

8-10 April 2019
University of Leeds, Leeds, UK

Thinking in Dark Times
with the Transdisciplinary Legacy of Zygmunt Bauman's Work

**The Bauman Institute and
The Centre for Cultural Analysis, Theory and History (CentreCATH)
at the UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS
announce an international conference to to examine the intellectual and
political legacy
of the sociological thinker and cultural theorist
ZYGMENT BAUMAN (1925-2017)**

'We live in times of interregnum... There is a change: something dies, something else is being born. The old effective ways of acting are no longer working – and the new ones are not working yet.'

Without direction, fluid and in a state of suspension – this is today's world according to Zygmunt Bauman, the sociologist who preferred to identify himself as 'a chronicler' of contemporary reality. In the dark—and some would say crooked—mirror we find in his work, the world appears an insecure and mercurial place. Today, a mere eighteen months after his death, we find critical inspiration in the telling diagnoses of Bauman's cultural hermeneutics. His extensive writings are more apt and prescient than ever. In this world of relentless flux—*liquid modernity* affecting every aspect of social and subjective experience, ethics, political imagination and resistance—Bauman's ideas offer an island of resolute engagement and thought. This conference wishes to revisit, elaborate, and crucially to extend this intellectual and political archive. Taking Bauman's re-vision of contemporary social realities as a point of departure, the participants of this conference will re-examine — critically but also generously, in order to go on — the many questions Bauman asked, tried to answer, and imbued on the way with new and sometimes shocking insights.

Inviting submissions to a transdisciplinary encounter between sociology, philosophy, informatics, political theory, arts, humanities and contemporary political activism, this conference aims to prompt critical assessment of the place of Zygmunt Bauman's thinking and texts in our current attempts to negotiate challenging and darkening times.

Some questions:

- What does Bauman's concept of 'thinking sociologically' offer to the arts and humanities for thinking creatively/aesthetically?
- What are his contributions to the key issues of *Sicherheit* (security, stability and certainty), notably in relation to digital modernity and the gig-economy?
- How could his work articulate with current research into the sociology, subjectivity

and politics of space, no-place and placelessness?

- Bauman's work is clearly marked by Central Europe's history of Nazi horror and Communist terror. Do we also see traces of contemporaneous feminist, queer, and postcolonial movements and socio-cultural theorizations? What can these projects glean from Bauman's work?
- How can these perspectives be aligned with his contributions to concepts of the social-political in the tradition of Antonio Gramsci and of the human in the wake of Hannah Arendt?
- What are the politics and ethics of being a public intellectual and a writer for a public readership?
- What responses does his major sociological project call for in our moment?
- Does liquid modernity pose a deadly threat to the unfinished project of democracy?
- And what of the economic questions latent within his analysis of globalised consumerism and the plight of those without the resources to navigate the flows of liquid life?

Instead of keynote speakers, we are inviting several major thinkers to be in dialogue with each other. There will be four such conversations. Etienne Balibar is confirmed and others will be announced on the conference website when confirmed.

Background to the conference

Born into a working class family in Poznan in 1925, forced to flee to Russia in 1939, returning after the war to study and teach at the University of Warsaw, then driven out of Poland in 1968 by the antisemitic communist regime, Zygmunt Bauman became Professor of Sociology in Leeds in 1971 and died there in January 2017. Publishing a stream of ground-breaking books, and receiving all the major European prizes for social thought, Bauman was internationally recognized as a major social and cultural theorist reshaping studies of the Holocaust, ambivalence and the stranger, postmodernity, ethics, mortality, morality, consumerism, citizenship, poverty, migration, while developing the penetrating analysis of our present condition as *liquid modernity*. He was awarded the major European prizes for intellectual achievement and critical influence: Amalfi Prize 1992, Adorno Prize 1998, Prince of Asturias Prize 2010, the Vaclav Havel Prize, and the highest award given by the Polish government for the arts in 2012. The University of Leeds first recognised his sociological legacy by launching The Bauman Institute in 2010.

Consistent questions run through Bauman's extensive writings that connect unrelated territories while revealing the dark logic of modernity and its currently unchallenged capitalist forms. An original cultural sociologist in the European tradition of Simmel and Adorno, his distinctiveness lay in astute but accessible readings of contemporary cultural forms that identified trends in social experience and its formations of subjectivity as they were shaped by, and became symptomatic of, structural transformations of contemporary globalizing capitalism: notably, relentless change and uncertainty, forced migration, economic and material precarity, consumerism, social exclusion and increasing inequalities of access to life resources and security. He analysed the violence of intolerance and racism, and notably the

'racism' of impoverishment, which renders vast populations not merely economically disadvantaged but condemned to what Bauman named 'wasted lives' which create a contemporary horror not of mass destruction but of exile to a non-human condition.

We are inviting formal academic papers, round tables, panels of short interventions, conversations, artworks, essay films that might address, among other topics, the following areas:

- Memories of Democracy/ Memories of Socialism:
articulations of the public sphere, citizenship, responsibility and obligation
 - International Perspectives on Bauman's work from Latin America, Eastern Europe, Mediterranean Europe
 - Cultural Theory and analysis in the wake of Bauman's sociological imagination: language, concepts, thought-models, narratives of social change, address, reader
 - What is a public intellectual? Relations between academic practice, political activism and public thinker
 - The Other, the Stranger, the Exile, the Refugee, the Vagabond, the Tourist, and Wasted Life
 - Insecurity, Precarity and Uncertainty: social, cultural, subjective dimensions
 - Bauman and contemporary political activism; international context
 - Critical Engagements: Gender, Sexuality, and the Postcolonial in liquid modernity
 - Capitalism, consumerism, financialization: liquid modernity's challenge to economics
 - Consequences of *interregnum*: 'decline of the West', 'end of world' panic and the current emergence of 'retrotopias' versus looking forward to 'cosmopolitically integrated humanity'

We also want to honour the thought and writings of Janina Bauman and invite papers that engage with her work as there will be special panels dedicated to her and a performance based on personal papers.

Please send abstracts of 250 words with title, name, affiliation, email address and mobile phone number, proposed session (see list above) and 250 words outline. Panels will be welcomed and should be submitted with all information for each participant.

Email to

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Subject heading: Bauman Conference Leeds 2019

by 5 September 2018. We shall try and let you know by 5 October.