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What is reality and what is pleasure?

(Commentary to Zygmunt Bauman: *Freudian civilization revisited*)

Zygmunt Bauman's paper is of immediate importance and we could bring many things up for discussion in our contribution. However, we have chosen to bring into focus two main issues entitled *Society, History and the Constitution of the Subject* and *Fantasy and Reality*, respectively. Both themes circulate around Bauman's as well as our own interpretations of Freud's psychoanalysis.

Society, History and the Constitution of the Subject

It does not do justice to Freud to interpret him as an adherent of Rousseau and his romantic determination of civilization as basically repressive and ultimately pathological, emphasizing that the "evil" civilization is against the primordial and "true" nature of the subject. This would imply that man at a historical time has acted out the pleasure principle without compromise and that development of civilization has gradually repressed and limited this unfolding.

At no point in history has mankind existed without a reality principle, but the principle has been determined by different external factors. In its most primitive and early form the principle was defined by the biological and physical surroundings and these conditions imposed a delay and a postponement of direct satisfaction or pleasure.

Like Freud, Bauman is pessimistic regarding cultural development. In general Freud was not very optimistic about the human species and its future possibilities. According to Freud culture and civilization are always increasing, something that is not automatically or by matter of course positive due to the implicit renouncing of the satisfaction of the drives. Man gains in security and safety but at the same time loses immediate satisfaction.

We believe that Bauman's interpretation of Freud's theory as presented here could be more elaborated. Throughout his work Freud never stopped questioning the duality of pleasure, fantasy and the inner world on

the one side and reality, survival and the outer world on the other. Certainly, his writings show how genuinely doubtful he remained about how to distinguish between pleasure and reality and where to place mankind in this definition. One has to incorporate the development of Freud's writings and discriminate between the three meta-psychological waves of his theory in order to catch the complexities and even paradoxes implicit in Freud's development of his theory. It is beyond the scope of this commentary to give a thorough account of the three meta-psychological phases that draw the history of Freud's psychoanalysis. However, we will present some of the aspects of the meta-psychology that we find necessary for our discussion of Bauman's interpretation of Freud.

The third meta-psychological phase started with "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" (1920) and implied a revision of the dualism between survival and sexuality with Freud's introduction of the dualism between Eros and Thanatos, between life drives and death drives. Freud had discovered that repetition in psychic life should not be understood exclusively as an expression of the fact that the sexual drives seek satisfaction or as an expression of the reality from the drives of self-preservation. The compulsion to repeat was a principle of regulation reflecting that the essential property of the drives was *beyond the pleasure principle* in the sexual drives and *beyond the reality principle* in the drives of self-preservation. Man reached beyond both pleasure and reality with his urge to reestablish a point of zero where tension is reduced to nothing.

According to Freud civilization moves away from satisfaction because Eros or the life drives must be used to bind the death drives. Man's sublimation and neuroses increase with the amount of life drives used for this binding. The making of neurotics and the death drive are knit together. Nevertheless, according to other theoretical concepts there will always be an opportunity to create new sources of satisfaction, new partial drives. The sources of the drives are flexible and changeable; they are not static or fully developed. This is very important in relation to Bauman's interpretation of Freud. The sources of the drives are not biologically deter-

mined, and that is exactly why the human species is able to move away from a solely instinctual constitution.

Human beings do not just survive for survival itself. From the beginning of life, survival has a cultural meaning. Compared to other primates and mammals human beings are born in a very premature state and are unable to survive on their own. One could say that humans are born into a social womb, a context of meaning and relations: that is why the sources of the drives, i.e. the sources from which the drives originate, are not inborn or native, not exactly alike, not identical in the development of history. The object, meaning the other person to whom we always relate to in our development, is the object for the constitution of drives. Thus, our source of development is always embedded in our relation to the other. Drives can be socialized – or rather, drives are constituted in a process of socialization. They are constituted in specific relations in specific contexts of society. Drives are constituted in specific contexts of intimacy, in spheres, working relations etc., which are to some degree determined by the overall historical context. Drives exist as potential entities inscribed in contexts that to some extent are always civilized because contexts are always loaded with conscious and unconscious meanings.

