is unable to deal with strangeness or difference and even avoids studying closer those that are considered "same." In time, it breeds *mixophobia*, a reaction to difference that causes a self-perpetuating drive towards homogeneity and separation. Still, Bauman ends this chapter with a belief that there is no other space than the "city streets," in which *mixophobia*—itself a global problem by now—can be dealt with, although the outlooks are bleak, since currently few cities serve as mechanisms for solving "systemic contradictions and malfunctions." They are according to the author quite the opposite: "dumping grounds for the misformed and deformed products of fluid modern society" (p. 116).

It is worthwhile to compare Bauman's analysis of mediated relations and urban life with the much more optimistic views of Arjun Appadurai (1996). Appadurai believes that electronic media support what he calls "communities of affection" that constitute an important way of being together, for example, by ethnic groups and diasporas. Therefore, a locality can exist extraterritorially and not be physically bound, for example to the urban setting. What for Bauman is a detachment characteristic only of "cyberelites," for Appadurai is a widespread process of transforming localities and communities through mediation. The difference might be explained by Bauman's focus on communication media, while Appadurai pays greater attention to the workings of collective imagination fuelled by mass media.

"Togetherness Dismantled," the last part of the book, is devoted to human waste—Bauman uses this term to describe people defined as worthless or useless as a result of two modern mechanisms: economic progress and construction of order. Human waste has been accumulating throughout modernity but only recently humanity started running out of "dumping grounds" lying beyond the "modernizing sectors of the planet." The globe has been filled up to its limits. In this overcrowded world there are nevertheless people without connections, bonds or even identities. Refugees are the archetypical "human waste." Bauman describes them as unimaginables in a world of imagined communities, living in a state of permanent transience in extraterritorial "nowwherevilles." The plight of refugees can be solved only by imagining a global community to which refugees could belong. But imagination, writes Bauman, becomes potent only when supported by social and political institutions. And these do not exist at a global scale. Bauman thinks that refugee ghettos are "advanced samples of the world to come," "laboratories, where … the new liquid modern permanent transient pattern of life is put to the test and rehearsed." Analyses of current society as knowledge- or information-based often treat experts, the scientific or technical elite, as sources not just of knowledge, but of values, norms and patterns of behaviour that structure current ways of living. As an example, Pekka Himanen (2001) in the

book *The Hacker Ethic and the Spirit of the Information Age* proposes a new work ethic based upon the experiences of computer programmers. It is in this context that Bauman's insight seems so important, since it locates the paradigmatic inhabitant of liquid modernity not among its globetrotting elites, but in the shape of the expelled "human waste." A refugee camp rather than an airport lounge offers, according to the author, a more sober perspective for evaluating the possibility of attaining today Immanuel Kant's "universal unity of mankind." Precisely this, a search for the politics of shared and common humanity, is for Bauman the most pressing challenge that we all face today. Such politics depend upon a global, imagined solidarity and understanding—in other words, upon love.

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