It is curious that Bauman does not mention Herbert Marcuse and his book *Eros and Civilization* (1955). Marcuse discusses Freud's cultural pessimism and rejects some of his basic premises. Marcuse emphasizes that the inhibition and repression of humankind that come with civilization are not in themselves natural and biologically determined. Marcuse divides repression into two and distinguishes between a necessary repression and a surplus-repression. Necessary repression is biological, physiological, and determined by the natural conditions of the planet. The species itself is not able to change these conditions but can only try to protect itself from danger. However, in contrast surplus-repression is related to civilization and the socialization process. Surplus-repression is not necessary in a biological sense – it is culturally and historically specific and implies what Marcuse labels: "socialization of the body to an instrument of labor" (REF). The premise of this point of view is that socialization of the human subject in itself consists of the creation of partial drives emanating from different zones of the body. The body is socialized to a potential working context defined by society and the specific stage of civilization.

Marcuse had a utopia. It was marked by the optimism implied in the dawning economic boom of his time. Technology – "the machines" as technology was labeled then – would be able to carry out all manual labor, and humankind could cultivate itself, develop new sorts of

pleasurable activities in relation to the making of the aesthetic body. There would be no predefined labor specific socialization of the body, because there would be no labor – the surplus-repression would be at a minimum, and the development and creation of new forms of satisfaction, for instance in relation to the aesthetics, would be free – only the sky would set the limits.

Fantasy and Reality

Pleasure is neither universal nor absolute. Man must adjust satisfaction in order for it to be in accordance with what the surrounding world has to offer. Thereby, the reality principle is a modification of the pleasure principle, a modification that is necessary in order for man to survive by moving from being directed by pleasure to being attuned to reality. Freud wrote that the small child's experience with the mother's absence forced secondary processes to develop (Freud 1900). Freud referred to the small child that produces the satisfactory mother breast in fantasy, when the mother withdraws for a while and leaves the baby without breast and without milk. This gives the baby an opportunity to postpone real satisfaction by evoking it with hallucination.

Jean Laplanche, the French psychoanalyst and interpreter of Freud's work, examines and revises Freud's early dualism between pleasure and reality. Laplanche maintains that fantasy is no replacement nor is it compensation of reality. Rather, fantasy is a displacement of reality. In this way Laplanche revises the duality between fantasy and reality. The fantasy of the satisfactory breast does not replace the real satisfaction of hunger but displaces satisfaction to mean something other than survival. The small child displaces satisfaction to mean something other than survival because in fantasy the small child gives survival a meaning that reaches beyond survival in itself, i.e. being fed when hungry. From the outset, nature is cultivated. Nature means something because it does not exist detached and isolated from the specific culture that attends to development, be it the culture that expands between mother and child or the societal and historical culture that unfolds between individual and society.

Therefore, man's needs or man's pleasure is defined in relation to the outside world. Satisfaction defines need rather than the other way round. Alternatively, in the words of Laplanche (1999): The offer creates the demand. The demand is neither natural nor given. Rather it is constituted by an absence that unfolds and is

given meaning in the relation, primarily in the relation between mother and child.

Just as the child's needs are defined through that which the specific mother offers her child, the individual's need for safety or security is also defined from the outside and specifically through that which the state has to offer. Thus, the state defines the individual's needs as a citizen in a specific society. Pleasure is defined from the outside and collides with the reality principle that should have belonged to the outside world. The reality principle is dissolved because it loses its meaning as something other than the pleasure principle, as that which postpones pleasure and sublimates it. In this way reality is displaced from being civilized and defined to being natural and given. The reality principle is made internal. However, it is the one with the power to formulate and give meaning that defines pleasure, be it mother as well as society. Bauman's article might as well have been entitled: "Whatever happened to the pleasure principle", because pleasure and reality become the same thing in the society he criticises.

Bauman himself gives a very good example: The threat of terrorism makes us grateful of the security and safety offered by the state. Passengers that are victims of terror threats in airports thank the state for the security it offers in such situations. It makes them feel safe. However, the question of who creates the threat is not asked. The premises of the threat disappear because of an acknowledgement of the authority that watches over safety and security. One could say that dualities become mixed up and distorted: Insecurity is related to protection while threat is related to security. If you feel insecure, the state will protect you and if you feel threatened, the state will provide security. The possibility to discuss the meaning and the creation of dualities such as secure/insecure and threat/protection is dissolved.

Bauman's example of children exposed to sexual abuse is related to the same kind of complex of problems: Here the threat comes either from within, from the child's own internal pleasure and the child's forbidden acting out of this. Or the threat comes from without, from the paedophiles that the public debate has focused on for the last ten years, a threat that has overtaken earlier years' fright of infantile sexuality. This dissolves a focus and discussion of what defines the premises of the relation between child and adult in the same way as the premises of the relation between individual and society is dissolved in the example of the terror threat.

This discussion obliges us to look at and scrutinize these relations, taking as our starting point the premise that they are asymmetrical from a power perspective: Children and adults do not share the same premises of entering into the relationship between child and adult,

just as individuals and societies do not share relational premises. The mother defines the child's pleasure by satisfying it in a specific way that is characteristic of the specific relationship. The state defines the individual's anxiety by creating or providing safety and security in a specific way that is characteristic of the specific relationship between individual and society. It is overlooked or denied how the specific satisfaction offered defines the need just as it is overseen or denied how the offered security or safety defines the threat. The discussion is silenced of why we are obliged to deal with the fact that the premises to participate in these relations are not and never will be symmetrical just as well as access to power is blocked. The rhetoric of threat frees us from this responsibility and so does a romantic rhetoric of nature be it of the child's pleasure or the liberal individual's natural need of freedom.

In his book about the fight of the truths (*Kampen om sandhederne*), the Danish journalist Rune Lykkeberg illustrates how our former prime minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen turned liberalism into something natural with a metaphor from nature describing man as a tree that can unfold if only it is given the right amount of space and freedom. But Fogh forgot the tree that stood next to it and by which it was defined. He forgot that nature is cultural from the outset and that the relationship between subject and object is at stake.

Is Bauman right when he says that the reality principle has disappeared in favour of a pleasure principle? A pleasure principle filled with a societal satisfaction of the need before the need is defined and understood by the individual: You need space and freedom to grow. We will look after you because it is unsafe and insecure to be here. War and sexuality are threatening, whether they come from within or without. Bauman criticises the present time presence for maintaining dichotomies as internal and external, nature and culture, us and them, pleasure and reality. However, he leaves us without a solution to how the individual can become an active participant in the definition of a/his reality principle. Thus, Bauman himself does not dissolve the dualities in his article. His criticism remains on a constructionist level.

It would be obvious to integrate the psychoanalytic object in a revision of Freud's formulation of his culture pessimism, a pessimism Bauman revitalizes in his paper. The concept of the object has moved through psychology and philosophy into psychoanalysis where the concept is very broadly defined. The term has many meanings, each taking as their starting point the relationship between subject and object in one way or the other. The different definitions of the object all have in common that the object is something the subject is

placed in relation to. A naturalization of the drive as something internal and innate can imply a neglect of the fact that the drive comes into existence and develops in the relationship between child and adult.

One of the cranks in psychoanalytic theory is exactly that the subject's relation to another subject at the same time establishes the subject as an object. Therefore, the subject is a subject for itself but an object for the other with all the fantasies, ideas and representations implied in the relation about who the other is. The subject is not merely relating to another subject. Apart from the physical other there will always be a psychical representation of the other. This makes the other an object as well as a subject and this is why relations not only exist of entities that are related to each other. A third thing comes into existence namely a potential space. There is a potential space between mother and child just as there is a potential space between subject and society. It is necessary to acknowledge that this potential space does not rest on the same premises for child and adult or subject and society. There will always be someone who knows more and therefore is more enigmatic and powerful. By acknowledging this, the path to meaning will become more accessible. Not only do paedophiles exist, they may also threaten children with their perverse sexuality. Children do not understand the meaning of the paedophile's approach because they neither know the meaning of sexuality nor of abuse. Children must learn how to distinguish between adult love and adult abuse. The individual scared of terrorism must learn how to distinguish between a threat coming from without and a threat based on some quite specific and man-made dualities, primarily the most used and most powerful rhetorical duality of our time: us and them.

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